

# SAIL AWAY

FROM PAINTING THE QUEEN TO BEING GIVEN ACCESS TO ALL AREAS AT HIGHGROVE, BROADWAY ARTIST JEREMY HOUGHTON IS NEVER TOO FAR FROM CAPTURING THE RICH AND FAMOUS. HE TELLS JONATHAN WHILEY WHY HE HOPES HIS NEXT PROJECT – PAINTING SIR BEN AINSLIE AS HE BIDS TO MAKE SPORTING HISTORY – WILL BE JUST AS PLAIN SAILING

**W**HEN artist Jeremy Houghton looks back at his CV he does what anyone would do – he shakes his head in disbelief. The résumé for this contemporary visual artist, who lives in Broadway, is staggeringly impressive.

London Fashion Week, Highgrove, Goodwood, Windsor Castle, the 2012 Olympics and even the Queen have all been made the subjects of his work following official commissions from A-list clients and the royal household.

“You could crumble under the pressure of the moment if you think too much about where you are and what you’re doing,” says Jeremy who lives in a picturesque Cotswold stone cottage with wife Jess and young daughters Honeysuckle and Martha.

“I look back at my CV now and the things I’ve done in the past 10 years and sometimes I shake my head.

“If someone has said to me 10 years ago ‘this is what you will have done in the next decade’ I’d have said ‘don’t be so stupid. That’s

impossible’. I’ve had some great jobs and I hope they don’t dry up and there’s some more opportunities.”

They’re not about to dry up any time soon with Jeremy recently announced as the official artist-in-residence of Land Rover Ben Ainslie Racing which will see him charting Sir Ben and his team’s bid to make sailing history by bringing the America’s Cup, the sport’s most prestigious trophy, back to British hands for the first time since the race started in 1851.

Given his catalogue of work – which favours themes of space, light, movement and time – it was, I imagine, an easy fit.

“I did a lot of work around the 2012 Olympics and spent time in Weymouth where the sailing events were held – the light, the spray, the movement and the speed mean the artistic possibilities of sailing are endless,” he says.

“When I heard Ben Ainslie was putting together a team for the America’s Cup it was very much at the top of my list of projects.”





He will spend one week per month at the team's home in Portsmouth through to the America's Cup in Bermuda in 2017.

With two royal residences under his belt – at Highgrove and Windsor Castle – the Duchess of Cambridge no less proved a pivotal figure in securing his latest job.

“She had known about me and seen my work and because she’s the royal patron of Ben Ainslie Racing that was another factor why I might have got the nod,” he says.

Given the magnitude of the sporting occasion and the weight of history, does he feel any extra pressure?

“Each job has got a little bit bigger than the previous one and a little bit more high profile,” the 41-year-old says.

“With that there’s definitely added pressure to what I’m doing and I think the Ben Ainslie challenge for the America’s Cup is a massive sporting event.

“We’ve all got the Olympic T-shirts now. Everyone experienced London 2012 and we all loved it which sort of means there’s not quite so much British interest in Rio.

“If people are looking for exciting sporting events that Britain has a really good chance of winning then everyone is looking to Ben, with his record, to bring home the cup in 2017.

“From all angles it’s a really big exciting, challenging project.”

With the boats travelling at 50 knots across the water Jeremy is unable

to sketch but he will have his trusty camera, taking up to 3,000 photos a day.

“From those if there are half a dozen which are good and workable for me then that’s a success,” he says.

“Likewise I could spend a day at Windsor with my sketch book and I could fill up two entire sketch books and from those if I use three or four of them it’s been a success.

“You immerse yourself and then you come back out and let it percolate. I do my proper painting in my studio.”

Jeremy’s spent time with a few of the sailors already and even done a bit of painting with Ben and admits that it’s like nothing he’s ever experienced before.

“It’s incredibly exhilarating and inspiring when you think about the skill of these sportsmen,” he says before later adding that it’s as much about those off the boat as on it.

“That’s the same with all these institutions. Everyone sees the boat on the water and five guys sailing it but behind that there are 95 people working day and night to get the boat into the condition so they can sail it.

