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A Return to Bath

By Artist Peter Brown

"Rupert Street, The Gielgud Theatre" 24 x 16 inches - Oil on Board



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The last year has seen me do lots of paintings of our home interior, a quiet central London, two weeks of a snowed-in Harrogate, and a new passion for me - that city over the hill that I have mostly ignored this last 26 years - Bristol!

After the first lockdown, I painted the first of my 'Relaxing of Restrictions' paintings in Bath as it manifested in front of the Royal Crescent, working on two large canvases as the days unfolded to summer evenings.

The town centre, sadly, I found rather depressing - empty of stalls, shoppers and tourists. So I hopped over the hill to 'Briz', painting Stokes Croft to Cotham, Redland, Clifton, Colston Avenue, the Christmas Steps, the Floating Harbour and the Cumberland Road. Then in the run up to Christmas as the shops were re-opened, I headed for the West End, painting London's Christmas lights - quieter than usual but just as beautiful.

January saw a manic spell of painting, holed up in snow-bound Harrogate for my show up there which has just physically opened as I write. Then I returned to London to paint the abandoned theatres and surrounding streets, and Soho inhabited by . . . well, its inhabitants. It was an eye-opener. I saw Trafalgar Square and Piccadilly Circus empty of people bar skateboarders and Deliveroo riders.

And now I am mixing London with Bath - a Victoria Art Gallery show in my sights. Of course you don't ever stop painting your adopted home town. You keep an eye on it. I caught those drops of snow we had in January - a Pulteney Bridge emerging from heavy fog, a frosty New Year's view from Pipley Wood . . .

It never ceases to amaze me how you can miss what has been on your doorstep all these years. I think I have just discovered the best view of Bath. Driving up Oldfield Park's Coronation Avenue, dodging the buses coming down, I noticed a turning to my left ending in a gate. After parking up, I found myself in a large field of well-worked allotments. The small quirky sheds (reminding me of that one in Chitty Chitty Bang Bang that the grandad takes off in), the green houses with their missing panes, the variety of ways the allotments are cared for and delineated, the assortment of canes and polytunnels refracting light. It was a feast in itself but what backs all this is jaw dropping: a view of Bath that takes in Bear Flat, Beechen Cliff, Claverton Down, Bannerdown, Little Solsbury Hill, Lansdown, the city centre with the Abbey and St John's standing proud (how tall is that steeple?!), Weston, Kelston Round Hill and the crescents: Royal, Cavendish and Lansdown.

Below: "Royal Crescent, Relaxing of Lockdown 2, Late Afternoon" 20 x 60 inches - Oil on Canvas



Below: "Jermyn Street, Christmas Lights" 12 x 36 inches - Oil on Canvas



Below: "Pulteney Bridge, Fog" 16 x 20 inches - Oil on Canvas



I always describe Bath as a city beautiful in its uniformity - that incredible stone, but this view reminds us that it is a city of great variety in architecture and landscape. I have spent most of this last week in the allotments. It's an interesting ecosystem - those working their allotments, the dog walkers, the mums, dads, grannies and grandads taking their children and grandchildren to the wonderful park with the meandering stream and sandpits. It's a short walk down to Moorland Road for a coffee and bun when I get too cold which is an added bonus. The locals are brilliantly smug: "Our houses are cheaper this side and we get the view" but it is the community that is so wonderful. The allotments came into their own even more during lockdown, with families enjoying their own private - yet at the same time - communal space. A Georgian garden is all very well but give me an allotment any day. "

More information about Peter Brown can be found on his website www.petethestreet.com