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Art for everyone

With the launch of a spectacular book of art, and on the eve of his nationwide gallery tour, things have never been better for **Paul Horton**. He talks to Ali Alderman about his love of art - and the inspiration he gets from the people who feel such a strong connection to his work.

In the magical world of Paul Horton the figures weave seamlessly through a background of everyday life. The romance of relationships, the personalities of industrial cities and the nature of Chester & Lucy, and the wizard and the tramp have become firm favourites with collectors. He has the ability to set a scene and then step back, allowing the viewer to use their imagination to create their own unique story.

It was only in 1997 that Horton became a full-time artist, though it's been something he's been working towards for a lot longer. "As an artist I've enjoyed success but I always say it's an overnight success - an overnight success that's taken 30 years to achieve!" His love of painting and art started early, something that he puts down to a school art teacher's influence. "He made art such an enjoyable subject and I spent many happy hours in the art room," says Horton.

This passion continued when he chose to study drawing and painting at Bournville School of Art. Growing up and studying in Birmingham in the 60s and 70s and an early career in printing gave Horton his identity and a working class ethic. His working men in industrial street scenes have been drawn from his own memories and this has led people to see him as a modern day Lowry. "Although we share an industrial theme, my work is not in the style of Lowry so I'll probably let other people worry about that," Horton responds. "Like me, he created his own little world with a lot of symbolism, hidden meanings and poetical elements," he says. ►





↑ **A Grand Day Out**

Giclée Edition 495

Image 12½" x 16"

📄 £176 📄 £250

An art teacher may have inspired him to paint but other influences have also shaped his style. "One of my heroes is Degas and I also like Chagall because, like me, he created his own little world with a lot of symbolism, hidden meanings and poetical elements," he says.

If money were no object then owning work by Millias would be a dream come true for Horton, but he loves all art and is generous in his praise for his contemporaries. "The guys that I share the galleries with, they do such fantastic

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work. I feel so proud to have my work alongside some of the most talented artists of my generation," he says.

Characters such as the wizard came about through Horton's love of puppet theatre, an influence that can also be seen in his storytelling. "In the painting called *Waiting For You*, the character Chester has flowers behind his back and he's waiting to present them. Then,



← **A World of Imagination**

Image 20" x 20"

Giclée Edition 495

M £294 F £395

Giclée On Board Edition 250

Image 20" x 20"

M £388 F £475

in the next painting, I introduced a new character, his girlfriend, Lucy, and they're together on a park bench. It's a deliberate unfolding of a narrative," he explains. "I also like to leave space for people to take the characters and the adventures into their own imagination, to hand something over for people to explore and interpret in their own ways. Take the Victorian man for instance, is he Jack the Ripper, a magician, or a Phileas Fogg-type character? I like to keep his identity a closely guarded secret, hence his title, The Man of Mystery."

This character building and narrative ability has led Horton in many directions, the most recent being his first ever published book - a comprehensive collection of his work divided into six main character sections. He's about to embark on a major tour of over 50 UK galleries, and is relishing the prospect of taking his book, and new paintings, out to his audience. The three-dimensional qualities of his characters have meant success for them in formats such as bronze sculpture and ceramic vases and plates, as well as paintings, so his book is expected to be just as popular.

"So far, the response to the book has been amazing, plus I live for tours," he says. "When you are building up to a big tour like this one, the hours you put in are very enjoyable because it's focused on something. You can't rest on your laurels



because you are only as good as your new pieces, and you can't keep painting the same things over and over. Also, my work is quirky and it's a world that I've created, it's a world about people, and for me to do personal appearances and regularly talk to the people who enjoy and collect my work - it's fantastic. I get feedback and also I find great inspiration from those I talk to."

"This connection that I've got with the public has helped me with my work. My whole philosophy about my art is that art is for all, art is for the every man. I paint in the hope that people will ►

Fast gaining a reputation as one of the country's most talented and popular artists, Paul's main choice of medium is pastels. Sometimes described as a modern-day Lowry, he draws on his Midlands background for inspiration and produces work that is humorous and inventive, with his own quirky view of the world.

