

Chaos and Perfection

*An interview with watercolourist,
Louise Truslow*

Painting scenes of the vivid markets in Cambodia; along the banks of the Mekong River in Laos; the narrow lanes of Bangkok or the lush fields of up-country Thailand, this artist exudes a dignity and simplicity of life in Southeast Asia. **Suteera Boonlua** and **Ean Lee** talked to **Louise Truslow**.



"Sometimes when I look at the paintings I have done, I get that feeling I wish I'd done that ...," she said in a dreamy sort of way, as if someone else had painted them. Eight years ago, she took up the brush – which she had always wanted to – and now it probably seems unimaginable for her to live her life without it. It was not an accident, but the opportunity was what Louise Truslow would not regret at all. She started watercolour painting with Charlie Satprasat, a Thai artist who had invited her to take part in an exhibition, and ever since then she has been painting and exhibiting her works, almost relentlessly.

We visited Louise's home in a large compound one afternoon, and were enchanted by the house, especially the room out front that she has made her art studio. Surrounded by paintings, tools and art materials, and the bright afternoon light that came through the glassed patio studio, we could easily imagine her spending an inordinate amount of time savouring the pleasures of watercolour painting right here.



Garden in Front of Studio



*From Up High,
Siem Reap*



Javanese Royalty



Gazing Out



Serenity - Wat Jet Yau, Chiang Mai



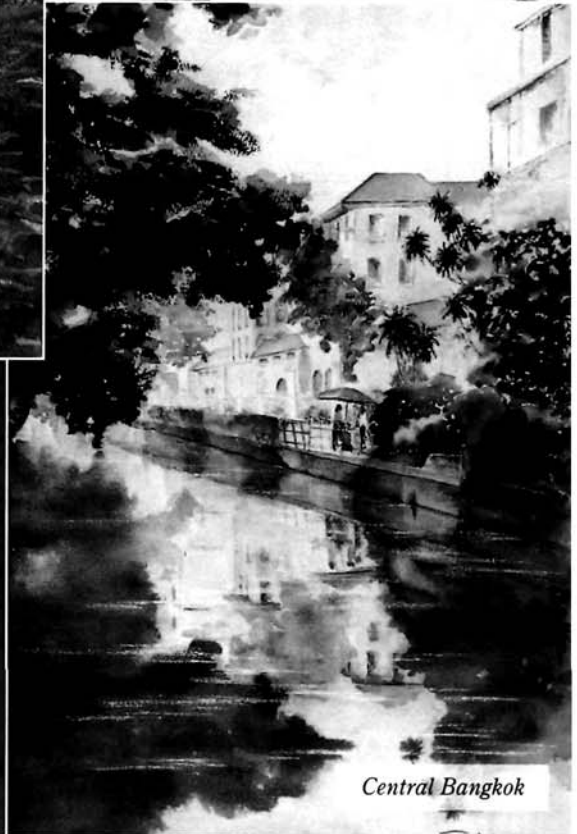
Shafts of Light



Beyond the Horizon



A Paler Shade



Central Bangkok



*The Mae Faek Year -
Scenic Transitions*

Louise herself was no less enchanting, engaging in conversation with us, and expressing an irrepressible enthusiasm about her work. She came to the East as an English teacher, and has been living in Bangkok for more than thirteen years, with her children and husband who works for the Bank of Asia. She also travelled throughout Southeast Asia, pursuing her interests in photography and watercolours, deriving inspiration from her experiences in the region. Exhibiting annually since 1997, her art has been drawing greater attention, and collected by both private and corporate collectors from several countries.

We asked her when her interest in watercolour painting began, and Louise explained that it was fairly recently, "About 8 years ago. I had never painted before. I've always loved and appreciated art, and studied it as an academic subject - history of art." What was the inspiration, the spark? "Oh that, it was something I've always wanted to do. Watercolour appealed to me. I saw an



