

Creative Endeavour - 1968 to 1983

*By Rob Munday*



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### Childhood inspiration

I was born in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, but grew up in the small coastal village of Caister-on-Sea on the East Norfolk coast, cradled between the restless slate-grey North Sea on one side, and the hushed green Norfolk Broads on the other - a maze of rivers, lakes, reed beds and windmills, famously name-checked by David Bowie's 1971 song *'Life on Mars'*.

As a child, only a row sand dunes, spiked by marram grass, separated my mother's modest three-bedroom bungalow, 8 Marram Drive, from a magnificent beach that stretched for miles in both directions. On storm-torn winter nights, I would lie awake listening to the waves crashing on the shore. It was a magical place of perpetual flux, of light and energy, from sunsets that painted the sky in molten colour to lightning storms that danced across the sea.



*The beach near my home at Caister-on-Sea.*



*Windmill on the Norfolk Broads.*

I wandered for hours with my dog Luckee along wind-swept cliffs in winter, watching gulls surf the turbulent air, and through fields of bracken and gorse in summer, where skylarks held their lofty vigil in song. I would regularly sail and fish on Ormesby Broad, catching perch and pike, and spend languid summer holidays in Cambridgeshire's Wicken, my mother's ancestral home, exploring its ancient fenland in search of swallowtail butterflies. Of particular fascination was Wicken Fen's Fenman's Cottage - a dim, time-stilled museum, its shelves crowded with collections of pinned butterflies and taxidermy, for which I was entrusted the key, free to explore it alone. What's more, Anthony Day, a distant relative and an artist of some repute, lived at Mangle Cottage overlooking the village pond. He exhibited at the Royal Academy of Art in London and painted the Fens almost exclusively *en plein air*. My mother and I would always call on him, and I would marvel at his landscapes.



*Footbridge, Sunset, 1991, by Anthony Day  
A small footbridge that I fished from as a child.*



*Wicken Fen's Fenman's Cottage and Museum*

My childhood became a natural-history museum in motion. I collected butterflies, shells, animal skeletons, plants, fossils, and rocks with an obsessive enthusiasm, and kept as many living creatures in our garden and conservatory as my mother would allow. I built two bird aviaries and a pond, rescued oil-soaked guillemots from the beach, caught sand lizards and slow-worms, bred exotic silk moths, and grew plants of every kind. One such plant, a bird of paradise (*Strelitzia reginae*) that I raised from seed when I was only ten, still graces my conservatory in southwest France, fifty-eight years on.

But merely collecting and keeping these natural wonders was not enough. I needed to write about them, draw them, paint them, and later photograph them, as though to capture the essence of each entity before it slipped away.

### *My dog Luckee*

Other than the innate childhood urge to draw and paint, two companies indirectly influenced my early skills and appreciation of art. The first was Jarrold & Sons in Great Yarmouth, the iconic Norfolk publisher and bookseller, where my mother regularly bought me books on art and animals in equal measure. The other was Hartmann Fibre, a moulded-fibre packaging company that specialised in turning waste paper into egg cartons, and where my father, Reginald Robert Munday, 'Reggie' to his friends, worked as a print foreman. Mountains of discarded books, magazines and newspapers passed along Hartmann's conveyor belts each day, destined to be pulped into a wet fibre slurry. Every so often he would rescue a book before it disappeared into the shredder and bring it home for me.

One evening, when I was eight or nine years old, he arrived home with an entire set of books on famous artists. I remember especially the volumes on Titian, Gainsborough and J. M. W. Turner, and how I marvelled at the power and fidelity of their paintings. Turner captivated me at once. His canvases seemed to mirror my own experience growing up, and I would later discover that he had painted Great Yarmouth itself, its turbulent sea, its glorious sunsets, and the very elements that had shaped my childhood. Those rescued books were my first true introduction to fine art, and, unsurprisingly, Turner became my favourite artist.



*Great Yarmouth Harbour by J. M. W. Turner.*



*Yarmouth Sands by J. M. W. Turner*

My fascination with the natural world, and later with science and technology, was matched only by my love of art, colour and light. Over time, the urge to represent nature, and the very perception of reality itself, through visual means became my overriding ambition.

