

# THE ART WORLD PRACTICAL

NEWS, INFORMATION AND ONLINE EVENTS IN THE ART WORLD

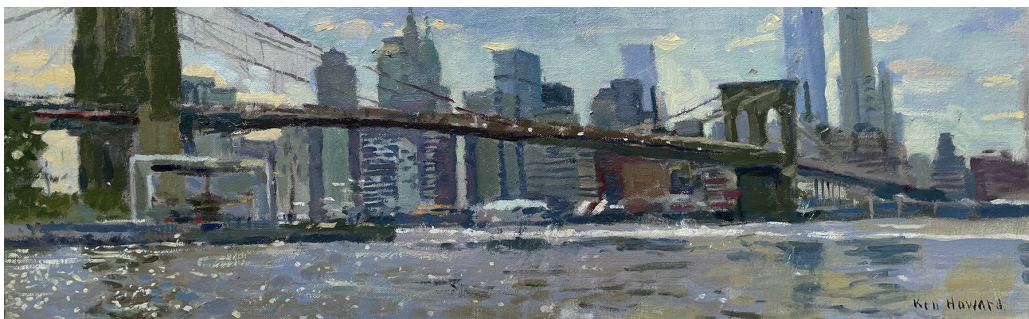


## Professor Ken Howard

OBE RA Hon RBA PPNEAC ROI RWA  
1932 – 2022

We were deeply saddened to hear of the passing of Ken Howard OBE RA on September 11, just a few days after the death of Her Majesty The Queen. Ken was one of our greatest figurative artists. He was incredibly approachable, kind and generous in his support of artists, as well as me personally in my role as editor of *The Artist*, over many decades. I was privileged to have spent so much time in Ken's company, in his London studio, talking to him about his life and work for the book about him, published by David & Charles. He was an inspiration to legions of artists, including fellow consultant editor Haidee-Jo Summers, whose tribute to Ken we are pleased to share with readers here (pages 10–12). Like so many others, I will miss Ken always, although his legacy will live on through his wonderful drawings and paintings, just three of which we publish here to accompany Haidee-Jo's tribute, and which I'm honoured to own and enjoy as a constant and happy reminder of the man and his work. Thank you Ken for everything. You will be sorely missed.

*Sally Bulgin, editor*



*Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridge, 2014, oil, 8×24in (20×61cm)*

*'Painting is no different from playing the piano, you've got to practise every day.'*



*Low Water, Mousehole, 2008, oil, 8×1in (20×25.5cm)*

## A tribute to Ken Howard by Haidee-Jo Summers

In the same week that we mourned the loss of the Queen news came of an enormous loss to the world of modern British and figurative art, the passing of Ken Howard OBE RA. It is hard to put into just a few words the impact this great artist made on so many of us painters today, or to touch on the immense legacy he leaves behind. He was so greatly loved and respected and will be much missed. I've been asked to write this personal tribute to the master, who in his own words lived 'a life that has been driven by the need to paint.'

### Early years

Ken Howard was born in London on December 26, 1932. He lived in Cricklewood and went to Kilburn Grammar School. He loved London and often said that London made him a painter, the railway sidings of industrial north London being his first major subject. After grammar school he studied at Hornsey School of Art. While there he was advised by a tutor that in order to be successful as an artist he should study at the Royal College of Art and become a Royal Academician, both of which he set out to do. At art school he became influenced by paintings that depicted social realism – the Kitchen Sink school was prevalent at the time with artists John Bratby, Edward Middleditch, Derrick Greaves and Jack Smith making a strong impact on the young student. He could clearly see from a young age what his way of painting was

going to encompass and was singularly committed to his ideals. 'I was beginning to realise already that there was a way of seeing. It wasn't necessarily concerned with wanting to put things on walls. It was a way of communicating with yourself via the visual world around you. This way of seeing, and expressing in paint, must be the key attached to everything that I was going to do.'

After two years of National Service with the Royal Marines at Lympstone in Devon, Ken took his place at the Royal College of Art from 1955 to 1958. His first solo show was at Plymouth Art Centre in 1955, consisting mainly of portraits of fellow marines. The exhibition was a big success, gaining him portrait commissions and national press coverage. Unfortunately this singled him out rather when he started his studies at the Royal College, so some members of staff felt that he needed cutting down to size. Things improved as time went on and he had a lot of help from tutors such as Carel Weight. While in his final year at the RCA he won a British Council Scholarship to Florence and spent a year there from 1958 to 1959. During that time he painted the vineyards and Florentine landscape, learned to cook a proper spaghetti bolognese and met Christa Gaa, the girl who would eventually become his second wife in 1990.

