**Interview with Graham Dean**

**Oksana Salamatina**

Oksana Salamatina: Tell me about your childhood. Do you come from an artistic family? When did you start to paint and draw? How old were you?

Graham Dean: Very young. I could draw really well when I was very young—it was always commented on. At school I was always top of art. I dons always commented on. At school I wafamily. My sister is not that way, and my father was really bad at art, but my grandfather did do some paintings in a sort of amateur way. My son Finn is now an artist and illustrator.

OS: When did you start your work? What made you choose to work with oil and acrylic as your primary mediums?

GD: As a painter I started in 1974 ( Ileft college in ’73), and a gallery took me up very early. At the time I was doing post-Pop art, which then developed into a very contemporary realist style, which bracketed me in with a group of British photorealists. I thought my work was humanistic and cinematic in its content, but the style was high realism. These were all acrylic on canvas paintings; I had a very successful period with these works, exhibiting worldwide and being bought by major collectors. However, around 1984–o5, I wanted to change and spread my wings, and I was finding that this manner of working was inhibiting—I found it difficult, for instance, to explore more sensual subject matter it didn it difficult, for instancestyle. So I set out to reinvent watercolor painting on a grand scale. Nothing short of being ambitious! At first it didns inhibitingwere all acrylic on teur way. My son Finn is now an artistupporters, including critics. But over time I built up a new audience, and as the work progressed into the way I work now, the audience worldwide is now quite large—but usually people learn of my work by word of mouth!

OS: What inspires you to create?

GD: Inspiration comes from directly working in the studio with my models—thatiration comes from diabout. Itout. ow my ideas come rectly working in the studio models, a lot of experimentation, playing around with figure and relationships. Ideas can develop out of these sessions, and I go back to my workbooks to flesh these out.

OS: Your favorite artists?

GD: Favorite artists: Picasso (for his lifestyle), Matisse and Rodin (erotic drawings), Francis Bacon, Degas (only for his prints and experimental pastels, not the ballet stuff), Nolde, Richard Hamilton (big art college influence), George Segal, Ed Kienholz, Richter, etc. etc.

OS: Has anyone ever compared your work to Marlene Dumas’s?

GD: In Holland it used to happen. We are the same age and probably look at similar things, but she is more sociopolitical than I am. On a technical level she tends to use inks and other materials, whereas I donow, But as often happens with me, people tend to see the s and other mfirst, and because there are so few contemporary artists around the world who are working this way, we tend to all be compared to each other. Some of Clementethis way, we tend to all be c—again, wennt the same age. I was unaware of Dumas until about ten years ago, when I started exhibiting in Amsterdam with Judith at Frans Jacobs. I admire both Dumas and Clemente and Peter DoigPe works. Ito ask any questionsu a list later!ten years ago, when I started exhibiting in AmsterdAlthough I questionsu a list later!ten years agoo, i. e., I will equally be looking at Roman murals (Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii) as much as a cutting-edge show of young artists in London. I know I tread an unusual hybrid path. It has been said to me so many times that I donch as a cutting-edge show of young artists in orld who are eries and supporters, including furrow, and the people I admire seem to be cut from similar cloth.

OS: Where ideally—what museums, private collections or other spaces or venues—do you see your works?

GD: I would love to have at some point a full retrospective, so that the early realist work could be shown alongside my watercolors and my films. It has been suggested more than once, but some collectors are unwilling to lend, and my work is distributed around the globe, so costs are an issue. It would have to be a prestigious museum with sponsorship, I think. I do really like having museum shows or big gallery shows––this is better, because I can show workbooks, films, and other kinds of work.

OS: Please tell me about your technique. What is your artistic process? It is true that every artist has a unique way of creating his or her work. What is yours?

GD: Can I refer this to the message I sent you about how I work? Something I left out was that once when I was at the British School in Rome (Prix de Rome), one of the younger archaeologists visited my studio to see what I was doing. He was really interested in the process and commented that what I was doing was in direct contrast to what he does. His way of working was to take away layers revealing what was underneath, often destroying one layer—say medieval, in the knowledge that a better Roman layer was underneath. He remarked that I was the opposite, and my work was more like “reverse archaeology.” I picked up on this phrase and used it many times since.

OS: Where do you create your photographs? How long does it take you to finish one work? Do you make sketches on the paper first?

GD: All my work is done either here in Brightonsketches?? e you to neath, often destroying one layero what he does.work is distributed around the g percent in Brighton. Everything starts before I get a model in, and you can see this in my workbooks.

OS: When you have solo exhibitions of your artworks, how do you get ready for them? Do you know where you want your work to be placed? Do you participate in the hanging of your work?

GD: Yes, I always hang my work with the curator if ithe a museum show. If it if ithe hanging rk to be placed?ow do you get reagallerist unless they ask me.

OS: Is there a question you would want to be asked but have never been asked before?

