

Fred Yates

—*Crossing the Tamar*

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John Martin Gallery

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Self Portrait by the Fowey Estuary, c.1970

oil on wood
4¾ x 3½ ins (12 x 9 cms)



Fred Yates:
–*Crossing the Tamar*

In 1968 at the age of 46, Fred Yates abandoned his career as an art teacher in Devon to become a full-time painter in Cornwall. This incremental change in profession might seem as small a step as the short journey needed to cross the Tamar to reach Fowey where he settled, but to Yates it was a monumental decision that he had agonised over for fifteen years. He hated teaching (as much as his shy, gentle nature could hate anything) but sticking with it for just three more years would entitle him to a pension that could make the precarious life of a painter a little more comfortable. Though he had enough savings to buy a small fisherman's cottage he had no other income; he had no gallery, no collectors, no reputation and a dry, linear style that offered only the barest hint of the exuberance and joy of his later paintings. Yates had no doubts about the inevitable poverty he faced, but it was something he took on with relish. Like a monk taking holy orders, he needed to give up everything else in order to become an artist and finally cut himself free from convention and society.

In his mind, part of the transition to being an artist also required a move to Cornwall. Having provided a sanctuary for artists for the previous eighty years Cornwall offered Yates the comfort that he wasn't alone in his reckless adventure; he needed to feel close to artists and be part of a community and, on a practical level, he needed the

structure of art societies and competitions to exhibit, and later, to sell his work. He had lost his twin brother at Arnhem, his parents were dead and at forty-six he may well have abandoned any thoughts of marriage or children. He had nothing to lose. He grew his hair long, painted with whatever materials he could find and, always the outsider, turned himself from a shy loner into a single-minded artist who, with the encouragement of a loyal group of supporters, slowly found his extraordinary voice. The next forty years were devoted to painting. He made room for nothing and nobody else in his life. No more compromising; he painted incessantly as if making up for the wasted years of teaching.

The earliest Cornish paintings showed a robust, kitchen-sink approach to quite ordinary subjects: thin slabs of paint, delineated by long strands of oil paint wrapped around the edges of each object using household paints or the cheapest grades of oil paint on hardboard. Paintings like the *Lighthouse Boat, South Coast* or the *Pleasure Boats* have a striking simplicity in their approach, but he evidently needed to go beyond merely developing his technical skill in front of conventional subjects: as he later said, he needed to "unlearn" how to paint. He found his inspiration painting outside in front of an audience. Having made the lanes and harbour walls his studio and his gallery,

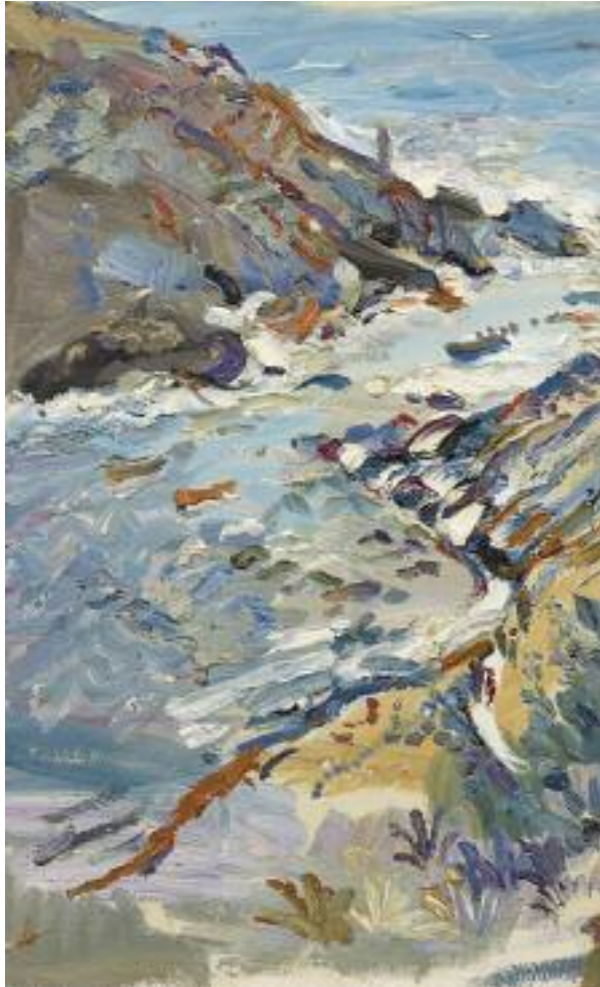


St Michael's Mount, c. 1998

oil on canvas
30 x 40 ins (76 x 101.5 cms)

