

Jeffery Camp

Veteran painter and teacher whose unique vision was celebrated by critics and fellow artists

JEFFERY CAMP, who has died aged 96, was a painter and teacher, a dual role epitomised in a pair of books he wrote in later life: *Draw* (1981) and *Paint* (1996), both of which were, perhaps surprisingly, international bestsellers.

In these copiously illustrated instruction manuals Camp brought together a lifetime's looking at art with a gentle but persistent pedagogic urge that made him one of the most valued teachers at the Slade School of Fine Art during his tutorship there.

The writer AA Gill, one of Camp's students, remembered him with amused affection: "Jeffery taught art in a counter Zeitgeist way. In the late 1970s he was quiet and he was thoughtful and he was spiritual. The art of the moment was loud, instinctive and dogmatic... Jeffery would say, 'Copy that Raphael. How does he make that boy stand up?' And you would, and it would be a bad drawing, but always a great revelation."

Although teaching was important to Camp, painting was his primary vocation, and it is in the context of his more famous contemporaries that Jeffery Camp deserves to be seen: those figurative painters of the "School of London" who include his friends Michael Andrews, Euan Uglow and Frank Auerbach. It is with them that he belongs and will in future be grouped: an independent artist and something of a loner, but of the same order of inventive picture-making and unique vision.

Essentially a figurative artist, though prepared to make rewarding forays into abstraction, Camp conducted a rapt investigation of forms in changing light. A favourite subject was people in movement – on a beach, in a park, on a cliff-top. He captured their essence in a light touch, varying from a broadly dabbed, feathery pointillism to a more inclusive impasto.

His was an art of observation, but of quick, acute glances, rather than lengthy scrutiny. He used landscape as a metaphor for states of mind and soul, but although intensely serious, he was never solemn and made paintings that are edgy and exciting, often funny.

Camp painted the old stories of human behaviour, flushed with lyricism, and turned the everyday into myth. His lovers pinwheel through luscious skies, entwined and entranced, while on the earth below a blackbird looks at a daffodil with equal attentiveness.

He painted on shaped canvases: the diamond or the square balancing en pointe, and, later, smaller, irregularly shaped boards for vignettes that he thought "faster and more alive than any I have done". His vision was closely ordered but unorthodox, passionate yet serene, with radiant, exhilarating colour stroked into the pictures.

Camp called paint "one of the great languages of poetry", and in his hands it was most certainly that.

Jeffery Bruce Camp was born at Oulton Broad, near Lowestoft in Suffolk, on April 17 1923, the only child of George Bruce Camp, a cabinet-maker and antique dealer, and Caroline Flogdell Hase Camp, née Denny, a former nurse. Following his father's example, Camp always did his



Jeffery Camp and, below, *Southcoast*, 1990, oil on canvas: a view of Sussex cliff-top east of Beachy Head, with figures representing a world of innocence and bliss; the half-head at the bottom is a self-portrait of the artist

own carpentry, making frames and supports for his paintings.

He attended a local grammar school, then Lowestoft Art School (1939), followed by a year at Ipswich Art School (1940). In 1941 he won a place at Edinburgh College of Art, and spent the next three years there, absorbing the French-inspired *belle peinture* aesthetic taught by William Gillies and John Maxwell.

A prize-winning student, he carried off the Andrew Grant Post-Graduate Bursary, the Andrew Grant Travelling Scholarship and the David Murray Bursary for landscape painting. But by the end of 1944 he was back in Suffolk painting the East Anglian coast, where he remained for the next 20 years, working hard under the inspiration of such masters as Piero della Francesca, Rubens, Bonnard and Seurat.

Although his first real show was at the Galerie de Seine in Belgravia in 1958, the next year Camp was offered a solo exhibition by Helen Lessore at her Beaux Arts Gallery, now famous as a cradle for those painters who comprise the School of London.