GD: Ha! Have to think about that one. Ten years ago it would have been Kate Moss asking me to paint hern.

OS: Can you tell me about your first-ever painting? Where is it located now?

GD: The painting I call my first one is the first time I used acrylics. It was on board and it was for a gallery invite show called “The Mona Lisa.h Many artists were invited to make a contemporary version or take on the *Mona Lisa* as an icon. Mine was called “Leo and Mona,” 1974. I didn called e invited to make a contemporary version or take on the r them?in my house and studio in Umbria, Italyk is distributed around the globe, so costs are an including fu*Time Out*,and many other papers and magazines. Even critics singled it out. So in a way it set off my career. It now looks like the work of a young artist—hardly anything in common with what came later—very post-Pop. You can still buy prints of it, so it certainly kick-started things. Itof terry version or take on thLondon.

OS: Which work (to your mind) became the first real success? Can you send me its image and description and its current location?

GD: I would say the best painting I did from that early period was “Compartment 2.” It was part of a trilogy called “Compartments.” I had intended to make six of these life-size paintings, which would form a circular installation. To this day I regret not completing the idea, but financial constraints got in the way and gallery pressure made me sell all three paintings. People still write to me about this painting, and it is on the Internet. Critically, it was incredible—many reviews, photos, etc. I think it was the first time the art establishment took serious notice of me. It was bought for the INGO art collection in Amsterdam in 1980. I was the only non-Dutch artist in the collection, and it is still there hanging in the headquarters.

OS: What is your favorite body of work that you created so far?

GD: There were three or four solo shows in a row: “Straight to Red,t “Light Sweet Crude,” “Shimmer,” and “Thinking Bodies.”

OS: How easily do you part from your works? Are there works that are never for sale?

GD: Very easy to part with works. I ry easy to part with workser for sale I have kept only a couple.

OS: What was your best review to date—which publication, author, which series of work?

GD: Some early reviews are on my website.

OS: Can you list all your reviews and publications and its authors?

GD: Too many! I have been exhibiting for forty years!

OS: Do you have followers or students of your work? How do you work with them? What advice do you give them, and what do you want them to learn from you? Do you have competition?

GD: Yes, quite a few students. I tend to get art students who feel they have dropped through the net and are seeking out someone like me to give them critical, or just fans, supporters, followers. I ollowers.,get art students who feel they have dropped through the net and are seeking out someone li, then I would have to start declining, as everything takes time.

OS: Who visits your studio? Do you open it so people can see how you work, and your work in progress?

GD: Very few people come to my studio, for various reasons. Firstly, it reasons. to my studio, ng, as everything takes time the I donly, it reasons. to my studi for this reason. If I had a large studio, it would be a different matter, but it is small and intimate, and I get worried when they start going through all my work when Ierent matter, b

OS: What inspires you? What inspires you to create your work? What is important for you in your work? Does your mood influence your creating process?

GD: I have no idea what inspires me any more. Twenty years ago this would have been easier to answer.

OS: In my last set of questions to you, I asked you to list your favorite masters, as in artists. Do you like them because they create similar works to yours, or because of some other reasons?

GD: No, I like artists who are a combination of intelligence and humanity. I also quite enjoy being thrown off course—seeing a show of new work, which I thought, wasn which I thought,nga combination of intelligencehasnn which I th Something got under the skin and you return and rediscover them as great works. This happened to me when I saw Richard Princend rediscover them as gr“Nurses” series. I didns.penke them, but then this process happened, and now I would love to own one. They were quite cheap in that exhibition in New York.

OS: Do you still learn? Do you have a teacher?

GD: Every artist worth his or her salt learns everyday.

OS: Do you like experiment with new ideas, new materials?

GD: Yes, all the time; otherwise its, all too predictable. I used to have a fear of becoming an old artist—just treading water, churning out the same stuff because galleries wanted it. So I do try out new ideas—some work, some don, c The key is not to lose heart if they donme—criticism will wound, but rarely harm.

BIOGRAPHY

**Awards and honors  
n**Graham Dean received the Senior Award in Painting at the British School in Rome, also known as the Prix de Rome in 1991. In 2000, specifically for his drawings, he was given the ICCD studio residency in Trivandrum, Kerala, India. In 2003 he received the International Fellowship Award at the Vermont Studio Center in the US.

Other major exhibitions devoted to painting in which Dean was represented included tudio Centes? worried when ion, and  (1980). Not only did Dean produce the best work from his early realist period, he was also featured in critics he was also featured in cto paintin an “itics he was also featured in c piece in the *London Evening Standard*. Dean Evening Standarde Futurecto paintin an which Dean was represented included tudio Centes? worried when ion, and  (1980). Not only did Dean produce the best work from his early realist phe people I admire seem to be cut from similar as subsequently featured in 1996 by Nicola Coleby of the Brighton Museum and Art Gallery, Brighton under the same title.