

## Re-generating Painting.

In February 2011, Graeme Harris and Evan Woodruffe were invited to visit the highly-regarded artist Michael Shepherd at his Onehunga house and studio. Designed by architect Nicholas Stevens, the stylish but utilitarian building has superb views across the Manukau Harbour, and is surrounded by Michael's other passion of rare native flora & fauna.

In the studio were many new works, conveying the freshness and vitality of an artist who is full of a new enthusiasm for his materials. Evan commented on how physically and mentally alive he looked.

"You're not the only one to tell me so!" he said.

The other story doing the rounds is that Michael, an expert in 17<sup>th</sup> Century Dutch painting who's studied at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, has put away his oilpaints for his new found love of Golden Acrylics.

He gestured to the works on the walls.

"Try to spot the acrylics from the oils," Michael laughed. "Yes, it's true – my oils are in the cupboard, and I don't know if they're coming out again.

"I've been a habitual oilpainter since 1969 – 70, but it's been harder to make it viable economically and from the point of view of my health, and quite frankly I don't see why in this modern age one should struggle with its drawbacks. Discovering Golden Acrylics has been a major breakthrough for my work.

"It's a thing of its own. I enjoy it for its' own sake. I get the finish to look like oil to confuse the viewer!"

"What do you say to people who say the pigmentation and brilliance of oilcolour is richer?" asked Graeme.

"They haven't used it properly! Look, the quality of Golden is superb. I'm astounded they get material to do this. There is a perception that oil is the violin, but can you really tell which of these paintings is done in acrylic or oil?"

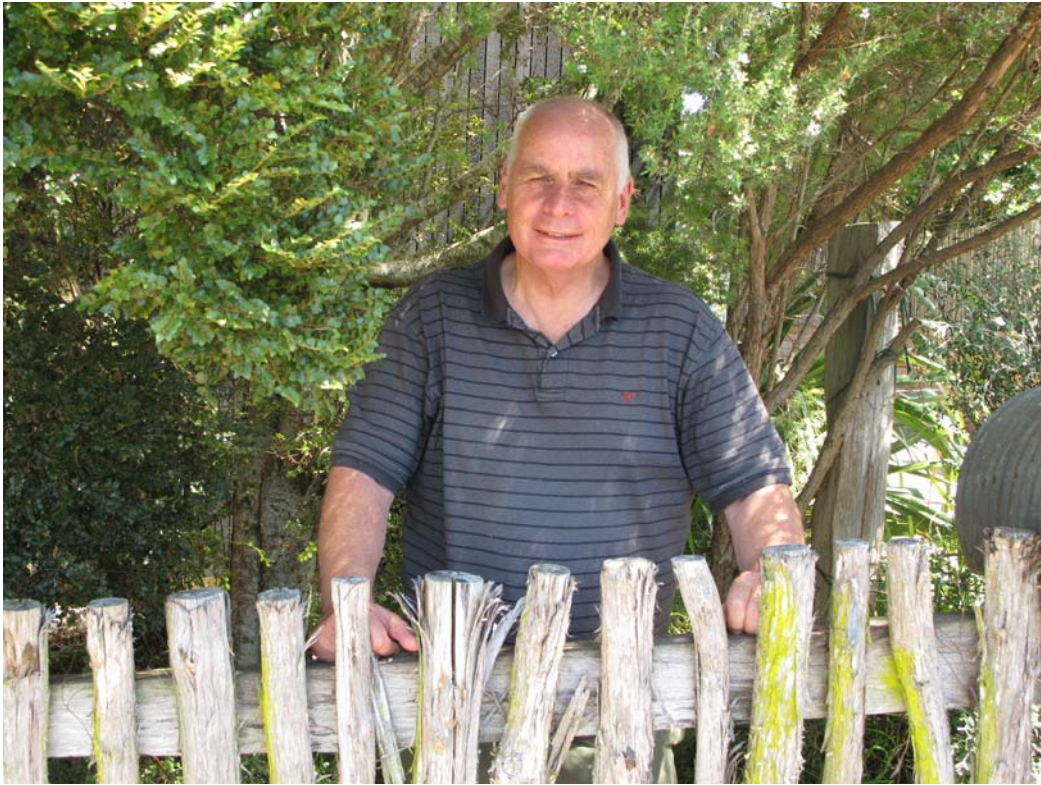
Michael brings out a recent painting of a tagged farm building which one would swear is produced using a tonal build up of oilcolour glazes. It was created with Golden Heavy Body and Open acrylics.

