



— Fred Yates  
*En Plein Air*

*Landscapes from France, 1994–2008*

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COVER: Fred Yates painting at the Yellow River, Les Pilles, 2004  
ABOVE: *Evening Light*, c. 1994, watercolour, 22 x 30 inches, 56 x 76 cms



### *Landscapes from France, 1994–2008*

In the early 1990's Fred Yates lived in Provence, in a small mill house near Beume de Venise. Lacking a car, his painting expeditions to the Provençal hills were usually on foot – or bus if heading to the coast – and demanded a medium that was portable. With oils he could work on a small scale, but it proved a problem to transport the wet canvases back home without ruining the surface. Watercolour dried quickly, could be rolled up for the return journey and, most importantly he could work on a scale that far better suited to his way of painting. Painting dense woods and hillsides on large sheets of paper required compositions that left little area of the paper without a mark. Watercolour taught Fred to dive into the landscape, to paint close up to the foreground and keep away from horizon lines and empty skies; it was a lesson that stayed with him for the next fifteen years and resulted in some of Yates's most original and complex paintings.

Sadly, many of those early watercolours were destroyed when floods swept through the ground floor of his mill house in 1994. This calamity was such a shock to Yates that he quit Provence and moved back to England. When he subsequently returned to France five years later, he had virtually abandoned watercolour as a medium. At the millenium he was living in Rancon in the Dordogne and his first paintings were made close to home, often in the narrow strip of garden behind his house. Fred found endless inspiration in his wild flowers, "herbes sauvages, bougainvillia, palmiers, glycine etc" that grew untended in clumps on either side of the garden path. His garden, its flower beds and a small lost chapel in a dense wood just outside the village were subjects Fred returned to over and over again in Rancon; by limiting what he painted it was as if he could better explore his technique. He was now using immense quantities of oil paint on each picture, leaving his garden littered with empty paint tubes like spent cartridges on a firing range. He lost himself in the dense vegetation of his garden paintings, each branch and leaf defined by long loops of colour and every inch of canvas filled with paint. In a letter from Rancon he wrote, "...If I am painting vegetation there is no fuzziness - every leaf is 'la petite touche' like the Chinese work with their fine brushes."

Although Fred kept his house in Rancon for the rest of his life (and now, thanks to his neighbour, Simon Sunman, this has been preserved as a museum\*), from 2002 onwards, Fred spent most of his year in the Vaucluse, buying a succession of small village homes from which he would go off on painting expeditions. Once more on the road, he was limited in scale to the smaller canvases he could carry with him and the exuberant brushwork of the large Rancon garden paintings gave way to more conventional and serene Provençal landscapes, finished in a day and then brought back to



*The Forest*, 2007, oil on canvas, 24 x 30, 61 x 76 cms

his home in Sablet or Seguret. We exhibited these little paintings together in London for an exhibition called 'Twelve Months in Provence' and though an infectious expression of his happiness at returning to the South of France, the style now seems a departure from his later landscape paintings. Within a year his work had changed dramatically: he had moved north into the mountains of the Drone, first to Nyons and then La Motte.

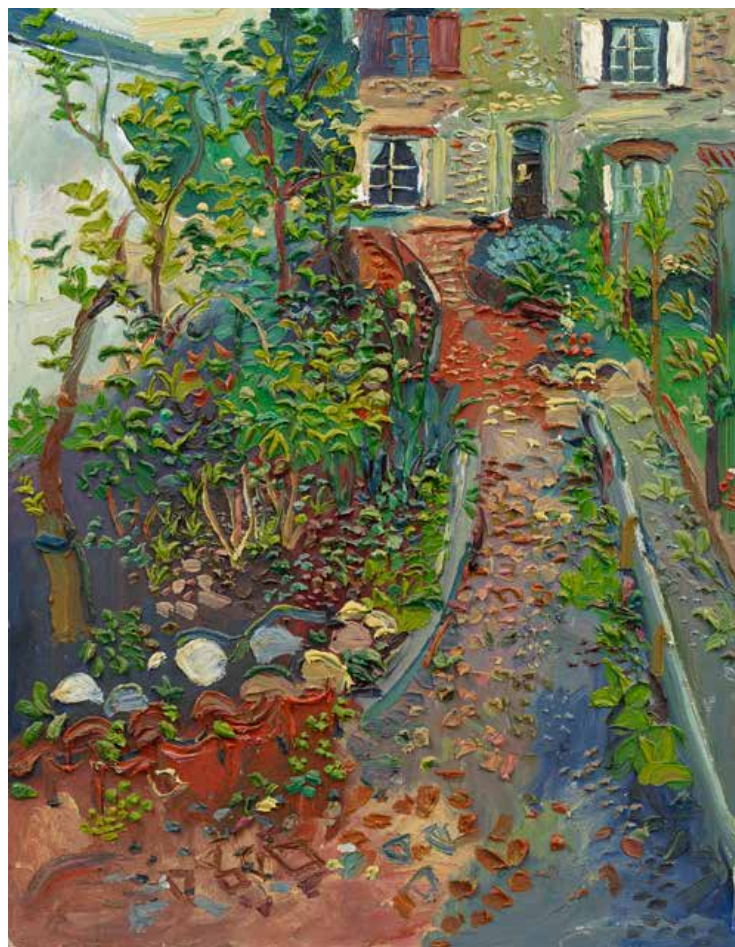
Excited by his new surroundings Fred continued to paint outside, working on increasingly large canvases with substantial quantities of oil paint squeezed out in their entirety from the tube before he began every picture. Understandably, taxi drivers were reluctant to allow Fred to bring his wet canvases back in their cars, so he needed a network of friendly café owners to store the finished work until they were dry. In La Motte, during the summer months, Fred took to leaving his paints and finished canvases behind bushes or trees to dry. I remember going for a walk with Fred to retrieve a half finished painting of a footbridge from a nearby thicket, which had been left with its palette ready for completion.