On his return to London Ken began teaching in art schools across London and exhibiting with the New English Art

Club, becoming a member in 1962. He was elected a member of the Royal Institute of Oil Painters in 1966 after winning first prize in the Lord Mayor's Art Award. Ken took his role within these societies seriously. No matter how busy he became he continued to support the groups, by putting his work in their exhibitions, with his presence at private views and taking part in events and elections of new members. Much later, in 1998, he went on to become the president of the New English Art Club. Meanwhile in his personal life he married dress design student Annie Popham in 1962. The marriage was dissolved in 1974 but the two remained friends, and Annie went on to become the director of a large fashion house.

### Working life

During his teaching years he took on notable commissions, including making ink drawings to illustrate telephone directories from places as far afield as Devon and the Lake District. He was also showing work with the exhibiting societies already mentioned plus the Royal Academy, and dealers including Wildenstein and the John Whidbey gallery. From 1971 he was represented by the New Grafton Gallery, London for over two decades, holding 15 solo exhibitions there, and in 1972 Ken was given a retrospective exhibition at the Plymouth City Art Gallery. That same year he was commissioned by the doctors at Charing Cross hospital to produce a series of 14 pen and wash drawings reflecting the life and architecture of the hospital.

In 1973 Ken was invited by the Imperial War Museum to be an official war artist in Northern Ireland. He was the first war artist since the Second World War had ended and he felt very privileged to be asked, joining the ranks of other notable war artists such as Stanley Spencer, Graham Sutherland and Henry Moore. For the next decade, alongside his own paintings, he worked on and off with the British Army in Germany, Cyprus, Oman, Hong Kong, Nepal, Norway, Canada, Belize and Brunei. One of his major paintings from his time in Northern Ireland, *Ulster Crucifixion* won a prize in 1978 at the John Moores exhibition, Liverpool and now hangs in the Ulster Museum in Belfast.

Ken's elections to societies of note continued, with membership of the Royal Society of Painters in Water Colours granted in 1979, the Royal West of England Academy in 1981, and becoming an honorary member of the Royal Society of British Artists in 1988. In 1983 he was elected an associate

*'When I feel I am getting to grips with this sort of subject I begin to believe I really am a painter. Unfortunately, most of the time I feel convinced that I have failed, but just having that good feeling every now and again gives me the strength to go on during the bad days.'*

*'To truly express the truth of a subject one must know it intimately and it is only familiarity which produces this quality'*

of the Royal Academy, becoming a full Royal Academician in 1991. In the 1980s Christa joined Ken in London. She was also a talented artist and they lived and worked together happily with a wide circle of friends, marrying in 1990. The art market was buoyant during that decade, and they divided their time between Cornwall and London. It was a golden era for Ken, but tragically Christa died of cancer in 1992.

### Painting the light

As the early industrial railway paintings, ink drawings and military portraits gradually evolved into glorious light-filled scenes Ken found his favourite painting themes, which he expanded on throughout his life, returning again and again to Cornwall harbour and beach scenes, models in the wider setting of his impressive studios and paintings of London and Venice. He also painted many self-portraits, one of the earliest as a 16-year-old is now in the Royal Academy collection.

Ken believed that painting was about three things: communication, revelation and celebration. By revelation, he meant that it is the artist's role to open people's eyes, revealing the world around them in a way they may never have seen otherwise. As for communication, Ken felt that an artist should have a recognisable style or language, firmly believing that drawing from life is the basis of all visual language. Finally, celebration, because Ken felt that art should uplift people and release them from the suffering in life, which everyone knows. Ken's particular vehicle for this mode of celebration was painting the light.

'I was painting on Neasden sidings one morning before going to art school and as I sat there a railwayman was going along to his shed to pick up his train back to Birmingham. He stopped and watched me paint. After about five minutes he leaned over and said, "Sonny, I've walked across this railway yard for 30 years, and for the first time this morning I can see that it is beautiful."

