

Long-Forgotten Passion of My Youth

Artist Statement

The paintings throughout this book are a small selection of over 100 watercolor paintings created during the various lockdown periods. At the first stage of lockdown, I awakened a long-forgotten passion of my youth and discovered a love of watercolor painting. This unintentional development of my new hobby was somehow a product of forced isolation and limited resources.

While I spring-cleaned my teenagers' bedrooms in the first lockdown, I found a bundle of old, half-dry watercolor paint tubes and brushes, which were used by our boys during primary school. My initial reaction was to throw away these dust-gathering, dirty things as they were poor quality and well past their use-by date. I packed them hastily in a trash bag. However, strangely, I could not bring myself to drop them into the can, so I left it by the door for a few days. I eventually thought that there was nothing else to do in complete lockdown apart from sitting around being idle, so I would give a go at making this resource useful and trying something new out of it. Having said that, a few more weeks passed by as I was a little bit nervous about starting to paint. Eventually I had the courage to pick up a brush, but realized there was no white watercolor paper in the house. As all the shops were completely closed except for food and essentials, at first,

I thought my attempt had failed. However, I remembered I had a nice book of black paper suitable for watercolor painting, so I ended up using that.

This coincidental way of painting helped me to develop a unique technique based on Korean traditional folk painting, Minhwa. Minhwa painting originally was completed on colored backgrounds by layering colors over and over, so I watched a few YouTube videos to mimic the style and I then applied this to the black paper. However, my paper and paints were very different from Korean traditional ones, and so I had to create my own way to bring up the colors on the black paper. Finally, relaxation of lockdown rules allowed me to get some white paper.

My work captures a glimpse of beauty in plants and flowers from local fields, neighbor's gardens and parks in Oxford. I examined the flowers and plants carefully at first with my bare eyes in nature and took many pictures from various positions and angles with my mobile phone. At home I painted them by looking at the digital images I had captured earlier. I often revisited the site where I found them and re-examined them to make sure of the accuracy of the plants and flowers.

Despite completing more than 100 pieces of work, I continue to be in awe at the wonders of nature. Each piece was a meditation of healing to me during this difficult COVID period. In every stroke I learned humbleness in my limitation to express the beauty of God's creation. Trying to imitate His magnificent work makes me just stand in amazement of the works of His hands.

Over the last three years, my works have been displayed at Wycliffe Hall with those of colleagues as part of Oxfordshire Artweeks open studios and pop-up exhibition. Also, I feel privileged that my artwork is now published in this wonderful book. This is way beyond my expectation.

“And we know that in all things God works for the good for those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”
(Romans 8:24)

Hannie Riley, October 2023