It was a joy to see Fred at work in the landscape. The cover photograph shows Fred working beside a favourite, and very obliging, café in Les Pilles. He came here regularly for a light lunch and an afternoon spent painting what he referred to as the 'Yellow River' which ran below it. Fred was immensely excited about this series of paintings and I remember feeling a bit underwhelmed arriving at the 'Yellow River' to see a trickle of a stream, surrounded by boulders and spindly trees, grey with summer dust. Yet Fred turned this ordinary scene into something enchanting and powerful, rich with colour and voluptuous, dense foliage.

It has been an enormous pleasure to put together this exhibition of Fred Yates's French landscapes. Over fifteen years, they appeared in sporadic bursts of energy, invariably triggered by his arrival in a new town. Within a year he would tire of his surroundings and his paintings would become more internal, turning to memories or wilder voyages of his imagination. Then he would move and the landscapes would start again. Syncopated by his restless nature these plein air paintings show a steady and dramatic progress in his confidence and skill as a painter. Together they form a powerful and highly original aspect of his art.

John Martin

*\* The Maison Fred Yates in Rancon, Limousin is open at weekends throughout the year. For further information please contact the gallery.*



*The Garden Path, Rancon, c.2002, oil on canvas, 45¾ x 35¾, 116 x 89 cms*



Fred Yates painting in his garden, Rancon. 2002



*Dans la Pays de Montagne*, c. 1994, watercolour, 22 x 30 inches, 56 x 76 cms





*My Garden In Bloom*, c. 2005, oil on canvas, 46 x 35 inches, 116 x 89 cm



*Afternoon Walk, Provence*, c. 1994, watercolour, 15 x 22 inches, 38 x 55 cms



RIGHT: *Les Pilles*, 2003, oil on canvas, 25½ x 31¾ inches, 65 x 81 cms  
TOP: Fred painting at Les Pilles 2003