In 1988 Ken was working in the Campo Sant'Angelo in Venice when a young woman in a purple tracksuit sat down by the fountain to eat a sandwich and feed the pigeons. Ken added the figure to his watercolour painting and the two had a conversation afterwards whereby Dora asked about buying the painting and Ken explained he was a Royal Academician back in London and his work fetched rather higher prices than she might have expected. Little did he know then that he would meet

Dora again and that in the year 2000 she would become his third wife.

### Every artist needs a Dora

Between 2002 and 2017, Ken was represented by Richard Green in London, and held solo shows at his gallery almost annually. He continued to exhibit regularly in the society shows at the Mall Galleries and held an exhibition of Swiss landscapes at the Royal Academy in 2016. Dora has

been a godsend in the last decades of Ken's life, tirelessly taking care of him and their London, Venice and Cornwall studios in her role as wife, model, driver, cook, studio assistant, gardener, and generous hostess with love and good grace and humour. Ken was once approached to write a few words for a magazine article about 'what the artist needs'. He asked what the last artist to be asked had said and the answer had been 'Naples yellow'. Without hesitation Ken said 'I know what every artist needs. Every artist needs a Dora'. Ken was justly awarded an OBE for his services to art in 2010.

### Ken's legacy

It would be impossible to put into just a few pages the far-reaching impact Ken Howard has had on so many artists working today. The same cohort as esteemed artists Bernard Dunstan, Fred Cuming and Diana Armfield, his legacy will live on, inspiring generations to come. When I was a young art student an older artist at Nottingham Society of Artists said to me, 'I think you'll like this' and handed me the Michael Spender book about Ken Howard which had just been published. When I saw those studio paintings with the light glowing through parasols and the silvery dried honesty leaves, I was in complete awe, and Ken Howard has remained my major artistic inspiration ever since. I never dreamed he would ever know who I was, but many years later he took a keen interest in my work and I discovered for myself what a kind, generous and modest man he was, despite his great status in the art world. They always say you shouldn't meet your heroes but I'm so very glad I did. Once Ken said to me, 'I'm going to have to stop giving you all these prizes!'. I think that was after he'd chosen my painting for *The Artist* magazine purchase award at Patchings in 2014 and had also been a judge of the Buxton Spa prize which I also won that year. In the years to follow Ken continued to support me by connecting me with the Russell Gallery in Putney, attending my private views and even buying my paintings. It really meant the world to me and always will, and I am just one of so many whose lives have been touched by the great man, the master of light, Ken Howard. We thank you for everything.



*Light Effects VI, Calle Larga Galliana, Venice, 2009, oil, 24×8in (61×20cm)*

*'London is my wife, and Venice is my mistress'*

## TRIBUTE TO KEN HOWARD OBE, RA



David Curtis, Haidee-Jo Summers and Ken Howard

### Some words about Ken

*'With all his status and profile, Ken remained accessible and supportive of all painters, be they well established or those emerging talents. He was especially drawn to individuals who he advocated as "proper painters" – often those who explore their visual journey en plein air as he did throughout his long painting life. I recall fun times over lunch at the Patchings Festival where we exchanged anecdotes, mostly his, of past times and painting experiences. This would include a succession of jokes and no one could convey and deliver a joke better than Ken!'*

**David Curtis ROI RSMA**

*'Ken wasted not one minute. He was organised, he was focused, yet he was generous with his time. He was a great raconteur and he could charm anyone.'*

*'We had loads of funny stories about his life usually involving one liners like. "Well you must have sold a lot of chickens!" But the most extraordinary of all was the one about the umber mine. If you don't know it, I'll tell you one day but you will not believe me.'*

*'He was more than just the tonal painter he referred to himself as. He understood colour, he could draw, he was brilliant and we all (those of us that paint this way) paint in his shadow. We will be swept along in his wake for years. Whenever I walk past Tate Modern, Britain's most visited free tourist attraction in 2020, I remember him grabbing my arm after a private view at Bankside Gallery and whispering in my ear, "You know, I have never been in there!"'*

**Peter Brown PNEAC PS Hon RBA ROI RP**

*'Ken Howard was one of the first figurative painters that I became aware of as a fledgling artist. His work set the standard for many an aspiring painter. He has been an inspiration, mentor and good friend to so many. His contre-jour studio set-ups and beautifully economical landscapes will be sorely missed at the ROI. We are lucky to have had such an important and generous painter amongst our ranks.'*

