

Oil on water

As a young boy watching ships steaming up and down the River Mersey, Robert Lloyd could hardly have believed his childhood obsession would lead to a career as a world renowned artist and cracking jokes with the Queen as she unveiled one of his paintings.

Yet, more than three decades on, Lloyd has achieved the improbable as the most prolific marine artist in Europe, known for the technical accuracy of his paintings of ships. A stunning collection of his work has been released in a book, *All at Sea, The Maritime Art of Robert G Lloyd*, which showcases his intricate paintings along with informed text. Those paintings range from Cunard and P&O ships, coasters, ferries and tankers to unlikely subjects such as oil rigs, dredgers and pilot boats, and he is an acknowledged expert at producing atmospheric views of ships from plans before they are even constructed.

Now 43, Lloyd's remarkable story began growing up in the port city of Liverpool in northwest England, where he became inspired to paint as a child. He said: "I remember reading a Ladybird book entitled *Ships and the Sea* and looking at these small paintings. I was in awe of the artist's ability to depict the ships with such accuracy." His boyhood passion, forged by the ships sailing in and out of Liverpool docks, initially tempted him as a teenager to enrol as an officer cadet with Blue Star line. But the course of his life took a different turn after teachers spotted his artistic talents and persuaded the young Lloyd to aim for a career in oils rather than sea water. He followed a course to art college and, from there, into graphic design with an advertising agency.

Yet, all the time, his passion for ships remained and he continued to paint them



for fun in his spare time. Then his big break came when P&O Ferries heard of the young new talent and asked him to paint one of its new ferries, *Pride of Portsmouth*. The company was so happy with the result it commissioned further paintings and thus began Lloyd's career as a fulltime marine artist. Now he paints both at home or on board one of his subjects.

Lloyd's typical working day starts at 8am and he finishes at 6.30pm. He usually completes one painting a week, although larger works can take weeks to finish. Inspiration comes from the effects of skies and sunlight, so he carries a camera most of the time. "One morning I may be painting a storm and the next a tropical sunset," he

comments in the beautifully illustrated book. "I would never describe it as just a job. It is at the very least a vocation." Usually he paints in oils, for the level of detail and colour they offer that cannot be achieved with other media. A particular skill he has mastered is the crucial matter of painting perfectly life-like waves.

He used to paint on stretched canvases, although now mostly paints on specially produced canvas boards, which are immensely strong. Because most of his paintings are for customers overseas, the extra strength cuts down the risk of damage during transport. Marine artists *per se* are quite rare. It is a small, niche world whose occupants know each other personally.

"Generally we all have different styles. Some concentrate purely on one aspect of marine art such as the classic liners or sailing yachts," Lloyd commented, adding: "I also very much enjoy all aspects of the shipping world from offshore support vessels to bulk carriers; oil tankers to the classic cargo ships and great liners. Each has its own charm and fascination."

His meticulously high standard keeps customers coming back. Their number includes an illustrious list of diverse shipping players. He has a typical pattern when working on a commission. Following the brief, he produces a pencil sketch to show how the finished painting will look. The customer then has the opportunity to make any comments or corrections before the painting is started. Once it is completed it is professionally photographed and a proof supplied. "Only after this is approved is the painting delivered, ensuring what I hope is complete customer satisfaction," said Lloyd, ever the perfectionist. He has never had a painting rejected. Many customers have come back year after year, since day one.

Because of high demand, he regularly has several paintings 'on the go'. Many customers look to him to illustrate Christmas cards and calendars, he said. Previous experience

'One morning I may be painting a storm and the next a tropical sunset. I would never describe it as just a job, it is at the very least a vocation'
Robert Lloyd

as a commercial artist within a marketing environment means he has the expertise in specifying print and an understanding of printer requirements. The perfectionist streak is again clear when he describes how this enables him to control the finished product and maintain a high standard. "I have a website but that is really just to show what I do and how I go about it. It is not really advertising. Satisfied customers and word of mouth recommendation is worth more than any advertising."

When his painting of the *QE2* was unveiled by the Queen in 2008, Lloyd admitted, he was somewhat nervous but found her very friendly.

"I complete every painting I do with a small trademark that is virtually undetectable and takes the form of a monkey. I never tell anyone where it is but somehow she found out and asked me where it was. I said: 'I'm terribly sorry but I can't tell you.' She looked at me for a moment that seemed like an eternity then said: 'I understand. But you know in times gone by you would have gone to the Tower for that!'"

All at Sea, The Maritime Art of Robert G Lloyd, is published by Ferry Publications Price £19.50 plus postage and packing

► For more information:

E-mail: ferrypubs@manx.net
Website: www.ferrypubs.co.uk
Robert Lloyd's website is



IMO plaudits

The IMO recently hosted an exhibition of Robert Lloyd's work, and in the book's foreword Efthimos Mitropoulos, secretary-general of the IMO,

says: "The phrase 'all at sea' is used to describe someone who is directionless, vague and generally lost. Yet the precision and clarity of Robert's work

and the assurance of his touch reveal quite clearly that here is an artist who understands exactly where he is going and how he is going to get there.

Robert's paintings are truly inspirational and this volume will grace and enrich the bookshelves of anyone fortunate enough to possess a copy."