*Path in the Woods*, c. 1994, watercolour, 22 x 30 inches, 56 x 76 cms



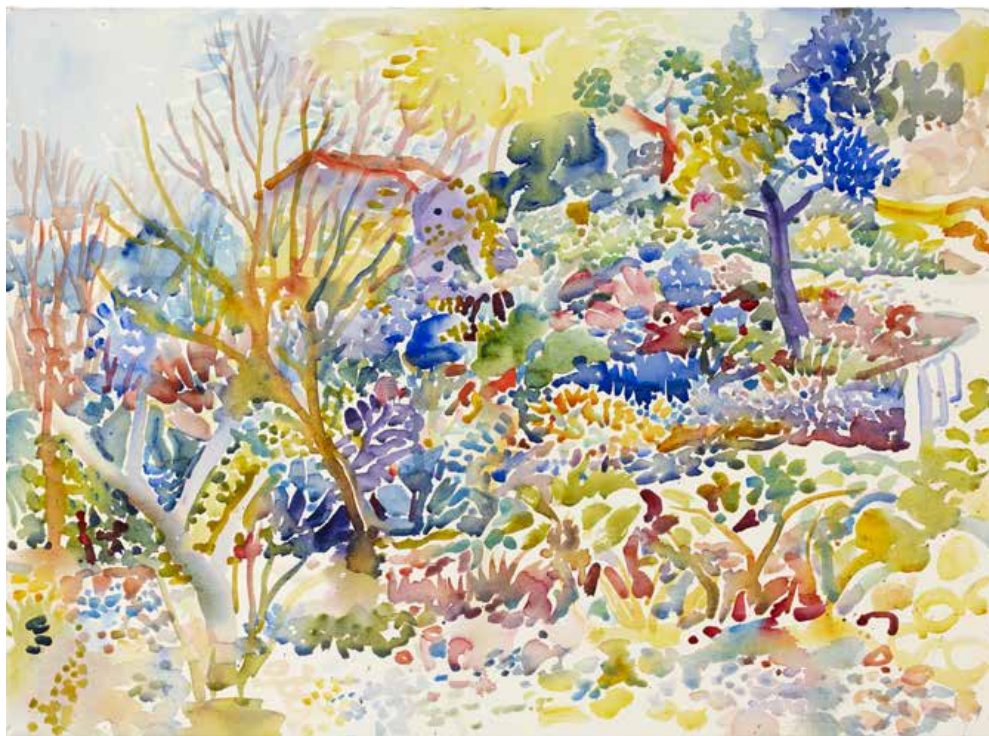
*Paysage Provençal 2*, 2003, oil on canvas, 31¼ x 39, 80 x 99 cms



*Mountain Path, Provence*, c. 1994, watercolour, 20 x 30 inches, 51 x 76 cms



*My Garden Rancon*, c.2002, oil on canvas, 35 x 45 $\frac{3}{4}$ , 89 x 116 cms



*An Angel Appears, Provence*, c. 1994, watercolour, 22 x 30 inches, 56 x 76 cms







*Iris*, 2008, oil on canvas, 24 x 24, 60 x 60 cms



*Family Outing* c. 1994, watercolour, 20 x 30 inches, 51 x 76 cms



Fred in Les Pilles, 2004



*Picked Flowers in the Garden*, c. 2004, oil on canvas, 35 x 35 inches, 89 x 89 cms



*Footpath Provence*, c. 1994, watercolour, 18 x 23 inches, 46 x 62 cms



*The Chapel in the Woods, Rancon, 2002, oil on canvas, 38¾ x 38¾ inches, 98 x 98 cms*

