

Capturing Suffolk's QUIRKS

*Mike Trippitt meets Stephanie Lambourne,
an artist with an eye for our funny little habits...*

SOUTHWOLD Pier, so quintessentially British, reaches out into the gentle swell of a winter's morning. The lighthouse hides against a grey sky, its light waving lazily seaward from the gloom. Life in the Suffolk town is as it should be – peaceful, ordered and, at least today, ordinary.

But inside the café on the pier, artist Stephanie Lambourne sips the white, creamy froth from a warm latte, and regards the world outside with a keen eye. "If I go out for a walk I will see something a little bit strange," she says. "Just today someone was riding a bike along, with broccoli stalks sticking out at the back. I just thought how funny that looked. That might turn up in one of my paintings somewhere."

Born and raised in Sawbridgeworth Hertfordshire, the 44-year old former teacher creates acrylic paintings she describes as "quirky, light-hearted and colourful".

"My paintings are something to enjoy. If I can make someone smile for a minute I have achieved what I set out to do. There is nothing deep and meaningful behind them." Stephanie Lambourne has been painting scenes of Suffolk, Norfolk, and Southwold especially, "peopled by unreal characters in sometimes strange and simple pursuits" since 2003 after a short career in teaching. Her work, characterised with little perspective and described as "naïve or childlike", sells in galleries in East Anglia as well as featuring on greetings cards. It is simple, off-beat and lots of fun.

Although trained in fine art at Middlesex University (the former radical and respected Hornsey School of Art), Stephanie's style was not born in her college days. "I struggled at university. I found it difficult. I wasn't sure that fine art was what I should be doing when I was there." She was not prepared for life as a student at a progressive art school where ideas and conceptual art were being encouraged. "When I was 18, I was very young. I hadn't been into London on my own. If I'd gone anywhere it was with friends who knew how to use the underground. I didn't know what I was doing.



Teaching the Gulls

"I thought I was going to go there and learn something. I did not realise it was going to be more of a personal discovery, where I was going to go on a journey on my own. I had this notion of sitting in a classroom learning to draw. It wasn't like that at all."

Although her work was different to that of her contemporaries – "Everyone's work was very conceptual, about ideas. Mine was about doing" – she developed an interest ▶

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The Lord Nelson

in creating assemblages from driftwood recovered from the beaches of Norfolk and Suffolk depicting simple scenes of harbours, cottages and landscapes. But success as an artist came when she transferred her approach to art onto canvas. A well-developed observational humour and a love of reading combined to create a unique style that visitors to the area identify with.

"I was doing lots of drawings, and reading lots like Laurie Lee, *The Darling Buds of May*, and the E F Benson novels, *Mapp and Lucia*. From these books I got the idea of funny little people going about, doing ordinary things. But I wanted to keep the landscapes of the local places, so by putting the people in, suddenly the people became more important than the backgrounds." All Stephanie Lambourne's pictures contain a narrative, words that explain or complement her characters and scenes. She says she has always marvelled at how something as small as a comic seaside postcard can amuse so easily, and she strives to embrace that in her work. If she can make someone "smile or snigger" she is content.

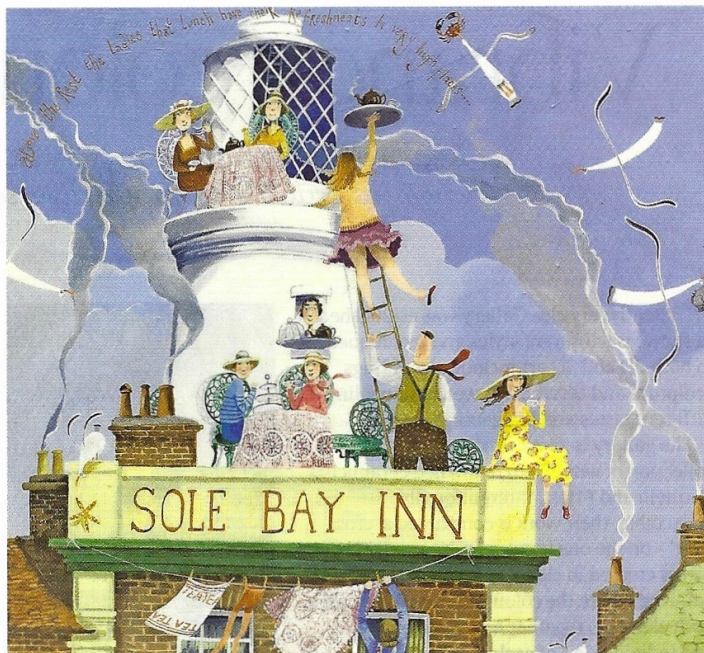
Stephanie paints from her home in Suffolk. Her work is spontaneous. She rarely does preparatory drawings, but is never short of ideas. "I have themes for paintings, Southwold themes, car themes, living room themes and snow themes. It comes down to doing a different version on those. Sometimes I think of the little narrative and do the painting around that. Other times the painting comes first, and I suppose I contrive something for that particular painting."

Her characters – funny little people dressed in clothes from a bygone age – busy themselves in Southwold, and the coast and countryside of Suffolk. Rotund, bonneted ladies take tea or walk their dogs, fishermen drink ale outside Southwold's finest hostelrys and housewives hang their washing from windows and lines. Morris Minors, campervans, bicycles and pushchairs transport the oddest of folk and the oddest of cargoes around the Suffolk that Stephanie Lambourne sees. But surely, she has never seen anyone teaching seagulls to fly?

"My husband once said that when he lived in Eastbourne for a while, in a balcony flat,



Blowing the cobwebs away



Light Lunch



Stephanie Lambourne, Photo: Mike Trippitt

he would have lots of seagulls shouting at the baby birds encouraging them to fly," she says. That was enough to inspire her. "I wanted to do a painting of the [Southwold] lighthouse. I just thought that in it I would have people holding baskets with baby seagulls in, and encouraging them to fly." She has achieved her aim of making people smile. A number of her pictures depicting the efforts of Southwold folk getting the youngsters airborne have been sold.

After 15 years, Stephanie continues to enjoy her work, blessed, as she is, with a flair for the burlesque and a knack for detecting oddity. Her almost daily visits to Southwold, its people and the things she sees in the town bring ideas for the next picture to her mind. She has no plans to change. "Whilst people are buying my work," she says, "I will continue doing it." ♦

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Stephanie Lambourne's work is available at Southwold Gallery, Bircham Gallery at Holt, Taplin Gallery at Woodbridge and Cork Brick Antiques and Gallery at Bungay. Publishers Green Pebbles sell greetings cards featuring her work. She accepts commissions and can be contacted via her stephlambourne Instagram account.