

# AC Gallery and Peter Brook...

## “the North’s best kept artistic secret”

Back in the 1960s, AC Gallery was known as Arts and Crafts and sold art materials to local students and artists. One of those artists was Peter Brook, who at the time was an art teacher. As time passed, the art shop wound down and we became a picture framing shop and gallery showcasing Peter’s work.



*Holmfirth, a little mill*

In 1998, I saw some postcards that had come in for framing... they were by an artist called Peter Brook (who at that time I had not heard of). I really liked them and showed them to my father who recounted his memories of Peter. He said Peter would call in from time to time to buy art materials – and those who knew him would agree that he was a quiet, unassuming man. He was also incredibly modest, thoughtful, quietly spoken and forthright.

At the time we supplied many other galleries with artwork and I thought our customers might like Peter’s work. A couple of phone calls later and Peter agreed to meet with me. I met Peter and his wife Molly at their home and was taken into the front room. From that first meeting we agreed to

represent Peter and try to sell his prints via a few galleries... and so began a relationship that went way beyond just business – they became an intrinsic part of my personal and professional life.

In 2000, we agreed that I would be his publisher and we began producing prints which Peter would check and approve. We agreed not to mass market his work but bit by bit we could see a following was growing. In 2002, Peter gave me a couple of originals to try in the gallery – both sold. In 2003, we tried a few more and they all sold too. By now, sales were really beginning to grow and more galleries were asking us if they could stock Peter’s work but we had to decline quite a few so we could keep the work relatively exclusive.



*On the Pennines, danger*



*On the way to Wasdale reading the signs*

We agreed to have a proper exhibition in October 2004 and this became an annual event that is still going strong today (this year’s event ran from September 11th to October 9th). However, we always have a big display of Peter’s work in place all year round at our Huddersfield gallery – the 1st floor is dedicated to his work entirely. We are very fortunate to be able to offer paintings from Peter’s estate, as well as a wide network of collectors we have got to know over the years.

Those early paintings sold for a few hundred pounds, nowadays they are a few thousand. In 2007, the Tate (who have Peter’s work in their collection) announced they were including one of his pieces in their 2009 diary – that announcement catapulted Peter into a different league entirely... demand and prices soared. Sadly, Peter passed away in November 2009 but not before it had been announced that his work would feature in the 2011 diary too. At last, this great painter’s contribution to the art world was being acknowledged.

Born in 1927 in Scholes, Peter spent a lot of his childhood surrounded by the farms and landscapes which became such an intrinsic part of his life. Yet it was the streets, houses, and mills of Brighouse that first inspired him as an artist. He found pictures all around him and it was here that Peter made his home and brought up his family. After National Service he began work as a school teacher and is fondly remembered by students and teachers alike. Peter would take his pupils out into the countryside as often as possible and say “to find a subject, look around you”.

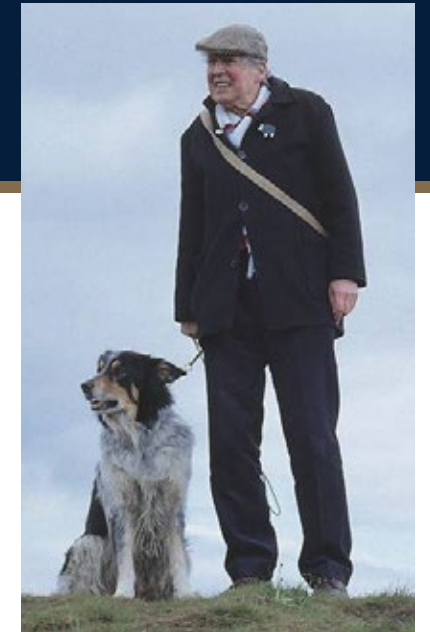
In 1960, his first show in Wakefield was a resounding success. The Times were full of praise for Peter’s work. More exhibitions followed and, in 1969, Peter’s career as an artist really took off when the London art dealers Agnews gave him a one-man show and an annual contract for many years thereafter. This allowed Peter to become a full-time professional artist.

Peter has been coined “Yorkshire’s Lowry” and more than once, customers have said he is “the North’s best kept artistic secret”. Peter was also successful in London for many years as the “Pennine Landscape Painter” but it was Yorkshire where his heart, and his art, was at home.

Along with many wonderful stories and anecdotes in the various books that have been published on Peter and his work, celebrities such as James Mason, Tom Courtenay, Rodney Bewes, Hannah Gordon and many others collected his work – exhibitions in America and Australia followed. Peter also appeared in the TV documentary on James Mason, which followed the actor back to his Yorkshire roots. He even inspired Yorkshire folk singer Roger Davies to write the song ‘Peter Brook’s Paintings’ in 2008.

Typical of Peter, he once said that he always painted subjects that he liked and he was just lucky that other people liked them too. He wasn’t one for the limelight, or the world of marketing and PR, and he preferred that his paintings spoke for themselves. He simply loved the fact that other people liked his work.

His sheepdogs were always by his side and often featured in his work. This began when Peter decided to include Tess, his third dog, in his paintings. Soon Peter featured himself, and after Tess passed away, his new dog Shep would appear. Shep had remarkable ‘chevron’ markings down his back and owners of Peter’s earlier work even ask him to add Shep, and himself, as this had become a real trademark.



Peter’s style, and subject matter, has varied over the years from the large dramatic landscapes and mill scenes of his early paintings to the derelict farms and abandoned lands of his later work. There are the dogs peering out from under barn doors, the quirkier images featuring penguins and the moonlight paintings where Peter used glitter for the stars. Peter has painted other areas too, from the striking tin mines of Cornwall to the majesty of Scotland, amongst others. Of course it is well known that Peter loved snow and was fascinated by the variety it produced.

Peter has left a fantastic legacy of artwork, as well as many wonderful memories for those fortunate enough to have known him. AC Gallery now showcase Peter’s work in all our stores, though our Huddersfield store will always remain the main centre for his work.

Article courtesy of Mike Baggs, AC Gallery - [www.acgallery.co.uk](http://www.acgallery.co.uk) [admin@acgallery.co.uk](mailto:admin@acgallery.co.uk)