

PAINTING FROM THE HEART

Mike Trippitt meets Norfolk artist Karen SJ Keable, owner of The Southwold Gallery in Southwold.

Gazing across the garden pond at her Norwich home, artist Karen SJ Keable looks self-assured. But underneath, taken back to the canvas, this increasingly popular painter remains the Norfolk girl who longs to be at the seaside.

*All photos by
Mike Trippitt*

“I was born in Great Yarmouth, grew up in Great Yarmouth and went to Great Yarmouth Grammar School,” she says.

She talks, openly, although nervously at first, of her childhood. Her artistic ability had been recognised early on.

“I enjoyed art at school. My teachers really encouraged me. They thought I had talent. I used to sketch and paint in my spare time.



“I remember my father saying that he wanted to be an artist but his father had told him that he had to get a ‘proper job’.

“So I knew that that was what I was expected to do. Even though I liked art and would have liked to have gone to art college then, I knew I had to make my contribution in the home.”

Upon leaving school Karen found work. But she left home to join boyfriend, and future

husband, Kevin when his work took him to Norway.

Following marriage, the young couple lived in Singapore and Bangkok. Here, Karen found the time to paint once again.

“I painted Asian scenes, markets and things like that. Quite detailed, pen and ink and water colour. In Bangkok I started doing art classes for children. I could not do enough of those. They were really popular and that made me think about how I was painting and the different things I did.”

With her confidence growing, Karen began to take on commissioned



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work, especially portraits. The popularity she enjoyed spurred her on, and when the couple returned to the UK in 1994 Karen studied art at Gray’s School of Art at Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen.

Although Karen and Kevin spent another four years abroad she always wanted to return to East Anglia. The sea, the coastline, the changing seasons and the sand dunes drew her to Suffolk.

They bought Dunburgh, a guesthouse on Southwold’s North Parade. It suited them well. Son Charlie was four years old and daughter Olivia was a baby. From her home Karen could see wide, open skies; ever-changing seas; beaches; groynes and the pier.

“We love it here. That’s why we chose our house in Southwold. It was right on the seafront and out of all of the windows we had a great view of the sea. The sea was like our garden.”

Karen’s break came in 2000 when East Anglia artist and owner of the Garden Gallery in Southwold, Mary Gundry, saw some of Karen’s work on the walls inside Dunburgh. She was impressed and invited Karen to exhibit in the gallery.

“I couldn’t believe how much money she put the first two in for and they both sold within two weeks. And that was it then. I couldn’t paint enough. That’s when I became a professional artist. I was painting seascapes to put in the gallery and they were selling well.”

For sixteen years Karen has produced paintings in acrylics on canvas that hang in private collections, homes and galleries the world over.

She draws inspiration from the Norfolk and Suffolk coastline. The drama in the sky; the light reflected off the sea; fishermen and fishing boats, and pebbles and stones on the beach.

“I don’t really see that I have a style,” she says. “I just paint it as I paint. Every painting I do I try to capture the light or a feel. I paint from the heart. My heart belongs to the sea.”

Karen gives many of her pieces emotive titles: ‘Happy Days’, ‘New Horizons’, ‘Our Little Piece Of Heaven’, ‘Together At Last’. It reflects her own feeling towards what she observes in Suffolk and how she hopes others will find a personal interpretation of what she creates.

Her ideas come as she travels around Southwold; there is no other place she would rather be. She always has a camera or sketchbook with her, whether she is walking with family or out looking for views to paint.

“I will just see something and think, ‘look at that!’ Something just leads my eye. It might be Walberswick church or a jetty and I just think, ‘that’s fantastic’, ‘that would make such a good painting’. I have always got

LEFT: Karen and her work in the Southwold Gallery





ABOVE: *Drifting By*, by Karen SJ Keable; RIGHT TOP: *Inside the Southwold Gallery*.
 RIGHT MIDDLE: *From the Dunes*, by Karen SJ Keable; RIGHT BOTTOM: *The Southwold Gallery*.
 CIRCLE: Karen at home with dog.

my eye out for my next painting."

Once she has mapped out a picture in her mind, Karen works in her studio, first doing a sketch, then, creating the final work. Each takes between one and five weeks depending on size and she never starts one without finishing another.

She keeps motivated and admits to being more at home painting alone in her studio than talking to others about her work.

But as she talks, her enthusiasm for her work and for painting is infectious. Although she has worked hard, she says she has been very lucky.

"If you have a passion for something, you really enjoy it. That is honestly how I feel about painting. I love it and it makes me feel better doing it. It is not like work really."

For over 10 years, Karen

Keable has owned The Southwold Gallery; the same gallery that gave her the break 16 years ago. It is close to her heart.

"I love all the artists we have in there. I love finding new artists, and supporting other artists. I am trying to do for other artists what the gallery did for me. We have artists who we were the first to promote and who are now successful in other galleries. That is very rewarding."

With her children growing up Karen will devote more time to her work. She hopes to produce a coffee-table book of her art and aims to keep the gallery until, as she puts it, the day she dies.

Most of all, she plans to continue walking around Southwold seeking inspiration from the Suffolk coast.

For more details about Karen's work visit her website www.ksjkeable.co.uk



An exhibition of Karen's Work

If you would like see more of Karen's work, her next exhibition is at the **Southwold Gallery** from **24th March to 17th April 2017**

You can find our more details about the gallery at www.southwoldgallery.co.uk

