



*The Kitchen Cat* 100cm x 78cm Oil on Canvas

## THE ARTIST'S PERSONA

interviews by *Ali Cockrean*

Toby Ward

**O**f the many wonderful artists I've had the pleasure of interviewing this year, there are none that epitomise the versatility of approach or imaginative weaving of fantasy and reality like Toby Ward.

His fascination with people, the things that they do and places that they inhabit, forms the basis for all his work. He is a painter who is as comfortable standing in the corner of the kitchens at The Ritz Hotel, sketching and recording the frenetic activity of a lunchtime service, as he is creating a work of total fiction on the canvas, or undertaking a royal portrait.

He is also totally grounded, humble and matter-of-fact about the impressive variety of commissions he has undertaken. These include: working with the National Trust, recording the conservation of Chastleton House in the Cotswolds; the Royal Opera House, capturing for posterity the period before and during its redevelopment in the late 1990s; and the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in central Bosnia, drawing the life and work of the soldiers.

Toby's drawings are exquisite. They are atmospheric, evocative and beautifully observed. He knows exactly what to include and what to ignore and every drawing and painting, while faithfully recording historic details, also captures the elusive and intangible nature of whatever environment he's in.

After serving for six years in the army, Toby studied at City and Guilds of London Art School where he won the Richard Ford Travel Award to study in Madrid. As an art graduate and needing a regular income, he explains that portraiture seemed like the best way to earn a living. It quickly became a passion and among a number of significant commissions have been portraits of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, Lord Rothermere and Sir Sidney Kentridge.

Alongside these strands of his work as a painter, Toby also has another, equally intriguing, string to his artistic bow. Works of complete fantasy, in which he paints unknown people and places in a less naturalistic manner. These are forays into his imagination, where he creates his own narrative and builds a scene from remembered situations and people he's observed while going about his daily life. One such example is his fabulous work entitled *The Minor Delights of Jules De Loffre*.

'My wife and I were staying on a campsite in France some years ago,' he explains. 'As we sat relaxing on holiday and idly people watching, I noticed a man nearby who was camping with his wife. I couldn't help but notice their daily routine, which included an ample lunch with wine every day, before a siesta in the afternoon. Later on, he would emerge from his tent in full lycra, stretched across a pretty ample frame, and head off for a cycle on his racing bike. >



*The Drawing Room at the Athenaeum* 38cm x 57cm Watercolour on Paper



*The Minor Delights of Jules De Loffre* 60cm x 90cm Oil on Canvas

'I started to wonder who he might be and built a narrative in my head. I decided he was a successful pharmacist and lover of gourmet food. Not long before, my wife and I had enjoyed a fruit de mere lunch experience, when we had been served a true celebration of the sea, including lobster, oysters and many other seafood delights. In my head I somehow weaved this event into the life of the man on the campsite, imagining him and his glamorous wife enjoying such a meal.

'As a result, I created a painting of this scene and on completion wondered what I should call it. I decided that this lunch probably signified one of many 'minor delights' that he and his wife might share, so the title started to form. 'The Minor Delights Of...'. But who was he? I needed a name, so, remembering his penchant for cycling in the afternoon, I picked up a very old listing of competitors who had taken part in the Tour De France. In among the names I found Jules De Loffre and decided that this well suited my character in the painting. The painting was titled *The Minor Delights Of Jules De Loffre* and in due course went off to a gallery as part of an exhibition. The gallery then picked this work for their advertising and marketing.

'Remarkably, the surviving family of Jules De Loffre, the cyclist who had taken part in the Tour De France, saw the image and title and contacted me to ask if it was indeed based on their relative!

I then had to explain, somewhat sheepishly, how I had come to use his name in the work. Thankfully, they thought it was a wonderful story and explained that Jules had been a very slight man (not surprising given all the cycling he did) and had actually paid for his trip by performing acrobatics for the other competitors in the evenings, after racing all day. They were delighted to see him honoured in such a way! Clearly he was a character in his own right, if a little less rotund than my pharmacist!

This fabulous painting is just one example of Toby Ward's skill and mastery. Each one is a cornucopia of colour, life and story. I can only scratch the surface here, so do make time to visit his website [tobyward.net](http://tobyward.net).

And if you would like to hear my full interview with Toby, you can find it on Facebook. Just search for The Artist's Persona and join our free membership. ●

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