**Tim Benson PROI NEAC RP**

*'Ken Howard to me represented a bundle of encouragement. He always had a kind uplifting word to offer about helping me with my professional practice. He paved the way for many representational artists and, personally, made me feel special by awarding me three separate prizes when he was judge and agreeing to write the foreword for my second book, which I cherish even more now that he has gone. I'm going to miss him so dearly, but I can only do what he loved so much, paint and draw from life every day!'*

**Adebanji Alade VPROI**

*'Ken Howard was instrumental in the opportunities he gave me to exhibit and survive as an artist. I met him while a student at the Royal Academy of Art and painted with him in the Academy life room. He introduced me to Manya Igel, an art dealer, and also encouraged me to enter the NEAC shows at the Mall Galleries and become a member. I will always remember him fondly. I made two documentaries about him and his work and even accompanied him when he received his OBE at Buckingham Palace. A positive generous man who wanted to help other artists. I will sorely miss him.'*

**Neale Worley RP NEAC**

*'It was a great pleasure to represent Ken over 14 years. Not only was he a brilliant artist, but he was a warm, witty and generous man, whose company all at the Richard Green Gallery enjoyed.'*

**Richard Green, chairman Richard Green Gallery**

*'I'd been an illustrator for a number of years when I came across one of Ken's paintings at the Royal Academy of bathers on Sennen beach, Cornwall. I just knew I had to be a painter from that moment on, and remember it like it was yesterday.'*

**Peter Wileman FROI RSMA FRSA**

*'I had the privilege of working almost every year with Ken from 1994 until 2018. We hit it off straight away and shared a mutual trust*

*in each other and love of life. He trusted me in sending him off to far-flung places to paint with The Artist readers including The Yemen, India, Cuba, Morocco, and most European countries, and I knew that whoever travelled with Ken would be inspired and in awe of him. Ken was a rare individual who enriched many peoples' lives, mine included. From the bottom of my heart, thank you Ken.'*

**Liz Drake, Spencer Scott Travel**

*'Ken gave kind and generous support to Patchings Art Centre over many years. This included guest appearances at the festival and a willingness to take part in important exhibitions at Patchings, making such occasions very special indeed. To have the Professor of Perspective (once Turner's role) and senior member of the Royal Academy take part in exhibitions at Patchings is a clear indication of his generosity and eagerness to encourage our work.'*

*'Ken will be a sad and great loss to the art world, especially for the way he would help and support – as well, of course, as the creator of some wonderful art. During an unplanned meeting on the Accademia Bridge in Venice a few years ago now – a place where he could often be seen – his gushing and warm response, remembering without a moment's hesitation that we were from Patchings, made us feel very special. Such was the nature of the man.'*

**Chas Wood, Patchings Art Centre**

### Selected collections that hold Ken Howard's work

Guildhall Art Gallery  
Hove Museum and Art Gallery  
Imperial War Museum  
National Army Museum  
Plymouth City Art Centre  
Sheffield Art Gallery  
Southern Museum and Art Gallery  
Ulster Museum

#### BOOKS

Ken Howard's autobiography *Light and Dark* 2011  
Michael Spender *The Paintings of Ken Howard* 1992  
Ken Howard and Sally Bulgin *Inspired by Light* 1998  
Ken Howard Royal Academy Masterclass *A vision of Venice in Watercolour* 2002  
Ken Howard and Jürg Gabathuler *Ken Howard's Switzerland, in the Footsteps of Turner* 2013

#### Documentaries/DVDs

*Inspired by Light: Painting in Oils; A Vision of Venice in Watercolour; A Vision of Venice in Oils; and Variations on a Theme* by APV films  
[www.apvfilms.com](http://www.apvfilms.com)

*The Way I See It; Painting Varanasi; and It's a Rum Business* by Neale Worley and Dave Austin  
[www.nealeworley.com](http://www.nealeworley.com)

Ken's Masterclass from the February 2016 issue of *The Artist*, featuring paintings of his two favourite cities, London and Venice, is available to view at PaintersOnline now. Visit <https://bit.ly/3xHXSdT>