"This painting I completed in 4 days and it has about 30 layers on it," he said, pointing to an area of the painting. "This effect is very difficult to achieve in oilcolour.

"The Heavy Body and Open acrylics are both wonderful; it's an entire system – some are fast drying, some slow, you have the choice, and they're all intermixable. I can demonstrate a classical way of making a painting." He shows a series of small paintings made using traditional oilpainting techniques. "I can produce a turps-wash effect without the risks to the paint film, let alone one's health. Here I've used

Golden Fluid Acrylic to get the effect, and here Heavy Body gives me both wash and body colour. It adapts into oilpainting routines but in just one day! It's easy to adjust and finish, unlike oil, where the planning stage is vital.

"With oilpainting the structure of a work is so important, it took me a while to change my thinking. It was something you said, Evan – "Don't think structure, think final effect." The first painting I did using it, I wasn't that fussed. The second – I thought I could have something here. By the third, I was sold."



Michael Shepherd's avid interest in native flora & fauna often finds its way out of his garden and into his paintings.

Michael is brimming full of ideas and shows his guests through two separate suites of work that he's been creating over the last few months.

"My job as an artist is to put a top quality idea out. What is the best way through, the shortest way to achieve one's vision? I've made nearly 20 works this Summer using Golden Acrylics, whereas I'd make just 5 or 6 a year with oilcolours. I feel strings pulling me out of bed each morning, knowing I can realise an idea that day, finish a painting in 2 ½ hours, 2 days... you don't need a studio, you can do it on the deck, in the living room! There's no preparation. It should be transforming painting.

"I saw Anselm Kiefer's work in Melbourne – it's monumental. And it's all saturated with acrylic polymer. It really brought home to me the possibilities of the medium.

"I see the Golden Acrylics as a way of re-generating painting. They take the pressure off the artist. For an artist, the important thing is, what is the painting about? What do you want it to say? It's about how to get to that very quickly.

"A lot of people are put off painting when their materials fail them, and it's usually because they are unaware that they're using them incorrectly. I have frantic calls from artists who have got in a pickle, and when I see what they're doing, I say – you can't use that to extend your colour, don't you know how to look after your brush? But if they're disappointed with the process, they might give it up. "

"We do put a lot of time & effort into educating people into proper use of materials, though sometimes they just think Oh you're trying to sell us stuff," said Evan. "Yes we are, but the right stuff with the right process. The wonderful thing about Golden Acrylics is that there is virtually no wrong way of doing things. It doesn't matter, for example, if you put Burnt Umber over Titanium White. "

"Yes, that's right – nothing is going to be a mistake. For example, Zinc White is a poor drier in oils and it embrittles, but in acrylics there are no problems at all with it. Instead of making a beginner's mind boggle with do's and don'ts, with this acrylic system they can just get on with painting."

"Golden were the first to develop Zinc White as an acrylic colour," said Evan. "I can see you've enjoyed using it in these paintings – in this one you've done of the skulls, in just one day, it has the qualities of a Goya."

"You know the Goya painting, one of his last, with the old man on crutches called 'I'm still learning'? Well, that's a bit like me; I'm not too old to learn! Golden has changed my life. I love this technology! A single water molecule, it's so simple."

"Michael, we'd love you to do a talk for our customers! They would love to hear how Golden Acrylics can be used from a classically-trained point of view. Is this something you could do for us?" asked Graeme.

"I've only been using Golden for eight months," replied Michael, "I'd like to think by the end of a year I'd have a good handle on them."

Watch this space!