



RADLETT'S FINEST

Words Faye Manning

Beverley McNeill, founder and owner of the McNeill Gallery, Radlett, is one of the art world's most refreshing characters. Her warmth and humour are matched with a down-to-earth attitude, whilst her dynamism has ensured that the McNeill Gallery has gone from strength to strength. The McNeill Gallery, which Beverley founded in the autumn of 1996, has a well earned reputation for showing high quality original paintings, sculpture, and fine art prints by established and up-and-coming artists in a welcoming and friendly environment.

The secret of the McNeill Gallery's success lies very much in the owner's commitment to establishing a gallery with an 'open door' policy, a place in which everyone is actively encouraged to browse at their leisure and find their own modern day version of a Picasso or Rembrandt. In 2006, Beverley's drive to further this commitment inspired her to apply to the Art Council's Own Art scheme, an enterprise that allows regional galleries to offer interest free loans to its clients. After a rigorous application process, the McNeill Gallery was granted Own Art status, ensuring that the gallery can offer its clients a variety of ways to purchase artworks.

ABOUT BEVERLEY MCNEILL

Beverley McNeill's career has been built upon a 'can do' attitude. She began her working life as a marketing and public relations officer for a publishing company in London. This led to a spell in radio, where she produced short sports features for the BBC World Service and local BBC radio. This introduction to the sporting world fired Beverley's growing enthusiasm for sailing and, in partnership with a colleague, she published a yachting magazine covering major sailing events such as the Admirals Cup and Cowes Week. Through her connections in the yachting community, Beverley learned the rudiments of crewing and sailing yachts. This eventually took her across the Atlantic, where she spent two years sailing in the Caribbean and along the east coast of America. As a crew member on board some of the world's fastest yachts, she was expected to 'muck in' and pull her weight. She took part in three transatlantic races that tested her stamina and endurance to their limits. The gallery

owner remembers her sailing years fondly and believes that the tenacity required for sailing paved the way to building a business in the art world!

THE GALLERY

In 1995, the village of Radlett received a one million pound makeover to improve traffic congestion in the area. The building work lasted a year and during nine months of it, many local businesses were badly affected because shoppers were prevented from visiting the village by car. As a result, local retailers demanded the services of Beverley's public relations and marketing company to turn around the situation. Beverley was hired and was given only six weeks to promote the newly designed village for its annual festival. It was during this time that Beverley spotted the potential to create a local, friendly gallery offering artworks of exceptional quality. She found suitable premises and signed a temporary lease on a property in the high street. In October 1996, the McNeill Gallery opened. The gallery was so successful during its first three months that the premises became a permanent home for the gallery; Beverley's efforts had been rewarded.

During those early months Beverley's philosophy was to create a friendly environment for both artists and collectors to display and view artworks. The emphasis was very much upon the presentation of exceptional artworks in a beautiful and pleasant environment, an ethos which is still very much in evidence today. The McNeill Gallery has built a reputation of presenting interesting exhibitions, in which recent graduates and up-and-coming talents are showcased alongside established and renowned artists. In recent years, the McNeill Gallery has travelled to the major art shows in London, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Ireland, in order to raise its artists' profiles. The gallery's programme mixes group exhibitions with solo artist shows. Original artworks are also supplied to companies and in 2006 Beverley won the contract to supply and hang twenty-five large scale paintings for Take Over Panel, a company based in the New Stock Exchange building in the city of London.

Among the younger artists she represents, Beverley McNeill is revered as both mentor and sponsor. She has utter faith in their artistic endeavours. One of Beverley's biggest stars is Alex Rennie, an artist who has been represented by the McNeill Gallery since Beverley spotted his work as an A-level student. Alex, now aged 30, has gained a phenomenal reputation amongst collectors of contemporary art and is now listed in the Dictionary of British Artists. Indeed, Beverley's knack of spotting the 'next big thing' ensures that the gallery's portfolio remains fresh and vibrant.

In spring 2007, Beverley was approached to take part in an online art competition, 'Seeking Picasso'. In a format similar to television's 'The X Factor', the pilot project searched for the most talented artist in Brighton. As one of the judges Beverley played a pivotal role in deciding the future success of an artistic young hopeful, which she found hugely rewarding. The concept has now been picked up by a major network and is set to become reality TV's next big thing in 2008.

Beverley's taste in art is rarely wrong and her talent for being in the right place at the right time usually ensures that success is just around the corner. On one occasion, whilst walking past the local Peace Hospice charity shop, Beverley noticed an original oil painting in the shop's window for sale at £25. Upon closer inspection, Beverley realised that the work was of considerable accomplishment and suspected that it was by Edwardian painter Charles A. Wilkinson [1881 – 1925]. She returned to her gallery and, on consulting one of her many art dictionaries, her suspicions were confirmed. Beverley immediately returned to the charity shop and suggested that the painting was removed and submitted to auction, whereupon it fetched £7500.

Current Exhibition at McNeill Gallery: Summer Exhibition; Not the Royal Academy. An exhibition of new artists from around the UK and abroad, including the winner of Seeking Picasso, an online art competition. Exhibition continues until September 12th.