



■ Neil Masterman, who started painting as a hobby, has seen his artwork displayed at the Agora Gallery, New York, right. Picture: SONYA DUNCAN



Artist's delight as his work is seized on by New York gallery

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He only picked up a paintbrush for a bit of light relief when he took an amateur painting class on board a holiday cruise.

But today, what started 25 years ago as little more than a hobby has exceeded Neil Masterman's wildest expectations, as his work – praised by critics across the globe – has been featured in a prestigious New York gallery.

Mr Masterman first discovered his passion for art while looking for something to relieve the stresses and strains of a hectic work schedule running his own caravan company.

His interest soon developed when he started painting his own drawings

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Neil Masterman

for his company's calendars, which were sold to his customers.

He also used to paint for enjoyment, but said: “I was too shy to show it.”

“I couldn't even show it to other painters. I just put it in the cupboard. I was just worried in case people didn't like it.”

Unknown to him, however, in 2008

his work acquired a new fan – his grandson Jacob Wardrop.

Jacob had been helping Mr Masterman to sell his calendars and was so impressed with what he saw that he entered the artwork he found into a competition Stateside – without telling his grandfather.

It was then that the family got a surprise call from the Agora Gallery, on West 25th Street, New York, saying they liked his work so much they wanted to feature it in an exhibition.

They even put his work on large posters which were displayed in the streets of the Big Apple – quite a thrill for a self-confessed shy artist.

And to prove it was no fluke, the gallery invited him back this year to display his artistic creations again.

“To have my work recognised like that makes me feel terrific,” said Mr

Masterman, of The Street in Bracon Ash, near Wymondham.

“It makes me think I've made it. “I never imagined I'd walk in the centre of New York and see my work being displayed.”

“I can't describe what it feels like.” Mr Masterman's diverse range of work is characterised by his use of bold and bright colours, which he uses intentionally to capture the viewer's attention and convey emotion, texture and movement.

He paints a variety of styles and subjects – from post-impressionism and cubism to the abstract – and also uses a range of mediums, from acrylic to oils and watercolors, to Chinese pen. Acrylic is currently his preferred medium.

His usual method is to spend time thinking up of the general concept

purely in his head, before transferring his thoughts onto the canvas using a bright range of colours.

“With a mastery of colour and design, Masterman jolts the viewer out of complacency and encourages them to take a closer look,” the Agora Gallery said in its description of this year's display, which has been called Evolving Abstraction.

Mr Masterman does not like to give his age for fear that people might view his work through a stereotype.

“I find that if people put you in a category, they don't ask you to do new things,” he said.

“I have quite a lot of new ideas and get on with young people very well.”

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