

A Window into Paul Minter's Interiors

England is renowned for its historic houses, their interiors resplendent with style and sophistication. It's an opulence and luxury to admire, and to which we can aspire.

If you're looking for an opportunity to indulge in this splendour, during this year's Oxfordshire Artweeks artist Paul Minter will present a series of sumptuous oil paintings depicting the interiors of stately homes. Gazing at his art transports you to glittering empty gilded rooms, to populate with one's imagination, all of which look as though they've been taken straight from a historical drama. Paul trained in theatre design at the Central School of Art and Design, London and worked in Film and TV as a designer for twenty years – it's clear he has an eye for a striking backdrop.

"The Covid-19 pandemic made it impossible to travel and to visit the places that we love. For me, historic houses have always been a passion and I spend my days off visiting them." Over the last couple of years, whilst unable to visit them, Paul painted these glorious interiors he would have liked to stroll through in-person, capturing their essence rather than copying every detail. Paul's pieces could be mistaken for a photograph until closely examined to realise the paint is all loosely applied and impressionistic: much of the detail is merely implied.



"Art is about memory," says Paul. "It is a way of capturing a fleeting moment and preserving it, sharing emotions and memories with others. I have discovered, like Charles Ryder in *Brideshead Revisited* that I have an aptitude for painting interiors. I try to capture the special atmosphere in these places that I love.

Country House interiors inspire me to live life surrounded by beautiful things," he smiles. "When you see these images, you see what makes me tick. They are – perhaps like all paintings – actually self-portraits."

As the viewer tours some of the stately homes of the UK with Paul, the table is set in Felbrigg Hall, Norfolk; ancestral portraits peer down from the walls of Wilton House, Salisbury, and a chandelier sparkles in the Grey Drawing Room at Waddesdon Manor.

"One aspect of historic interiors which interests me as a painter," explains Paul, "is the use of artificial light. Chandeliers are particularly tricky to paint. Illuminated bulbs or candles emit a warm light that is reflected by cold crystal droplets. The metal armature of the chandelier has structure and solid geometry that is difficult to understand yet the whole thing has an ethereal quality.

The Waddesdon Manor Dining Room is a synthesis of eighteenth-century elements combined with late nineteenth-century opulence, the epitome of Rothschild style. For many years now it has been presented with the curtains drawn and blazing candles reflected in the mirrors and the polished





marble walls. Here, the floral display created for the visit of Queen Victoria takes centre stage. This is probably the most photogenic interior in the house and in all its guises it is absolutely stunning,” he continues.

“Over in Norfolk, The Holkham Hall State Bedroom is another truly magnificent room and I can scarcely think of a bedroom that I like more. The room is hung with dark rich tapestries and insulated from reality. It is a warm and comfortable space that glitters by the golden glow of its many lamps.”

Another painting in Paul’s new collection shows Holkham Hall Library which is still part of a private apartment rather than a stateroom. Here, the fine architecture of William Kent and a great collection of books provides a sumptuous background for comfortable living. Sofas in

pools of lamplight surround the fireplace, and looking at the painting, the viewer half expects a drama to unfold as Hercule Poirot steps ‘on set’ and unravels a mystery.

Previously, Paul painted gardens, focusing on those patches where gardens merge into the surrounding landscape.

These paintings were also about dusk and early morning sun, just as Paul’s interiors often have an ‘evening’ flavour, that moment when you settle down, turn on the lamps and light the fire; and in Marie Antoinette’s Boudoir at Fountainbleu, the fire is already glowing: “The room is gold, silver and mother of pearl. Decorated in the classical style of Pompeii and Herculaneum, it was the height of luxury in the eighteenth century. I wanted to capture its shimmering surfaces in paint.” says Paul.

As a whole, the collection is enchanting. Individually, each picture is poised to add a touch of splendour and magic to any contemporary home, a window to – for most of us – another world.

Paul Minter is one of sixteen artists exhibiting at the ancient Peach Croft Farm Barn in North Abingdon (Artweeks venue 183), where art ranging from stunning textile birds to pottery and silver jewellery will be available to browse and buy.



See full details at artweeks.org.