



"I did my first painting as the bombs were dropping in World War II"

Growing up during WWII, Morris is no stranger to adverse conditions. At his teenage home there was a reinforced metal cage under the kitchen table, where he knew to shelter when bombs threatened. This is where he completed his first ever painting.

Now aged 92, he continues to work during lockdown for his forthcoming solo exhibition 'Desmond Morris in the 21st Century' at Beaux Arts London.



Family, 2019, Mixed media on paper, 30 x 42 cm

*"Well, I think it was a sort of teenage rebellion in a way, but it was a creative rebellion.
I didn't want to smash windows, but I was pretty angry about the war."*



The Pluralist, 2017, Ink and watercolour, 30 x 21 cm

"Thanks to lockdown I finished this at 2.30am this morning."



The Emissary, 2020, Oil on board, 61 x 91 cm

Known for his best-selling books *'The Naked Ape'* *'The Human Zoo'* and *'Manwatching'*.

Also, his TV programmes about animal and human behaviour.

However, Desmond Morris' first interest has always been art.

"When I was about 7, I went into the attic and found my grandfather's microscope. I brought it downstairs set it up on the kitchen table, went outside put some pond water on a saucer and placed it under the microscope. There were all these amazing moving creatures that I couldn't resist drawing. They inspire me still"



Landscape in Waiting, 2020, Oil on board, 51 x 76 cm

Desmond Morris held his first solo art exhibition in 1948, now at the age of 92 he is still actively painting and writing. Today, most of his paintings are in private collections but he also has works in public galleries and art museums in England, Scotland, Holland, Italy, Israel and the United States.

"One of the joys of being 92 is that I have lived long enough to see some of my very early work re-surface after being lost to me for many years. In 2020 a work that I had created seventy years earlier, called The Trap, re-appeared and is now included in this exhibition. It has come back to me as an old friend and I am fascinated by its details, as though they were painted by another artist. And, of course, in a sense, they were, because I was a very different person all those years ago. In 1950 I was at university, studying animal behaviour, and the drama taking place in this painting, showing a strange creature being coaxed into some kind of trap, would have been inspired by my zoological studies. But although it was influenced by them, there was no attempt to depict a naturalistic scene. The hunters and the hunted are imaginary, biomorphic beings."



The Trap, 1950, Oil on canvas, 41 x 52 cm

He was asked recently to check his archives. He found that he has held 60 solo exhibitions of his paintings and 11 books have been written about his art. He has produced over 3300 paintings over the past 70 years.

His scientific studies of animals saw him take a B.Sc degree from Birmingham University in 1951 and a D.Phil from Oxford University in 1954. He then went on to do post-doctoral research at Oxford until, in 1956, he left to take up the post of Head of the the TV and Film Unit at London Zoo. There he began to make TV programmes about animals and, later on, about human behaviour. In 1967 his book *The Naked Ape* was published and became one of the top 100 best-sellers of all time.

When asked to check his archives recently, he was surprised by the figures. As an academic zoologist, he published 48 scientific papers. When he turned to popular writing, he produced 360 articles in magazines and newspapers. He has written a total of 78 books, and has been published in 40 different languages. He has presented over 700 television programmes and has given over 470 television interviews.

Desmond Morris at 92 remains terrifyingly lucid, with a fearsome, inquisitive intelligence and a wicked wit. He says it is because he has been using both sides of his brain all his life; the scientific and the artistic. He is a night animal; he works late into the night and sleeps until noon.



Tripod, 2020, Bronze, Edition of 8, 32 x 18.5 cm

“Three-legged biomorphs have often appeared in my paintings and sculptures. For some reason that I cannot explain, tripods fascinate me. They have a special kind of stability, better than two legs and better even than four. They stand proud and defiant, challenging the world around them. Philip Pullman asked me how they move and David Attenborough wanted to know what they ate. I found it hard to answer them because I had never considered their natural history. To me, the tripods were beings inhabiting a world where such mundane matters as locomotion and diet did not arise. They were unique images, like displayed idols, seen in a world of their own. For me, that was enough. They simply existed. I enjoyed their company and asked them no questions.”



The Neoteric, 2020, Oil on board, 46 x 56 cm

He tells the story about a recent conversation with his old friend David Attenborough, when they mused about why they were still alive, and still working in their 90s.

"Why are we still here?" Morris asked him

"I don't know" Attenborough replied

"Well did you ever do any exercise?" "No"

"Did you ever go to a gymnasium?" "No"

"Did you ever eat any health food?" "No"

"Nor did I. So why are we still here?"

"Because" Attenborough said eventually, "we are fascinated by this planet that we live on. And we are both so fascinated by it that we keep asking questions, and we never stop looking for new answers. And if you have a fascination for this small planet...it will keep you going."



The exhibition will coincide with the publication of the third Catalogue Raisonné.