“So if you’re going to paint a full, honest story of team Ben Ainslie you have to include all the people; engineers, technicians, cleaners, the lot.”

The paintings will also be used to help raise money for the team’s official charity, the 1851 Trust, through exhibitions and the sale of the works.

Jeremy’s ability to pick out an aspect of a subject’s life away from the public eye has defined many of his works; particularly with members of the royal family.

At Highgrove – in which he was given licence to roam, driving in and out when he liked – it was important for Jeremy to showcase farm life.

“I felt it was more interesting than the house and garden which were already quite commercial and quite publicised,” says Jeremy.

“So I went beyond the garden fence and out on the estate where there’s hundreds of acres. You can hide pretty easily and get stuck in with the animals and things.

“It was more difficult at Windsor where you’re in the castle and behind the castle walls.

“But I chose to do Windsor through the eyes of the horses and often horses had to go outside the castle for exercise to the park and to all the peripheral parts.”

Was he surprised by any aspect of life behind closed doors?

“Not to say that I was surprised, but a nice aspect is that you very much feel, especially at Windsor when the Queen is in residence, you almost feel like new batteries have been put into the place.

“There’s a whole new energy; the flag is flying, there’s a bigger security presence and you really feel that.”

During her record-breaking reign, The Queen has sat for more than 130 portraits and in 2009 Jeremy was tasked with capturing Her

Majesty as part of a period of residency for one of her regiments.

“I actually had to shadow her for the year. It meant that I went to these very interesting places which are usually behind closed doors such as garden parties and the state opening of parliament.

“The actual painting I did was of her presenting a new flag to the regiment so it wasn’t a head and shoulders.

“I always try and tell the story in my paintings so it was her presenting the [Royal] Standard to the officer within the walls of St James’ Palace.”

For Jeremy painting the queen was all about “normalising” the subject.

“There’s the reality and there’s the perception – often when you go behind closed doors you just see the people as being people.

“The Queen, yes she’s our monarch but she’s also a lady, a grandmother, a mother, a friend. I try and put everyone and everything on an even keel.

“We know about their public lives, they’re all duty-bound and they work incredibly hard and don’t switch off.

“We know about all that so I’m much more interested in what they’re like as people if you take the crown off the Queen’s head, if you take the robes off Prince Charles’s back, what would they be like or what are they like when the doors are closed and the cameras are not fixed on them?

“With Prince Charles whenever I spoke to him he was fascinated by my art because he’s an artist himself. He loves painting, and he was



fascinated with the pictures I've done of Highgrove because they're all about the farm and he's a passionate countryside man.

"He kept on saying that the mountains are as important as our monasteries – we should be protecting them and conserving them as much as we do the architecture.

"If he wasn't who he was I think he'd probably be a farmer, he'd probably be in the countryside rather than the towns and that was the part I wanted to reflect."

The Queen, Jeremy believes, would have been involved in the world of equestrian full-time and would have relished the opportunity.

"She's so passionate and so knowledgeable about the horses and the breeding – and not just race horses. From her fell ponies to Zara's eventers, she knows every single horse's name, its pedigree, where it has come from, who it was bred with and why."

Jeremy made the trip to Buckingham Palace in 2014 to showcase his work to the Queen and Prince Phillip, setting up all the paintings in the drawing room and talking the royals through them.

And there was one piece in particular which proved particularly memorable: a watercolour sketch of the Queen stroking the nose of her favourite fell pony, Balmoral Erica.

"She showed that pony at The Royal Windsor Horse Show and there's a lovely tender moment with her stroking the pony's nose and it was very sweet and intimate and I managed to capture that.

"I showed her all the paintings and at the end of the line, so to speak, I had this small painting on an easel and I said 'that's for you Ma'am as a little present and a thank you for the experience'.

"I think she was quite touched by that because she's probably got all sorts of portraits of her with the crown and the robes and huge big oil paintings that are probably worth millions but this was a very small, simple watercolour sketch and a totally different gift I guess.

"The chap that looks after all her horses went up to see her the following morning and she was having breakfast at her usual table. She had the little painting in front of her that I'd given her on a little easel. That was a really nice thing."



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Jeremy with Ben Ainslie