



Life and the Seasons Through Art

Words and Illustrations by EMMA COXON.

Five years ago, as I approached my forties, I went from city to country living, moving in with my husband into a thatched cottage in the Wiltshire countryside. Having lived in cities throughout my twenties and thirties, I was concerned that I wouldn't enjoy the quieter, slower pace of life after the hustle and bustle I'd experienced before. I worried that I'd miss the art galleries, museums, restaurants, bars, independent cinemas, the café culture and all-round inspiring hum of the city.

Not knowing many people in my new village, I decided to investigate how I could get involved in the community and meet people, and I signed up as a volunteer at the local community art gallery. It was run by locals and featured a whole host of artists from in and around the area. I'd always loved art, having studied it at school, so this was perfect for me. I could give something back, whilst getting to know people in the area including the other volunteers and customers. I even took part in a competition for professional and amateur artists to show their work, and my first piece of art was sold. It helped me during a time when I felt a little lost, after such a big transition to a new life.

One day whilst working at the gallery, I met Jane. A retired art teacher, she ran art classes in the next village, a serendipitous opportunity that I didn't want to pass up. I found out more, and soon joined the class. I was fascinated and inspired by Jane's background; both her mother and grandmother had been artists. Jane's grandmother was taught by Italian portrait and fresco painter, Pietro Annigoni, best known for his portraits of Queen Elizabeth II.

Two and a half hours every Tuesday morning were spent in her company. There were some days when work seemed too busy for me to attend, but as the weeks went on, I guarded this time as my own, realising how important it was for my well-being. I'd always leave the class with a sense of achievement and that warm glow of connection.

There were just three other students - Julie, Rosemary and Caroline - women of varying ages, with different personalities and artistic abilities, but all keen to learn to draw and paint. Jane would often bring something in from her garden to study in the class, through watercolour, sketching or however else we wanted to capture it. Often the focus was on using nature to inspire our creativity, both landscapes and more detailed work. Jane would teach us different techniques, and we would either use photographs or real life to work from.

My passion is for drawing nature in detail; a flower, a fir cone, a fruit, bark, petals, grasses, stems – I see such beauty in the intricate details. It's taught me so much about the seasons, which plants and flowers are in bloom at different times of the year. I also appreciate how glorious those plants that have died off for the season are; dried honesty and alliums being among my favourites.

In summer, we'd take our materials, chairs and flasks of tea and find a spot in the middle of a beautiful vista of countryside. Drawing outside is such a wonderful experience, with the sky and light constantly changing. It provided us with a chance to develop our skills, enjoy the peace and quiet and connect more closely with nature. The sound of wind rustling through the trees, birds passing overhead, all so therapeutic whilst taking in the views and glory of the Wiltshire countryside. I felt lucky to be spending this time away from my laptop and phone, and to switch off from work for a while.

Each week, no matter the season, we discuss so much about life over coffee and our drawing pads, and there's much laughter along the way. Love, loss, relationships, family,

friends, career, village life, there's not much we haven't spoken about. We support and encourage each other, and through the group there is a continuous growth, a spark (of ideas) and development in the art we produce.

In the colder seasons there is a fire on in the room we work in, which provides a particularly cosy feel. Some days the rain is pelting down outside, and the wind howling, but there is always a glow inside, with our chatter, cups of tea and biscuits shared.

I now take my seven-month old daughter to class with me every week, and she has been lovingly embraced by the group which leaves me filled with such gratitude for these women, this small community, who have become my friends. When she was born there were clothes knitted, presents lovingly given and items handed down. She has become part of this group, and I hope she remembers something of these hours spent surrounded by strong, inspiring and creative women, the laughter and the warmth.

When I drive to class each week, through picturesque countryside, I feel utterly grateful for being a 'country girl' now and wouldn't change it for the world. Nature, community, friendship and my creativity have become what connects me to myself, to others and are imperative to keeping my feet on the ground, when life gets challenging.

It has taught me to appreciate the ordinary moments in our everyday lives. Life isn't always stimulating or about being busy, visiting cafés, bars and restaurants, as it was living in a city. The quiet I used to be apprehensive about can now feel like a tonic, a chance to re-connect with myself, those around me, as well as nature and the seasons. I'm grateful for this chance to slow down and see what magic lies in the small things.

Emma Coxon is a blogger (Little Piece of Wonder) and is passionate about sharing ideas around living a more creative and connected life. She explores the wonder of nature and magic that comes from slowing down. Emma is also a writer for Psychologies magazine. She lives in the Wiltshire countryside with her husband and daughter

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