Stormy Inlet, c. 1980

oil on board
25 x 15 ins (63.5 x 38 cms)



he began to thrive with the attention of a crowd and played to the audience, selling the finished painting when dry or inviting the curious back to his cottage to see other work. To visitors, Fred was delightfully unpretentious about painting: it was simply a morning's work like a plumber or a blacksmith and he charged accordingly. As he gained confidence in his work during the early 1970's, his audience soon found themselves the chief subject of his paintings: the women with prams, the old ladies with their dogs, the men in caps, the children playing, the sailors, the punks and bikers and nudists. He once sent me a cutting of a quote by the French painter, Jean Dubuffet summing up one of the few ambitions that Fred probably ever had:

... It is the man in the street that I'm after, whom I feel closest to, with whom I want to make friends and enter into confidence and connivance, and he is the one I want to please and enchant by means of my work

He had made his breakthrough as an artist with a unique vision, and in 1976, eight years after moving to Cornwall, Fred was offered his first one-man show and soon became a regular exhibitor across the county. He had succeeded in enchanting collectors, both locals and summer visitors who regularly made a point to buy a Yates on their trips to the south-west. And yet, having established his early following through his accessibility as a painter, Fred began to find that success put pressure on his need for privacy; he would feel smothered and hemmed in. There were too many

friends making demands on his time and he would tire of the subjects he needed for his painting. It was time to move on. This became a constant pattern throughout the rest of his life as the need for friendship battled with his need for solitude. He moved deeper into Cornwall: to St Just, then Newlyn, then Lostwithiel. Finally in the late 1980s Fred bought a small mill-house near Beaume-de-Venise in Provence and though he kept his home in Cornwall for a few more years, he returned less often.

Cornwall had liberated Fred from the misery of teaching and given him the freedom to live his dream and become an artist. Cornwall, the landscape and the people, remained with Fred throughout his later life and even in his final years, unable to travel from France, he painted a dramatic series of paintings of Cornwall from memory including one canvas of his first house in Fowey. If one had any doubts about where his heart lay, the day before he died, he hung in the window of his home, facing the street for all the village to see, a painting of St Michael's Mount, the view from his last Cornish home in Marazion.

John Martin

Taken from *Different Ways of Seeing, The Artistic Visions of Brian Pearce, Joan Gillchrist and Fred Yates*, Samson & Co., 2011

Pleasure Boats, 1968

oil on board
13 x 34 ins (33 x 86 cms)



Monastery, c. 1970

oil on canvas board
24 x 23 ins (61 x 58.5 cms)

Woman in Red Hat, c. 1968

oil on board
23 x 17ins (58.5 x 43 cms)

Lighthouse Boat, South Coast, c. 1974

oil on board
30 x 36 ins (76 x 91.5 cms)



Terrace at the Fowey Hotel, c. 1975

oil on board
23¾ x 33½ ins (60 x 85 cms)





Flowers, c.1985

oil on canvas
12 x 10 ins (30 x 25 cms)

Piggyback, c.1978

oil on canvas
12 x 10 ins (30 x 25 cms)





Beach House, c. 1978

oil on board
14 x 20 ins (35.5 x 51 cms)

Family in Studs, c. 1980

oil on board
20 x 10 ins (51 x 25.5 cms)



Self Portrait, c. 1978

oil on board
5 x 4 ins (13 x 10 cms)

Making an Exhibition of Themselves, c. 1985

oil on board
23 x 42 ins (58.5 x 107 cms)



Madame, c. 1978

oil on board
16 x 13 ins (40.5 x 33 cms)