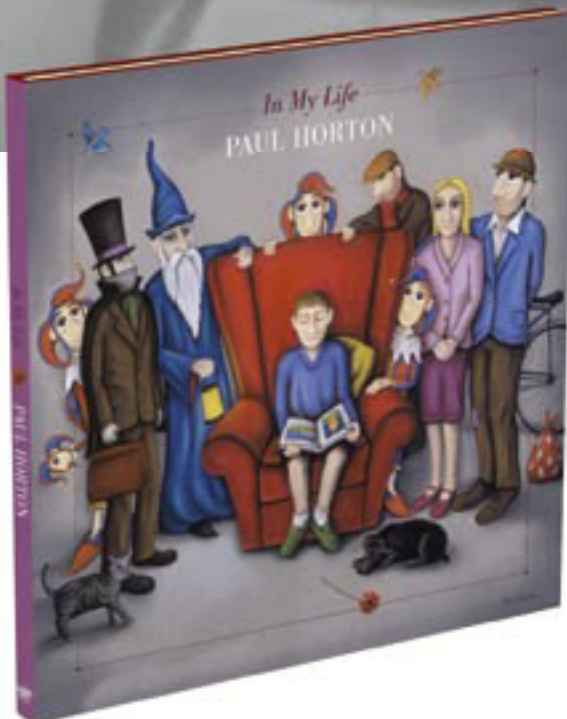


'MY WHOLE PHILOSOPHY ABOUT MY ART IS THAT ART IS FOR ALL. ART IS FOR THE EVERY MAN.'

respond to it and enjoy it. If I am creating an image, and someone comes into a gallery and says, 'I love this image,' or, 'I find it moving,' or, 'It makes me smile,' I think there is no greater thrill. For me, that's what it's all about."

It's not just through his work that Horton is able to touch people, success has meant he can support charities such as Acorns Children's Hospice Trust. He feels it's important to make a difference, however he's quick to point out that there are many more people than him making this happen.

"It's nice being the guy at the front, but it's really the people in the galleries who are working so hard on my behalf to sell the work, and the public who are coming on board and buying it, that are supporting the charity. I'm just the guy in the middle." he says. "As long as people keep buying the work, I'll keep supporting the charity."



↑ **Wishing Time**

Giclée Edition 495

Image 15" x 11"

Ⓜ £164 Ⓣ £250

← **In My Life Book**

Standard Edition • £24.95

Limited Edition of 995 • £95

(includes limited edition print)



In My Life, Paul Horton's sensational new book features many of his works, created over the years. The foreword is written by friend and collector, rock star Steve Harley.



With success and extra pressures on his time, Horton's commitment to helping others has had to evolve in new directions. "Until a few years ago I was spending one and a half days a week with special needs students using art as therapy, but as my career has taken off I'm unable to find the time to take the classes myself," he says. "I do still go in as a visiting tutor, to keep in touch and have a look at the work. When things have calmed down a little I hope to return and take some classes as I really enjoy it."

A strong desire to paint means that working in his studio twelve hours a day, seven days a week is fairly standard for Horton, however outside commitments and family relationships change his working patterns, especially when his son, Mark, who's in his late teens, is home from University.

"When Mark's home we have quality time together as he's the most impor-

tant part of my life, and always will be," he says. "He often works beside me as he too has a love of art. He's studying film and television but also art and he's a very creative soul."

Using a wide range of painting styles and formats within his work hasn't stopped people being able to recognise and point out a Paul Horton painting, something he is understandably proud of. "I do like the fact that people can point out my paintings, however I firmly believe that I'm at the beginning of a journey," he says. "My work has changed over the last 30 years and I can't predict how it will develop and change over the next 30 - that's the exciting part."

If Horton is excited about the work he will be producing over the coming years, then this excitement will surely be shared by his many expectant fans, who'll look forward to his new work over the next 30 years and more. ■

↑ The Street Players

Image 18" x 30"

Giclée Edition 495

M £329 F £450

Giclée On Board Edition 250

Image 18" x 30"

M £446 F £575

A collection of Paul Horton's artworks are available as part of his exhibition currently touring galleries nationwide

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www.washingtongreen.co.uk