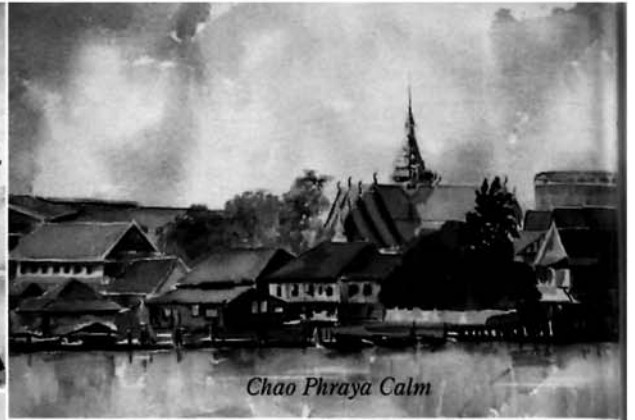
Saffron and Gold



Wending Homewards, Siem Reap



Morning Bath, Chiang Dao



Chao Phraya Calm



Warorot Market, Chiang Mai



Alms Gathering



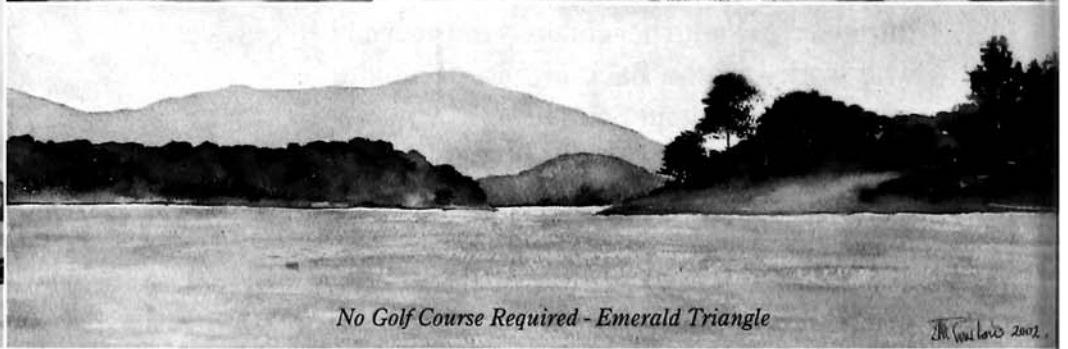
Opportunity



Kite Flying, Sanam Luang



Friends, Ton Le Sap



No Golf Course Required - Emerald Triangle

Ph. Wal Lewis 2802



The Family, Hue



Cornfields, Mae Faek



Soi Kengchuan, Bangkok



Wat Chong Nonsi

Reflections, Ayutthaya



Morning Light, Ubud



Bargain Hunting, Sampeng Lane



Lop Buri Sunflowers



*After the Rain,
Phnom Penh*



The Lake, Mae Hong Son



Who Are You?



Wat Jet Yod, Chiang Mai



Contrasts



Motherhood



The Chedi, Sukhothai



The Boys, Thaton



Ang Nam Ngum, Laos

advertisement for a watercolour course, and I thought, I want to sign up for that! Once I did that, I started and couldn't stop."

What do you love most about watercolour?

The unpredictability of it, the fact that something magical can happen – that's very exciting. I also love the way you can recreate light; and the subtlety. It can be incredibly strong, but at the same time very subtle. Sometimes I look at my paintings and – it sounds stupid – I think, *Ah I wish I could do that.* There's this magical element. Often with watercolour paintings, the artist may look at the completed work, and feel that it is not his/her painting. I think it happens with oil painting as well, but in a different way, the medium is more stable ... you get what you apply whereas with watercolour, it does change more. For me, it is more the inspiration side of it when I view my own work differently. I feel that my painting is a gift working through me; my ability to paint is not something that I created or worked for myself but it was a gift – it was given to me. It may be something from me, but I believe that it is from somewhere else as well.

Where do you draw inspiration for painting?

Images. I'm very strongly affected by images. I feel like I can't paint the images that I find most beautiful, because to represent them is in a way to reduce its beauty. Also, images influence me because before I started painting, photography was my main interest. I carry a camera, take lots of pictures. My paintings are done from the pictures.

Which painter do you admire most?

John Singer Sargent. He does portraits, with both oils and watercolour. I just love his work! The light depicted in his paintings is fantastic!

Are you influenced by a particular artist?

John Yardley, an impressionist whom I know and paint with for a week every summer. He's very well-known in Britain. Singer Sargent is also his favourite artist.

