



Knickerbocker Glorious Paintings

By James Leonard

No trip to the seaside would be complete without a 99, screwball or Knickerbocker Glory, and having lived by the seaside for most of her life, it is no surprise that Norfolk-based artist, Jane Hall, makes ice cream a central theme in her work. She grew up in Clacton before moving to Great Yarmouth as a teenager – both traditional British seaside resorts – and now lives just a two-minute walk from Great Yarmouth's busy seafront, with its numerous ice cream stands and beach-side cafes selling Slush Puppies, Sundaes and Flavour Bursts.

"I first started taking an interest in ice creams while planning my first major solo show last year," Jane explains. "I wanted to capture Great Yarmouth as it is today, while at the same time evoking the nostalgia we all feel for the British seaside holiday, and the key to that for me was seeing all the plastic ice creams used for advertising and decoration on the ice cream stalls along the seafront. One, in particular, caught my eye – a green and pink ice cream in a beautiful golden cone that gets lit up at night. I must have walked past it millions of times before, but suddenly it stood out to me as a symbol of the British holiday and also as a symbol of the seduction of adverts, which is another key theme in my work."

The green and pink ice cream was soon transformed into the painting, *Soft Scoop*, which was the first completed work for Jane's solo show, *Seaside Sensation*. This bright, colourful, modern painting then kick-started a series of vibrant pictures depicting ice creams used in advertising, such as a picture of a poster for *La Scala* ice creams that Jane spotted in a cafe doorway and two playful, nostalgic pictures of plastic display cones seen hanging above ice cream parlours in nearby Hemsby.

Jane then turned her attentions to the bright pink neon lights of the ice cream parlour at Great Yarmouth's famous Pleasure Beach.

Ice creams were cropping up in almost every painting she created, although never real ones – only those used to lure the buyers in.

"Yes, I'm not sure why I didn't paint more real ice creams to begin with," says Jane. "I was just fascinated by

the big, colourful cones that were dangling from the awnings of the ice cream stands, and it was well over six months into the project before I finally decided to paint the real thing. Of course, the good thing about painting a plastic ice cream is that it will not melt while you're painting it, but real ice creams are much more tricky customers. But luckily I made a few friends among the seafront ice cream sellers, and they agreed to let me spend a few days at their stands taking photographs and sketching. It was right in the middle of summer and I couldn't believe how many ice creams they were selling.

All the kids were really keen to try the new ice cream that hit Great Yarmouth last year – the Flavour Burst – which comes in about 30 different flavours and colours, and so is a really exciting subject to paint.

Jane's ice cream paintings took a new twist at this stage, showing a brighter, bolder use of paint. The delicate touch shown in the early works like *Soft Scoop*, in which careful brush strokes capture the plastic sheen of the fake ice cream and cornet, gets replaced by daring, thick splodges and splats of luscious brushwork and glorious colour. This new looser, more experimental style allows her to convey the thick, creamy texture of the 99 and makes a work of art out of the *Knickerbocker Glory*. The ice cream overflows the bowl and spills down the side of the sundae glass, with generous splashes of crimson conveying dribbles of strawberry and raspberry sauce. And then there's the cherry and the wafer on top!

"I'm really pleased with my *Knickerbocker Glory*," says Jane, "even if it did put me at risk of piling on the pounds. I had to buy one

every day for a week and then try and take decent photographs to work from before it melted, and of course it would have been a waste if I hadn't eaten it after the photo shoot. In fact, I've had to eat an enormous amount of ice cream over the past 12 months – all for artistic purposes, of course!"

Jane's ice cream paintings proved extremely popular during her solo show. "A lot of local people came along and were able to recognise the plastic cones from along the seafront," she explains, "and the ones based on real ice creams went down even better. Everyone kept saying that my 99 looked good enough to eat, and to make sure they didn't go hungry, I even served up ice creams on opening night and throughout the two-week exhibition."

The work has since moved onto a gallery in Norwich, while two of the paintings were shown last year at London's Chelsea Art Gallery. And with the art world taking notice and inspiration all around her, it will be exciting to see where Jane takes her ice cream paintings next. "I want to paint them bigger and thicker," she tells me, "and really capture the luscious, thick, creamy texture of ice cream in paint. It will probably mean I have to eat a lot more ice cream in the next few months, but I don't mind that – I love the stuff!"

JANE HALL

You can view more of Jane's work at www.jane-hall.co.uk or contact her on 01493-842809.