

Portrait of the artist



Rupert Shrive

'I am sometimes accused of being fashionable'

What got you started?

Copying Renaissance painters from a book my mother gave me when I was six. I did a version of Paolo Uccello's Saint George and the Dragon in coloured pencils. I found it interesting enough to want to do it again.

What was your big breakthrough?

Being expelled from school aged 17. I realised that I could get on to an art foundation course without any A-levels; I applied to Norwich School of Art and it all went from there.

Who or what have you sacrificed for your art?

Security: the life of an artist is very unpredictable. But the reward – freedom – makes it worth it.

What one song would feature on the soundtrack to your life?

Windowlicker by Aphex Twin. It's a clever song that pushes the boundaries. I respond to art that tries to settle new ground.

Are you fashionable?

I am sometimes accused of it.

Have you done anything cultural lately?

I saw Ernst Lubitsch's silent film of Lady Windermere's Fan. It shows how much you can say with a limited palette.

Do you suffer for your art?

It's taken me 20 years to get this far, and there were times when it was very tough. I wouldn't recommend this lifestyle to anyone.

What's your favourite film?

Pier Paolo Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St Matthew*. It's a convincing argument for the existence of Christ, made by a communist, atheist homosexual. The artist's job is to find beauty in unusual places; Pasolini did that.

What's your favourite art gallery?

The National Gallery. I can find answers to everything in there.

What advice would you give a young artist just starting out?

Choose the path you want to pursue, believe in it, and then work as hard as

In short

Born: Norfolk, 1965

Career: Had a studio for five years above the Coach and Horses pub in Soho, where he came into contact with Francis Bacon. Has just had his first solo UK show at London's Scream Gallery.

High point: 'Opening my first major solo show in Mayfair. It was something I'd dreamed of for years.'

Low point: 'There have been many, but low points make one appreciate the good times.'

you can. Young artists need as many obstacles as possible so that only the tough ones come through; they're usually the only ones worth looking at.

How does Britain's arts scene compare to the rest of Europe?

It's much more buoyant than Spain and France. People with money here want to invest in the creative arts.

Complete this sentence: At heart I'm just a frustrated...

Megalomaniac.

In the movie of your life, who plays you?

Horror actor Bela Lugosi. He had so many facets to his character.

What's the best advice anyone ever gave you?

Someone once told me, "When in danger or in doubt, run in circles, scream and shout." Sound advice.

Do you read your reviews?

Yes. Criticism can be more helpful than flattery, even if it is more painful.

Interview by Laura Barnett

PHOTOGRAPH:
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