Raised in Leigh-on-Sea near London, with a father who was an architect and along with her mother, who also shares a great interest in art, they spent a lot of time visiting art galleries, and architectural sites when she was young. She studied art history as well as drama, music and dance, with a degree in performance. She said that the patience and practice have helped her to paint better, and she enjoys using watercolours because she likes the uncertainty of the colours, and the way that the colour itself looks different on the paper. Louise also paints beautiful buildings that attract her, exteriors of supermarkets she visits, and now abstract works too.

Louise has a painting style of defined compositional lines but fluid strokes. Her viewpoints - concentrated on rural and urban landscapes until recently - often offer moments into which an observer is invited to linger and contemplate stillness or transitions. She has also depicted monks in their bright orange robes, and produced an exhibition, 'Saffron and Gold'. This was a collection of paintings showing Buddhist

monks in different activities, such as tending to their chores in the temples, in pensive poses, or gathering alms.

Where are you now seeking your impressions and influences.

Beyond your landscape/scenery work, what new directions are you moving in?

What I'm doing now is exploring subjects that are very present to me – picking something out from obscurity – that I may not notice but is very present. Last year I painted these semi-abstract umbrellas, and I explored the ideas of colour, light and shape so it was more to do with abstract concepts. At the moment, my exploration has become more personal. I have this fascination with many things and images I encounter in my daily life which I love to paint, but knowing that I can't do everything, I've become practical, and concentrate only on a number of things. By personal, I also mean I've become more intimate with the subjects, focussing less on themes, and looking at details in microscopic perspectives.

I can see your talent in watercolours, but I'm sure you have other talents, what talent would you most like to have?

Opera singer. I've sung some opera, but it is not something I'll ever be famous for. When I hear an

opera singer sing wonderfully, I have that wow-I-wish-I-could-do-that feeling.

Our host appeared to be an extrovert, who loves company, and who is creative, with an interest in lots of different art, including the theatre – she has directed a large theatrical production in Bangkok – and opera. She admitted to being a very untidy person but when it comes to crisis, deadlines and details she is as meticulous as she is a perfectionist about getting the job done.

Between being untidy and chaotic, and perfectionist and meticulous with details - it seems contradictory, doesn't it? How do you reconcile this?

Yes, yea. I am like that. We are referring to projects, which I would work hard, long hours

on every aspect, good at project management. The other things, my daily life, it's not quite managed this way. I could be difficult to live with when I'm in the middle of a ground project. Meticulous and untidy, that's me. Anybody in my family will verify this fact! [she laughed].



The Sala, Khun Kukrit's House

When do you decide that your painting is done? At what point do you let go of your perfectionist tendencies, and feel comfortable about a painting, to declare: "it's done!"?

It is a really hard thing. When you are a new artist, that's a difficult problem to know when a painting is finished. Yes, you can keep going on and on and on, but with watercolours you don't want to say everything – you want to leave things unsaid. You want to have some mystery, and watercolour lends itself to that because if you over work it, then it's spoiled and you're on dodgy ground. It's difficult to answer; I just know. I get the feeling that it's right, and that means it's finished. I supposed it's partly intuition, and partly experience.

How do you cope with your interests, your children, the family, the household, etc...?

Well, I think I'm very lucky, to have domestic assistants in the household. Their help is crucial. I don't have to be involved in chores that would surely mean no painting time for me. I'm very fortunate in that sense. The children, I usually paint/work when they're at school, when they're not home. My family is the most valued thing in my life.

Do you believe in reincarnation?

No, I'm a Roman Catholic but if I could be reborn, I would like to come back as a cat. I have a deep passion for my five cats and a dog.

Any influence from Buddhism?

I am very much attached to this world, and Buddhism is interesting to me in its persuasion on becoming detached to worldly material. I have experienced that sense of

detachment, and how it can help to instil peace in our lives, monuments from those hectic and chaotic times.

Favourite way to 'waste' time?

I love walking in the countryside. Whenever



Peace, Siem Reap

I'm in the north – I have a house up in Chiang Mai – to take breaks, I spend a lot of time walking in the natural setting.

Any vice or indulgence?

Being late, I can be half an hour away from somewhere, it's two minutes before I'm meant to be there, and I can still have this idea in my head that I'm not late yet. But my projects, I've never been late on deadlines! Another vice, I talk too much. I love to talk.

That's a good thing ...

Well, sometimes.