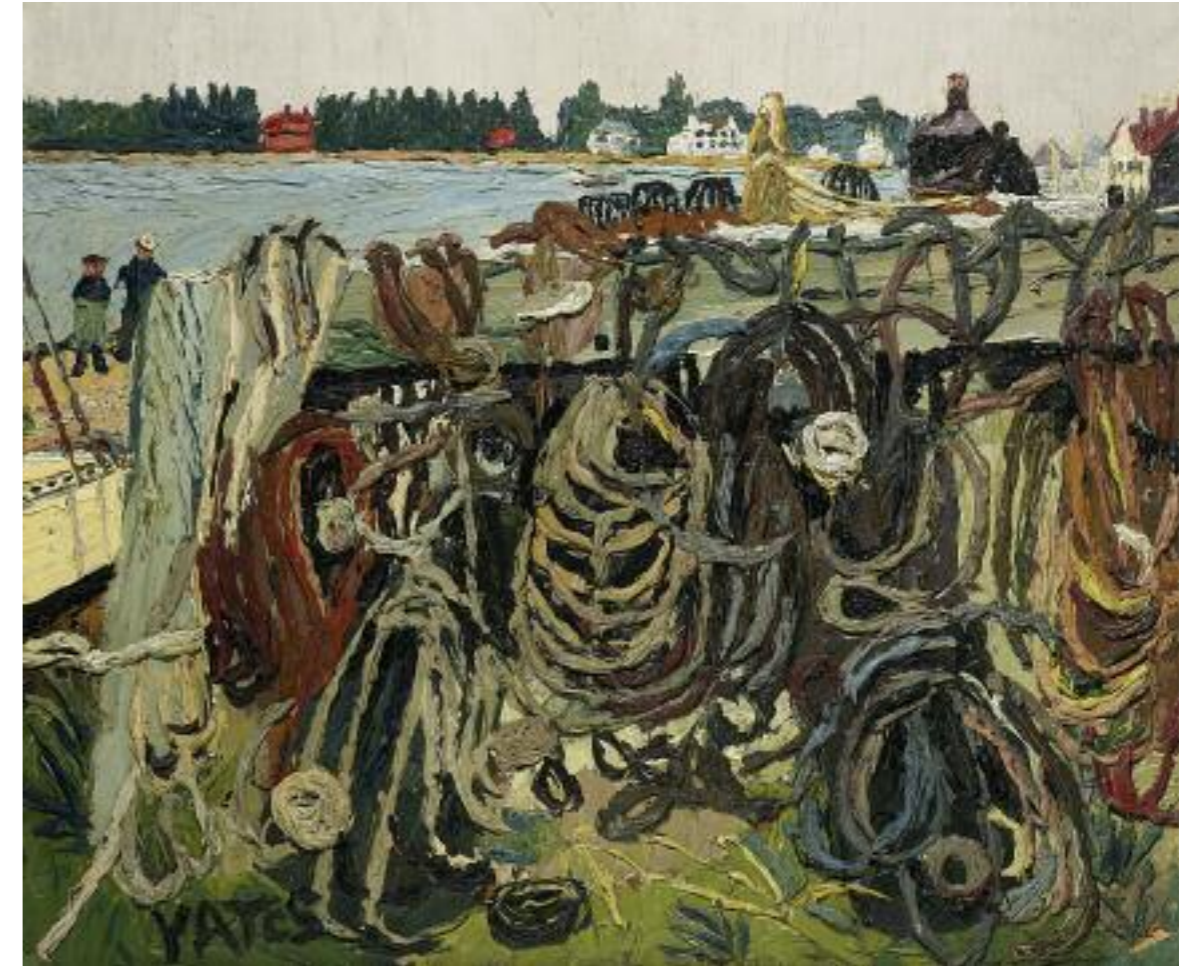


The Churchyard, c. 1974

oil on board
9¼ x 6¾ ins (23.5 x 17 cms)

Fishing Nets, c. 1985

oil on board
17 x 20 ins (43 x 51 cms)





Garden Watching, c. 1990

oil on board
14 x 24 ins (35.5 x 61 cms)

Couple, c. 1985

oil on board
9¼ x 7 ins (23.5 x 18 cms)





2 Dogs, c. 1985

oil on board
4 x 5½ ins (10 x 14 cms)

Sunday Stroll, c. 1988

oil on board
15¾ x 20 ins (40 x 51 cms)



