

PRESS RELEASE

UNIVERSITY
gallery
NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

30 November – 8 February 2013

[Closed from Sunday 23 December to 2 January 2013]

CORNISH IN PARIS Watercolours and Drawings

In 1966, a month after he had left his job as a miner to become a professional artist, Norman Cornish was invited by Tyne Tees Television to make a documentary about his impressions of Paris. During the week that he was there, the film crew recorded Norman as he made numerous drawings and sketches of the people and places that he visited while talking to camera about his impressions of life and art in Paris. In this small but compelling collection of watercolours and drawings, Cornish is shown at his best depicting individual characters, busy street scenes, café bars and restaurants.



“Paris”, Norman wrote “is a great encrustation of decoration which reminds me a little of sugar icing. It is an immensely gay city. Like all cities it is impossible to describe in its entirety, one can but give quick impressions. The statues (unlike most in London) are not standing with stiff upper lip to attention but seem to be relaxed or adopting poetic or interesting attitudes... At (the restaurant) Le Grenier, it is impossible to describe. Try to imagine Lautrec, Degas, Monet, Utrillo and then try to imagine all of their paintings come to life and you find yourself lost in the middle of this humanity with its special flavour.”



Born in Spennymoor, County Durham in 1918, Norman Cornish is widely regarded as one of the most important artists to have emerged from the region in the post-war years. He won his first drawing prize at the age of four and began his working life as a miner at the age of fourteen. Soon afterwards, having enrolled at the Spennymoor Sketching Club he embarked on the subject that was to preoccupy him for the rest of his professional career, his “narrow world” as the novelist Sid Chaplin described it.

This “narrow world” was one where below ground at the Dean and Chapter Colliery, the shapes of the miners echoed the “musculature” of the pit, while above ground he recorded “pigeon crees and allotments, pit rows and pubs, fish and chip vans and market stalls” and “off-shift miners squatting on their hunkers and soaking in the sunshine and the good crack.”

Like Sid Chaplin, he flourished in the stimulating environment of the Spennymoor Settlement, that enlightened educational and cultural project of the late 1930's, that enabled a rich broadening of his artistic horizons. Amongst his subsequent enthusiasms and influences was the work of Van Gogh and not surprisingly, his work too, has an underlying reverential spirit. Amongst his images, telegraph poles resemble crucifixes and pit gantries Calvary, while his studies of his wife Sarah knitting, gave her, as he put it, “a sense of sanctity.”

By the age of forty seven, after thirty three years working in the pit, he took the great risk of living by his painting. That it has been successful is irrefutable. He has been the subject of several television films, had countless exhibitions nationally, received and carried out numerous commissions, (notably the County Hall, Durham mural of the Miners' Gala), received Honorary Degrees from the Universities of Newcastle, Sunderland and Northumbria, and at ninety-three (18 November 2012), is the sole distinguished survivor of the Spennymoor Settlement.



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Cornish in Paris

University Gallery & Baring Wing
Northumbria University
Sandyford Road
Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 8ST

Monday to Thursday 10am – 5pm
Friday and Saturday 10am – 4pm

Closed from Sunday 23 December – 2 January 2013

Admission Free

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Captions: ©University Gallery on behalf of Norman Cornish

- NC514 Woman on Paris Street, Watercolour and ink, 49.9 x 35.4cm
- NC648 Old Lady Shopping in Montmartre, Watercolour and ink on paper, 35 x 25cm
- NC649 Old Lady Shopping in Paris, Watercolour and ink on paper, 35 x 25cm
- NC645 Study of Nun in Paris, Watercolour and ink on paper, 35 x 25cm
- NC647 Two old Ladies, Watercolour and ink on paper, 35 x 25cm
- NC646 Old lady dining in café at the foot of Sacré Coeur, Watercolour and ink on paper, 38 x 25cm