The early 1960s were a heady period for Camp: he had two more shows at

the Beaux Arts (1961 and 1963), began teaching in London, first at Regent Street Polytechnic and Chelsea School of Art, before settling at the Slade (1963-1988).

He also met and married the painter Laetitia Yhap (born 1941), who became his muse and the versatile model for so many of his subsequent paintings. By 1967 Camp's parents had died and the couple were able to buy a place in London and a cottage in Hastings Old Town.

In Sussex he discovered the cliff-world of Beachy Head, a wonderful contrast to the flat lands of East Anglia and a lasting source of inspiration and imagery. Camp painted the landscape and the weather and Laetitia. In fact, he had a show entirely of Laetitia pictures in 1968 at the New Art Centre in London.

Then in the 1970s, hang-gliding became a fruitful new subject. The couple separated gradually in the early 1980s, not divorcing until 2001, and Camp moved back to London for the remainder of his life.

Camp showed his work in two Mayfair galleries, Browse & Darby and Nigel Greenwood, in the 1980s and 1990s, before discovering his true home. Art Space Gallery in Islington first mounted a solo show of Camp's work in 2002, and there followed half-a-dozen more such exhibitions over the years, offering a superb conspectus of his painted and drawn imagery.

The gallery's directors Michael and Oya Richardson became close friends, and they were unstinting in their support. Camp was also fortunate in the calibre of appreciative art world professionals his work attracted. Among his supporters

can be numbered the art critics and curators William Feaver, Richard Morphet, Timothy Hyman, John McEwen, Andrew Lambirth and Barry Schwabsky. Sir Norman Rosenthal is a long-standing admirer of Camp's work and posed for a dashing full-length nude portrait in 1985.

Artists have been quicker to recognise Camp's remarkable qualities than the general public. He was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy in 1974, a full member in 1984, and a Senior RA in 1998. In 1996 he won the Wollaston Award for the most distinguished work in the RA Summer Show, a much deserved accolade.

There have been three retrospective exhibitions of his work: at the South London Art Gallery (1973), the Serpentine Gallery (1978) and the Royal Academy (1988). The most recent show in a public space took place in 2013 at the Jerwood Gallery in Hastings, a 90th birthday tribute on the coast he had so frequently exalted.

His third book, *Almanac*, a lavishly illustrated sideways look at his life in art, was published in 2010. It was characterised by the same original and poetic prose style, but was nothing like the usual autobiography. ("It is nasty looking back. My usual aim has been to avoid remembering stuff," he wrote.) Despite his encyclopedic knowledge of the art of the past, Camp was more interested in the present in his own life, and he lived each day with a sense of renewed wonder.

He spent long hours in the studio, often working a 16-hour day, though this would usually include spells of drawing in parks or by the river. He made a point of seeing nearly every exhibition of interest in London and a good few in the provinces, and was a regular at opening nights. But after the evening's socialising he would return to the studio and paint.

Jeffery Camp is survived by Laetitia Yhap. They had no children.

Jeffery Camp, born April 17 1923, died April 5 2020

Andrew Lambirth writes: More than 30 years ago when I first interviewed Jeffery Camp, he forbade me to bring a tape-recorder as he would find it off-putting. "I speak slowly enough for you to write it all down," he drawled in measured tones. Although Suffolk-born, his accent by the time I met him was less distinctive than his memorable delivery.

From that first encounter, I was beguiled and intrigued, and used to visit his studio regularly and accompany him on trips to the south coast – first by van (until he gave up driving), later by train. I remember one trip to Beachy Head when Jeffery took me up almost to the cliff edge. He then stepped carefully but nonchalantly over the "Danger – Cliff Falls" sign on its slender rope, and pointed to a spot several feet beyond the precipitous plunge of chalk. "I used to paint out there," he said. "It's all gone now."

At exhibitions, his comments on the art were often surprising and always enlightening. He encouraged you to think and look (and in my case, write) clearly and independently. I am fortunate to live with Jeffery's paintings and they re-enthrall me every time I look at them.

