

# WATCHING PALM TREES



Charlotte Royle grew up in Yorkshire in the north of England where cold rain falls on windswept moors and ancient woodlands. The damp soil and dark, cloudy skies have their own bleak beauty and romance where huge old Ash and Oak trees spread their twisted branches in Summer and stand bare and vulnerable in Winter.

So when, in complete contrast to this English landscape, Charlotte travelled south to Spain and first encountered her emblem palm trees holding themselves up in the bright sunlight, a new and thrilling chord was instantly struck. Their exotic beauty - tall slim trunks of rough scorched bark crowned with evergreen feathery fronds - spoke deeply to her and she immediately recognised them for herself, and as the perfect symbol of warmth and vitality that she had been looking for. Revelation or illumination, it was love at first sight and continues to be a passion which inspires Charlotte to go out and draw and paint palm trees wherever she is.

Whether they are exquisitely detailed pencil drawings or looser pen and inks, colourful collages or larger paintings, her beautiful palms are always drawn with a rare sensitivity which combines acute observation, a vigorous command of materials and a special ability to imbue these lovely organic forms with something intimate, attentive and original communicated through the artist. Each palm tree that she draws has a 'personality' and unique energy of its own.

Charlotte now lives and works in Casablanca, but also spends time in Italy and this mediterranean climate is reflected directly into her work. She absorbs the sparkling light, feels the warmth and meticulously records the shimmering lines and luscious colours she sees. She then filters all these visual and emotional sensations and is able to translate them onto paper or canvas using her own sensual and crafted language. It's as if the exterior landscape - often palm trees, but not always - and her own interior landscape fuse. Some of her palm tree pencil drawings are almost scientifically precise, but they never lack that essence and very personal touch which is so hard to pin down and is certainly the result of a powerful and dynamic identification between the artist and her beloved subject.



The Miami collages are early works, but the palm trees are already there interacting with the city architecture around them. The vertical and horizontal lines of the buildings, the windows and walls, are softened by the painterly splashes, sweeps and curves of the flowering trees. Charlotte always creates perfectly harmonious compositions. The patterns and textures of the paper and paint meet and overlay each other, but never squash or squeeze. There is always enough space and a considered equilibrium that combines to produce both abstract and figurative qualities in the work.

The Florida Palms are more complex, but that confident and refined sense of composition is still there; built up with textured shapes, details of painting and blocks of colour which carefully overlap and blend to create a joyful patchwork of windows and leaves, cut and paste, li-

nes, smudges and dots. Here we can see the influence of Charlotte's past work with textiles and fabric design. Certainly she is very skilled with patterning, weaving, proportion and structure. She knows how to extract the essentials of line, space, form and colour to create a visual rhythm and textural balance.

The larger acrylic paintings are bolder works. They still place us in a landscape with a clear horizon, but it is much less figurative and the palm trees blur or disappear completely into more abstract expanses of colour, line, folds and form. In Tuscan Lines there is a palpable sense of inside and outside merging – the interior and exterior of the concrete world converging with the internal and external perceptions of



the artist. There is a profound sense of time and place and the viewer is aware of the artist's visceral response to light and sound, forms and changing colours. The lines take us round corners that never fully reveal themselves and the shades of pink and green, bright yellow, orange, blue and black silhouettes suggest intense sunshine and the outdoors. In Early Autumn the colours are more subdued and, as the title indicates, the sun is lowering in the sky and the leaves are starting to fall. Pale blue and soft golden light. It is sensual and musical and suggests a backdrop or curtains. What do they conceal or might they reveal? Certainly there is a language being developed here which is feminine and concerned with perspective harmony, outer place and inner space.

But to return to Charlotte's palm trees who are the real protagonists of



this show. Perhaps the most accomplished of all are her ink and wax works. In these the artist's understanding and love of her subject is celebrated and spectacular. The city or landscape has fallen away and only the palm trees are left standing on clean white paper. Although their beautiful fronds are spun and ruffled, they are poised, elegant, upright and uplifting. They seem to rise above the clutter and the noise, but they aren't superior. They stand on long fragile stems, but remain purposeful and radiating. They are animated, dancing, full of movement and you can hear the wind from the ocean swishing through their long supple leaves. They evoke paradise, the sun, water and nourishment. They are ordered and disordered, linear and circular, dark and light, male and female. These works are made from years of looking and loving and synthesising. They are distilled and refined, but have freedom. That's not easy to achieve.

Rachel Inman

#### **BIOGRAPHY**

*Charlotte Royle was born in 1964 in York, England. She was introduced to the art of drawing at an early age at home and followed a concentrated interest in art through school and university. She received a BA Hons in Fine Art Textiles from Liverpool in 1985, and continued to have a successful career in the design of fabric for more than twelve years. A move to Edinburgh in 1998 marked a change of focus for Charlotte, away from design and towards drawing and painting.*

*From Scotland she moved to Tuscany in Italy, Paris, Marrakech and now works in Casablanca, Morocco where she lives with her partner Italian photographer Alessio Mei.*