



Inspiring
women

Ruth Wharrier

Flower Power

Sarah Hardy meets Suffolk-based botanical artist and teacher Ruth Wharrier, and hears about her latest unusual project www.ruthwharrier.com



Ruth Wharrier

has enjoyed a lifelong passion for art, starting when she was ill as a child and was given drawing and painting equipment to help pass the time. 'I was home-educated and spent time in childrens' hospitals, and art was really my salvation. I drew and painted avidly,' she explains.

This fascination has continued into her adulthood as Ruth, now in her 40s, is a professional botanical artist, creating delicate, precise pieces, as well as a

primary school teacher, specialising in art, and also an art tutor who runs regular workshops and longer courses, too.

So, although clearly a busy woman, Ruth is embarking on another fascinating project this month, painting a harpsichord. 'They come to me in a very raw state, just raw wood, and I paint and personalise them. I make the paint myself, a gouache, which has a slightly thicker consistency than a modern day paint, and takes more layering. I usually spend up to three months working on

each piece,' she says.

The harpsichords are made in Norwich by Alan Gotto, with Ruth adding: 'There's a real history to this; they are decorated with birds, butterflies and flowers - everything is bespoke, with the finished pieces going all over the world.'

Ruth, who lives in Pakefield, was completely self-taught before she attended a year's course, a Diploma in Botanical Illustration, at the prestigious Chelsea Physic Garden in London. 'I was

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completely amazed to be accepted,' she says. 'I was totally honest with them and told them that I had had no formal training but I guess they saw something in me.'

Ruth was born in the North East of England and, after travelling for several years and a spell of living overseas, came to Suffolk 14 years ago. She is captivated, as many are, by the light and landscapes, enjoying inspiring walks on the beach and the countryside inland, too. She has established a good working partnership with the Suffolk Wildlife Trust who are based at Carlton Marshes Visitor Centre, near Lowestoft, where she runs many of her courses, including her year long Level 4 Certificate in Botanical Drawing and Painting - with the next one starting in January 2024.

'It is a very special place,' she says. 'Well equipped and in a perfect setting.'

Apart from this course, Ruth also offers day-long workshops and is always keen to hear from people who want to learn to draw and paint. 'We can all do

it,' she says with vigour. 'It is my mission to get more people painting! I teach the basics upwards, and everyone goes away having acquired some new skills.'

'And it is so good for you, for your mental wellbeing. You have to focus, everything else stops as you work, you have to concentrate. It is very therapeutic.'

Ruth also plans to find more time to paint herself this year. She loves simply heading outdoors and seeing what catches her eye, explaining: 'I love sitting outside, sketching. Doing something entirely for myself. I am keen to build up my own collection so I can stage another exhibition at some point; my last solo exhibition was at Snape Maltings in 2018.'

Ruth works in watercolour and gouache on paper, wood and vellum and also creates etchings in pen and ink. Her preferred medium is vellum, a delicate, smooth material made from calf or goatskin, upon which she can almost float her flowers, and her favourite artists include American

botanical artist Kate Nessler who she met when she was studying, visiting a rather exclusive London gallery where she was deeply moved by her 'extraordinarily beautiful' pieces. 'She was really, really encouraging and we have stayed in touch. She really backed me,' says Ruth.

And her second big inspiration was Rory McEwen, a musician and singer - Jools Holland's father-in-law, no less - who also painted very delicate botanical illustrations.

When she's not drawing and painting, you'll find Ruth on the beach with her dog, Poppy, walking and enjoying plenty of fresh air. Or you'll find her at a concert at Snape Maltings or in Norwich. 'I enjoy live performances,' she says.

Find out more about Ruth's work at www.ruthwharrier.com

You can book courses here and also buy her work.



Ruth is also involved in a campaign to get a statue of Suffolk composer Benjamin Britten created and installed on Lowestoft seafront. Called *Britten As A Boy*, it aims to raise around £100,000 for the bronze statue which has been designed by sculptor Ian Rank-Broadley, who created the statue of Diana, Princess of Wales for Kensington Palace. It depicts Britten as a boy, looking out to sea. Various fundraising activities are planned including a concert in London in October. Find out more at www.brittenasaboy.com