

Freelance Artist – Sculptor, Ceramicist, Designer



### Bob Stafford - Wilbarston

I still have them. Or rather my mother kept them and finally I inherited the big folder full when she departed for God's studio.

Drawing and painting pictures was just what everyone did at home, wasn't it? My mother always had a pad of cartridge paper, a paint box of worn down watercolours and a jam jar of blushing coloured water. Or she had an easel, a canvas, with a box of squeezed tubes of oils, little bottles of linseed and turps; the smell combined and speaks to



me of my mum. A trip on the bus into Leicester city was never complete without a visit to Gadsby's Art shop. We would browse for hours the works of art and at the tools of the trade, and come away with a tube of burnt umber, yellow ochre and a large flake white. Sometimes a sable brush or two, 000 – fine. You name a medium my mum made pictures with it; pencils, pens, pastels and crayons, charcoal, chalk to acrylics and silk threads. You read right – silk thread. She embroidered pictures with needle and threads of silk that mixed the myriad colours, sown into canvas. Needle and thread portrayed a Georgian market, a glorious Native American chief in his war bonnet, a portrait of prince Charles in his regal investiture regalia, (A picture which resides in the Leicester museum along with the work of Mary Linford, a once famous Leicester embroider. (There was once a school named after her). My mum was an artist to the end, when she drew her last breath.

As an infant, I knew no better. It was a growing up environment where the tools to express yourself were always there. The evidence was treasured and kept, of course. I still have them.

3D? A scrap of pastry was given to the infant me to make snakes and snails. Until - Plasticine for



Christmas. Pristine strips of colour clay that gradually homogenised as I worked them into spectral snakes and snails. Then earth clay, in balls in the junior school. It was an exciting day when we were given a board with a lump of wet white clay on it, and wood tools. I didn't know it then; it was later, I realise that I learnt one of the most important lessons of my teaching career. –

*Never poke the eyes of someones elses duck.*

I made a clay duck. I was keen on natural history. By looking at the pictures only, I could name all the birds in the two editions of Ladybird British Birds - country side and garden editions - and their eggs. So my mallard duck was going to be in a natural pose. That is sleeping, with its bill tucked resting on its back. My teacher was impressed with my finished duck; but with the pointed end of a pencil he punched a hole in each side of its head saying "That's where the eyes go, you haven't put them in." Sixty years on, not forgot! IT WAS ADUCK, ASLEEP! Eyes closed. Beside, eyes are not holes. I knew that as a naturalist. My lesson learnt. Thirty-five years teaching, I have never poked the eyes of someone else's duck. They know what they want to express, communicate with their ducks. I have taught, coached and shown and advised but not poked!



I still have it. (My mum kept it of course)

But mainly I was a two dimensional child. I drew and painted.

Mr Veezy (Bearded Art teacher in sandals who smoked in the art cupboard), discovered my artistic talents and encouraged dreams of a career in art. When I reached secondary-modern school (having failed the 11+) I shined in the only subject on the curriculum I could make sense of. My French teacher allowed me to miss French to do extra art with the words, "Can you find something more useful to do Stafford, than turn up to my lessons?" I didn't need that repeating. I certainly could.

I stayed on an extra year to then- 16, to take Art O level with Mr Veezy's encouragement. My form tutor said "You staying on? It's a waste of pupil money." (Years later I went back and showed him my Bachelor of Education Degree from Leicester University and a few digits).

It took years of night school to gain a place at Teacher Training College. Five Os and an A in art later, I got in to TTC on the strength of my drawing and painting portfolio. The first year was a foundation year of textiles, painting, sculpture and ceramics. At the feedback consultation my tutors said that I should forget the painting and drawing and select Sculpture and ceramics as my main subjects.

After graduating with a distinction, I was described as "An up and coming young artist." by a critic after my degree exhibition, was taken and sold in a Tunbridge Wells gallery.

I've put a 35 year teaching career between then and now.

I studied Art Craft and Drama at teacher training and became a primary school teacher. I loved teaching – they loved art, craft and drama. Couldn't be better!

After 20 years, I changed course and left my deputy-headship in a primary school for Special Needs School and working with children with Autism – eventually becoming an Educational consultant for children in mainstream school who have problems associated with Autism.

Fifteen years later in 2012 THEY made me and 130 others advisory staff redundant. Slammed the door in our face and opened the door to my new career at 65.

So now, having finished earning a living, buying a home and raising a family, I have a studio and a new occupation. Which means, I now have the time to indulge my imagination and the time to teach people the joys of being creative and developing their skills- a rewarding endeavour.

I describe myself as an up and coming mature artist, whose endeavours were put on hold by a wonderful domestic interlude.

*In my work I enjoy expressing myself in shape and forms and commenting on the human condition through art; but I also have great fun using fantastical ideas. I love to, at present, create effigies of creatures, beings & forms from a freed imagination.*



*I can realise limitless machinations of humans and creatures, just as we have done from the time we became sentient. Think of the cave paintings, the stonemasons who left their "imaginings" made solid, on our churches and old buildings.*



*I believe that artistic expression is the ultimate physical communication which can be compelling, joyful, therapeutic and enriching; that it should be encouraged in all ages as a vital part of all our lives”.*

I believe that all artistic, creative endeavours in all its aspects are what make our species special. The human race gets great joy and meaning from expressing itself in many ways.

- We can do this through
- movement-acting, dance and sport
- Through our senses - words- stories and poems, both spoken and written;
- Sounds - music, from voice and instrument
- Mark-making - pictures and designs in shapes and colour; and sculptural and architectural forms, using and exploring the attributes of materials.

At present, I’m having fun from fantasy, exploring our ability to be godlike, creating effigies of creatures and beings from my own imagination. It is great fun imaging fantastic creatures just as the stone masons did on our churches, old buildings and ships and as story tellers did in myths and legends.

I get my enjoyment from the **process** of making and expressing as well as the finished product. Until now my medium of choice has been clay. (a finely-grained natural rock or soil material that combines one or more **clay** minerals with traces of metal oxides and organic matter.)

Clay is wonderful material but can’t cope well with large long thin parts. It shrinks in the kiln and can’t cope with supporting armatures left in place. For large work, until now, we have had to use difficult materials such as fibre glass and resins.

Pal Tiya Premium is a new material, exciting in its ability to do things clay and finds difficult/impossible. This opens up possibilities for new configurations to explore. I am so excited by the prospects of making stirring stuff!

I believe creativity and imagination is a part of our nature and that it should be encouraged in children to be part of their lives; not examined and judged by “current experts” who quantify and qualify – this is what deters expressions of imagination and creativity, not fosters it. –

- Hope you enjoy my work and feel like having ago.”