

Ray Richardson is essentially a London painter and a painter of London.

Other homegrown artists have anchored themselves here; Hogarth and Blake were moved by its people, Constable and Turner thrilled by its views. This place was once the centre of the world and the world came to witness London's pomp; Canaletto, Pissarro, Whistler and Monet took in its panoramas and made them permanent. London was then a grand subject for a painting, the city posed confidently and sat still for its portraits. But success brought with it the crowds and the grandeur became harder to find.

Derain was sent to London by his dealer in 1906 but didn't take to the place. His desire for serenity was disturbed by the throng: his paintings seem rattled by all the activity. London had become fidgety, incapable of staying put.

Sickert delighted in the seediness of the city. He settled into the stalls of the Music Hall or headed up the stairs to the first floor back room to engage with its domestic dramas and desires. If London's sights are seen at all in his work they are seen through the grubby windows of these shabby rooms.

In the second half of the 20th century, artists recorded the recovery and reconstruction after the war and then revealed the dramatic boom in the amount of cars, people and colour.

London changes as its people change but each population leaves its mark, fertilising the ground for future generations but one constant remains... this city has always been inherently glamorous.

That glamour shines from Ray Richardson's work. There is nothing that places these pictures geographically, no landmarks or famous sights but these are unmistakably London paintings. What makes them so is their magnetism, their cool, their star quality and the whiff of danger.

London these days is a fancier place. As the prices rise the populations that made areas like Brixton, Brick Lane, Deptford and Stepney distinct in the 20th century are losing their character. Many Londoners have cashed in their chips and moved out... but like Ray Richardson's marvellously pugnacious sparrows, they might now live in Kent, Essex or even Spain but they are still essentially Londoners and, like many of the characters in his paintings, you wouldn't want to get on their bad side.

This is not the London of Knightsbridge or Mayfair but it is packed with personality and style. Everyone takes pride in their appearance, out for the day in their classic suits and cars, even in the gym the training boxers look sharp. Richardson wields glamorous flourishes from the movies and television as well as art history, mixing wide shots, closeups and impossible angles, sometimes on a single canvas.

Over recent years a star has emerged in Richardson's work, Brian the English Bull Terrier ("Wee Bri"). This dog is no bit part player, he has a wide range; from Everyman on the daily commute to Hero leaping gas-holders in a single bound, "Wee Bri" seems ubiquitous... making his mark but staying aloof. This detachment is important, paintings are not just descriptions they are also experiments, trying to make sense of the world and to find the artist's place in it. I see Ray Richardson everywhere in his work, some times as a straightforward self-portrait at others as park footballer, confident urban casual and, not least, as an English Bull Terrier.

These pictures are not just surface, they have substance. Though they might appear as broad colourful public displays, the moments described seem more compassionate than the wide shots of Constable or Monet; they remind one more of the intimate closeups of Sickert and Hogarth. Ray Richardson's paintings engage in a similar way, they freeze a moment from these stories we will never know... the visual equivalent of eavesdropping on a private conversation... looking for clues.

Be it walking the dog, a day trip to the coast, crossing the road, taking the tube or having a pint; Richardson takes the seemingly commonplace and fills it with the essential glamour of London.