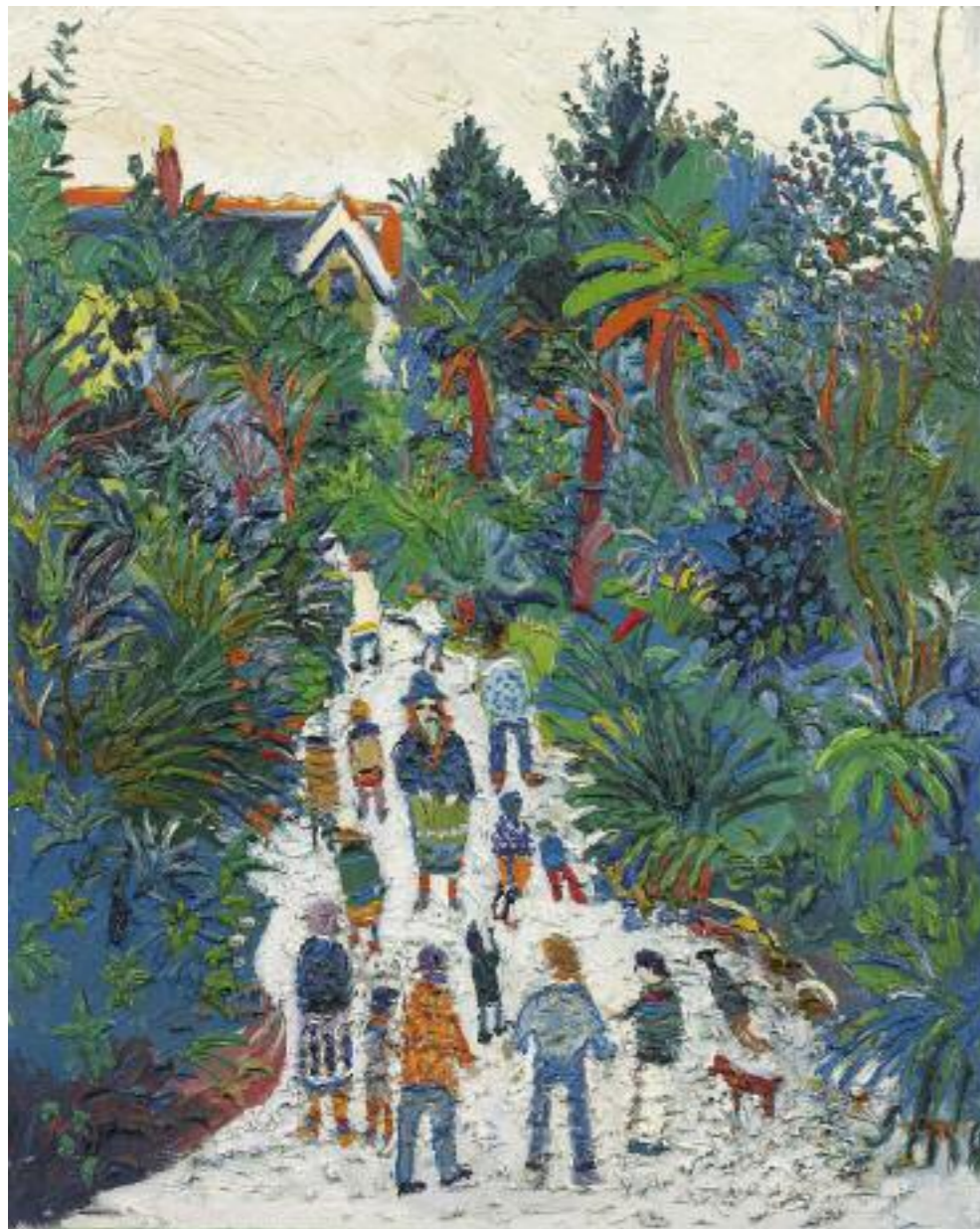
Stonechair Lane, Sennen, c. 1995

oil on board
10 x 8 ins (25 x 20 cms)

Morning Salutations, c. 1990

oil on board
16 x 20 ins (40.5 x 51 cms)



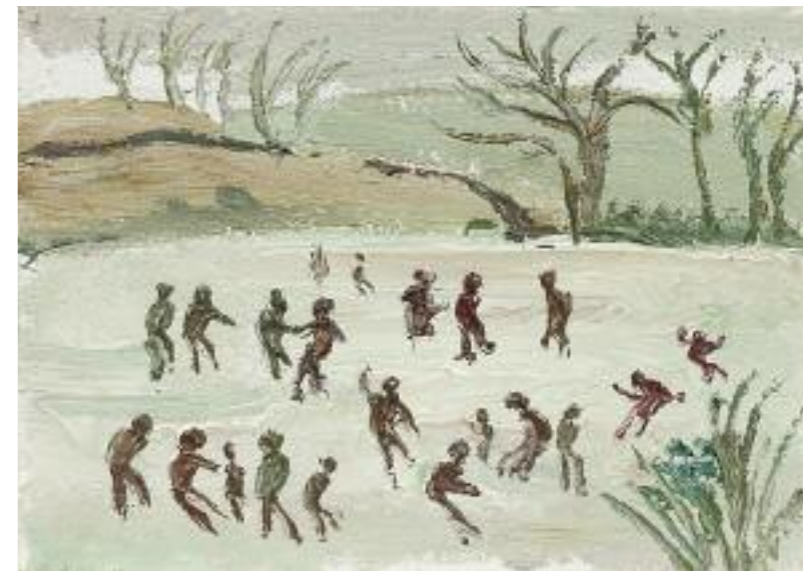


People up a Path, c. 1990

oil on canvas
30 x 24 ins (76 x 61 cms)

Skaters, c. 1980

oil on canvas
5 x 7 ins (13 x 18 cms)





Morrab Gardens, Penzance, c. 1978

oil on board
15¾ x 17 ins (40 x 43 cms)

My Cottage, Fowey (White), c. 2007

oil on canvas
28¾ x 23¾ ins (73 x 60 cms)



View to the Sea, c. 1995

oil on canvas

24 x 30 ins (61 x 76 cms)



The exhibition coincides with *Different Ways of Seeing: Pearce, Gillchrist and Yates*, Penlee House Museum and Art Gallery, Cornwall,
17 September - 12 November 2011

The Estate of Fred Yates is represented by John Martin Gallery
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