

My first question to artist and ROAR member Chris Slater is about his childhood; he paints a vivid picture of his younger self running around Rotherham with his mum's dustbin lid painted like a shield, inspired by Marvel comics, not DC, he assures me.

Nowadays you will see Chris not with a shield, but rather a paintbrush, canvas and easel, sitting outside capturing what he sees.

Hailing from a big family — he is one of nine — Chris was originally influenced by his father, a painter, decorator and sign writer who sometimes brought his work home; Chris would see him working on sign writing on the kitchen table and was intrigued by the French chalk, lines and lettering.

He tells me it was a teacher at college who first realised his potential and asked if he wanted to do a BA at what was then Granville College in Sheffield. This was his first real plunge into the art world and he said: "I was experimenting with different media, sculpture, photography and life drawing."

Art went on the back burner when he met his first wife and during the subsequent years raising a family, as he took up employment at the local steelworks here in Rotherham, later working as a self-employed window cleaner.



Perseverance over experimentation for plein air artist

Rotherham Open Arts Renaissance's marketing and communications assistant **AMY FORDE** spoke to artist and ROAR member Chris Slater to find out what inspires this man of steel.

However it is clear that throughout his life there has been an underlying need to create, from doing little drawings at the steelworks, capturing the figures labouring around him, to fitting art around his busy lifestyle. His diligent character shines through: "I worked 12-hour shifts, five or six days a week. But I still used to go home and try and do some artistic work for an hour."

Chris now operates as a plein air artist. He explains that it was seeing an exhibition of Modern Impressionist painters in Doncaster which really sparked his desire to work on observational paintings: "I rushed out and bought all the painting gear, it was a big Christmas present for myself and I have been painting outside ever since."

Now retired and opting to do what he always wanted — "to paint every day — Chris's work takes him across the world: Venice, London, Paris, Florence, Spain, Greece, the USA, the list goes on.

He enjoys the interaction of painting outdoors and tells me some of his favourite places to paint are right here near his hometown, including Wentworth, Elsecar and Sheffield. His approach to painting outside is quite unique: "I never know where I am going when I set off. It's always best to not have an idea because if you have an idea and you go, you're always disappointed. One of my favourite mottos is 'Get up, get out, walk around.' That's how you see things."

Chris is no stranger to exhibiting his work, which he has had on show extensively, including with the Royal Institute of Painters at the Mall Galleries in London and with the Royal Society of Marine Artists.

Through exhibiting his work, Chris has met many other artists with the same passion, unofficially forming The Northern Boys, a band of artists stretching across northern England, who meet up once or twice a year to paint together.

He has also become a well-known and regular member of ROAR. Initially renting a studio with the organisation, he describes how ROAR has been "a godsend".

He elaborates: "They have created an environment for all art forms to get together. You get introduced to new art forms, new ideas and new artists, which is great."

Chris is a regular at ROAR's Life Drawing class every Thursday, something he believes has been highly beneficial to his practice.

I ask him if he has any other tips for artists starting out and he advises: "Don't treat things as too precious, it's just a moment which you are trying to capture and if it doesn't work there is always another moment."

Laughing away, he adds: "Just throw the paint on and hope for the best, that's my approach."

He also believes that becoming a master of your craft takes perseverance: "I am not against experimentation, but to really get good at one thing you have really got to concentrate on one thing."

And he adds: "Always remember that at some point in life it's very important to do what you want to do. So make time. I know it's easier said than done, but if you're serious about it, put the time in and your work will improve."

Art lovers can keep up with Chris's work on his Facebook page and his Instagram feed @chrisslaterartist



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