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Derek Hyatt

Landscape artist who found inspiration on the Yorkshire moors

For some years, Derek Hyatt was widely assumed to be one of those artists who grow old lamenting their few hours of youthful fame and promise and leave the rest of the world wondering where they went. That all changed in 2012, when his 80th birthday was celebrated with a large London exhibition at the Art Space Gallery in London, and he was recognised once more as a towering figure in contemporary British art.

One of the reasons for the period of disregard was that he was absent for some 20 years from the London art scene, and as a famous sculptor recently observed, "If you're not in London, you might as well be in bloody Botswana." There was also the little matter of changing fashion. In the Seventies and Eighties, both landscape and symbolism were unfashionable in sophisticated art circles. Not that

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'Yorkshire moors: good
subject. Keep at it, lad'**

it seemed to worry Hyatt unduly.

Derek Hyatt was born in Ilkley, Yorkshire, in 1931 into a non-artistic family — his father insisted on being known as a turf accountant rather than a bookie. Hyatt was always determined he would be an artist; his family accepted and supported his ambitions.

It could be said of him as a boy — in the words of the writer and poet Walter Savage Landor — that "Nature he loved, and next to Nature, Art", though even as a child Hyatt was fascinated by aviation: he learnt to identify all the war aircraft by their outline. His father, who was in Civil Defence at the time, gave him a shilling for every accurate drawing of them.

One of his most vivid memories of his teens was seeing a German bomber crash into the moorland heather and rushing out on his bicycle to locate the wreckage. At the same time, he would go on long nature walks across the moors with his grandfather, with whom one Christmas Day he found marks made in the snow by the wings of a grouse (another recurrent image in his work).

He was fiercely independent and consequently something of a loner. From the moment he entered Leeds College of Art in 1948, he ploughed his own furrow. He graduated in 1952, carrying off the drawing prize for his year.

Even while he was doing his National Service in the RAF, happily stationed in Norfolk, he contrived to continue his art studies part-time at Norwich School of Art. Once demobbed in 1954, he moved on to the Royal College of Art, where he edited the beautifully produced college journal, *Ark*, and in 1958 was awarded the J Andrew Lloyd Scholarship for Landscape Painting.

He had his first one-man London show at the New Art Centre in 1960, and several years later he began teaching — first at Kingston School of Art, then, after he had returned to his beloved Yorkshire, at the College of Art and Leeds Polytechnic. He stayed close to the moors that inspired him until early this year, when his wife Rosamond's serious illness prompted them to move

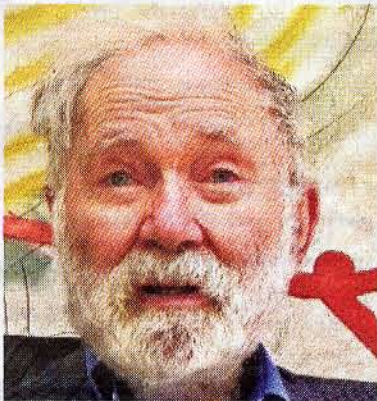


Hyatt's works included *Moor Girl*, above, which he painted in 1998

closer to their daughter Sally, a nanny and personal assistant to a family in Exeter, where he died barely six weeks after Rosamond.

Hyatt's painting was always rooted in landscape. When he was a student, the landscape was more clearly depicted; the great idol of his early years was the British painter Paul Nash.

As Hyatt's work progressed, he moved further towards abstraction,



Hyatt in 2012, when his birthday was marked with a large London exhibition

with the landscape element becoming more obscure. The underlying sense of the moors, though, remained. The sculptor Henry Moore, a fellow Yorkshireman, said to him as a student, "Yorkshire moors: good subject. Keep at it, lad." Hyatt himself declared: "I don't have a style, I have a subject."

In addition to Nash, he was a great admirer of the later, more abstract Turners and fascinated by prehistoric rock paintings. He followed enthusiastically the first showings of the New York abstract expressionists in London (1956 and 1959), and was especially admiring of Mark Rothko and Willem de Kooning.

Hyatt's personal life was exemplarily calm and organised. He met his future wife in London at a tennis club — he was an enthusiastic player in his younger days — and they married in 1960. She was a tax inspector, and later

dealers noted that they always dealt with husband and wife together: she handled the finances and left the art to him.

In the late Seventies, he bought a 17th-century farmhouse called Barker as a workplace on the edge of the moors. As he described it: "When I went to Barker I tasted another life, another time and history... no electricity, phone, computer or TV. Another world? The dawn light as it came up the valley at day-break reminded me how special is daylight."

The view from the top-storey windows of Barker across the valley of Bishopdale became his source of inspiration, and the sights that met his eyes on his long solitary walks on the moors constantly recur in his work. He was drawn to the so-called Reva Cross, a sandstone boulder built into a dry-stone wall on Rombalds Moor, near Hawksorth. This was not, in Hyatt's view, necessarily a Christian symbol, and the fact that it is close to the geographic centre of England, he thought, was probably a mere coincidence.

Notably, he once saw a pair of owls mating and these formed a frequent — though sometimes almost unrecognisable — element in his later paintings. They also inspired him to empathise with their airborne viewpoint over the rolling, bleak terrain beneath.

Derek Hyatt, painter, was born on February 21, 1931. He died on December 8, 2015, aged 84

Quiz answers 1. Procopius of Caesarea. 2. Thomas Hart Benton. 3. Brussels. 4. Pontefract Castle. 5. *44 Minutes*. 6. Gloster Meteor. 7. Prince Charles. 8. Crewe. 9. Keratin. 10. The Derveni papyrus. 11. 433 Eros — the probe was the first spacecraft to land on an asteroid. 12. Leonard Bernstein. 13. Philip J Fry — in *Futurama*. 14. Parkinson's disease. 15. Gary Powers. 16. Hadrian. 17. Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race. 18. Peru. 19. Primo Carnera. 20. Kosovo.