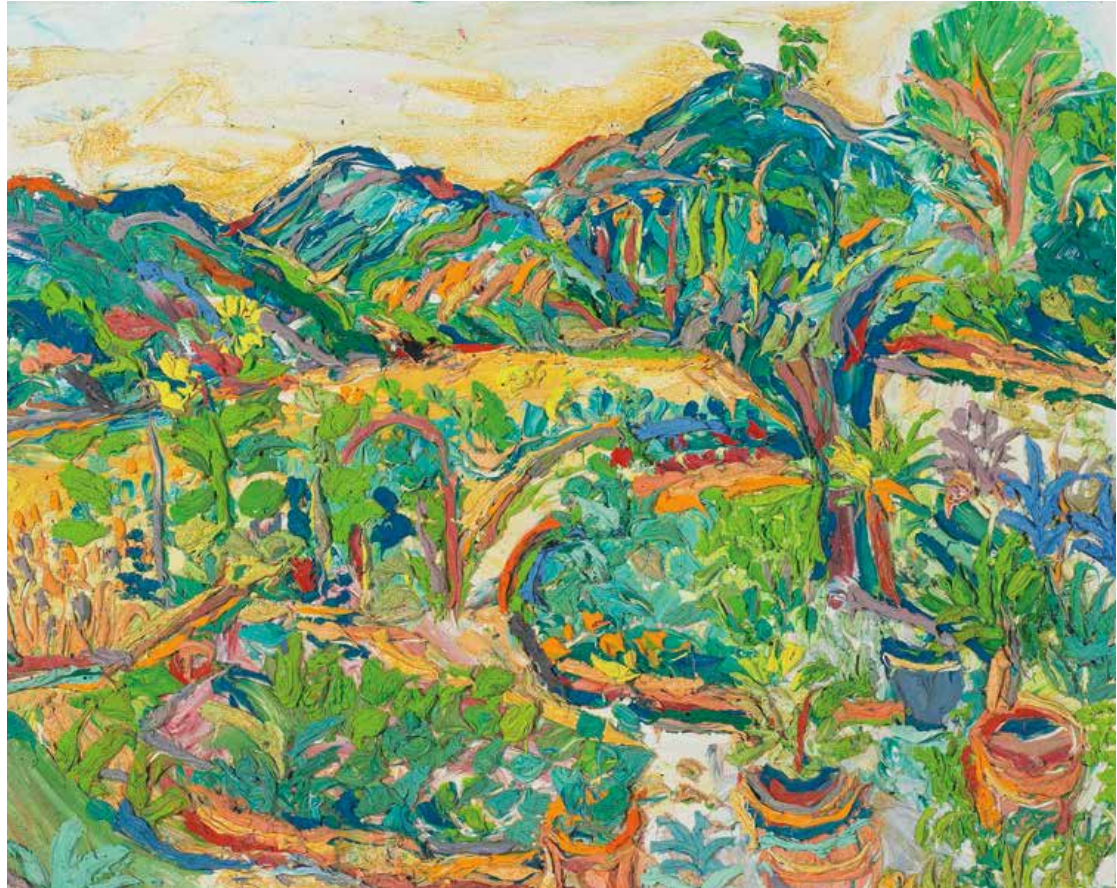


*Hillside Provence*, c. 1994, watercolour, 22 x 30 inches, 56 x 76 cms





View towards the mountains from the balcony of Yates's House La Motte, 2008



*Mon Jardin La Motte*, 2005, oil on canvas, 23½ x 29 inches, 60 x 74 cms



*House in the Hills*, c. 1994, watercolour, 20 x 30 inches, 51 x 76 cms



*Flowers Against a Blue Background*, 2000, oil on canvas, 35 x 45 inches, 89 x 115 cms



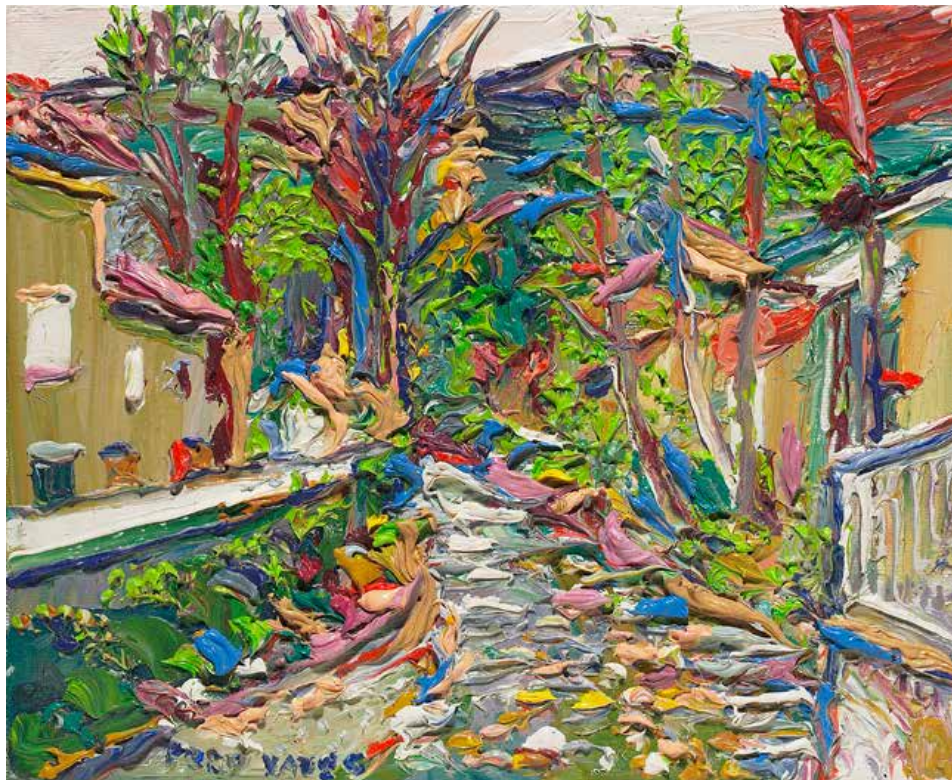
*Evening Walk*, c. 1994, watercolour, 20 x 30 inches, 51 x 76 cms



*View out of the Window, La Motte, 2006, oil on canvas,  
30 x 24 inches, 76 x 61 cms*



*Rocky Outcrop Provence*, c. 1994, watercolour, 20 x 30 inches, 51 x 76 cms



*The Stream La Motte*, 2005, oil on canvas, 8¾ x 10½ inches, 22 x 26.5 cms





*I'll be Right Back*, c. 1994, watercolour, 22 x 15 inches, 56 x 38 cms