### **Oil painting classes from age ten**

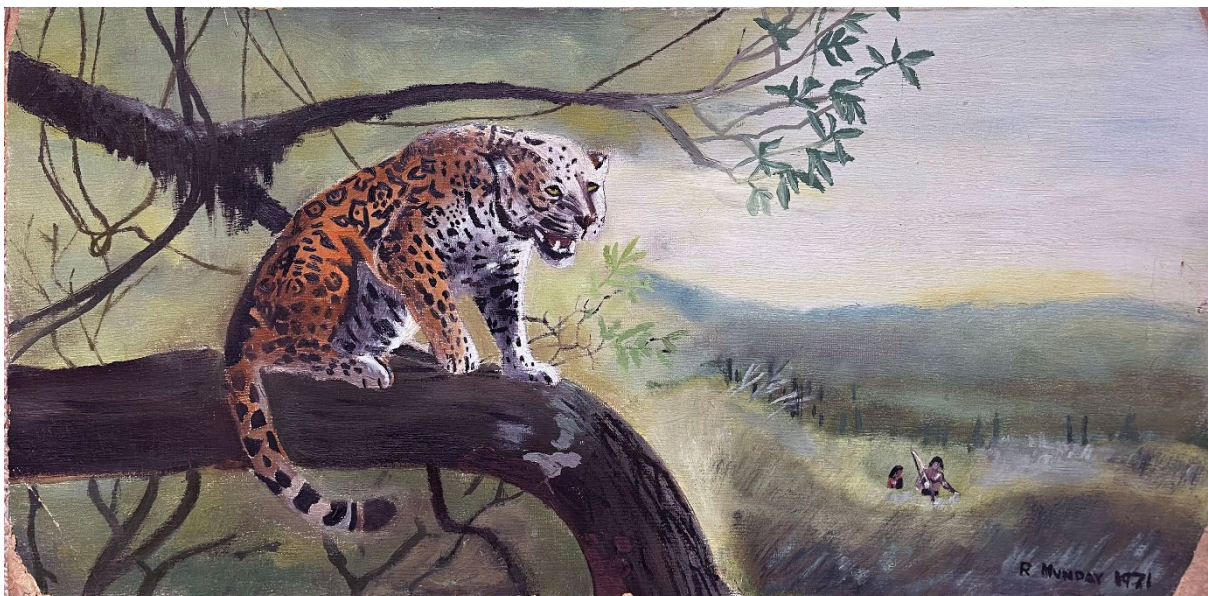
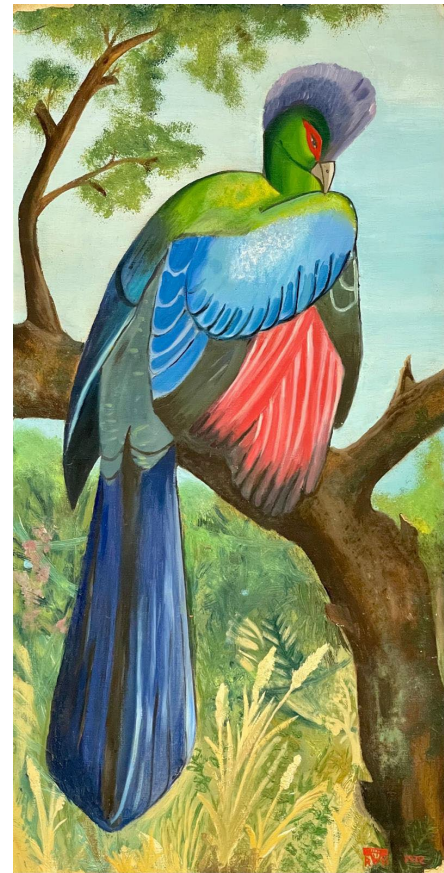
At the age of ten, my mother enrolled me in a private oil-painting class in Great Yarmouth. The class was taught by Mrs Butler, a widow who lived just around the corner from the house where I was born in Salisbury Road. Every Saturday afternoon I travelled alone on the turquoise-coloured number 16 bus from my home in Caister to Great Yarmouth, a five-mile journey I made in all weathers, summer and winter alike. I attended the class with Paul, another student my age. Mrs Butler taught from her dining room in a house full of cats that regularly urinated and defecated on the floor. Paul and I would sit on either side of her dining table for several hours each week, enveloped in equal measure by the smell of oil paint and cat urine, painting still lifes and copying postcards and pictures from books. Mrs Butler also taught at Blundeston Prison in Suffolk and later at Caister-on-Sea Secondary Modern School.

My very first oil painting, dated 1968, was a still life that Mrs Butler had arranged on an adjoining table at our first class. I'm especially fond of the way the red light refracts through the wine bottle onto the background. After that introduction, my interests quickly declared themselves: almost everything I painted from then on was either an animal or a landscape, or both.



*Still Life, 1968, aged 10.*

Scores of other paintings followed, mostly copied from birthday cards, Brooke Bond tea cards, and the many animal books that my mother had given me.



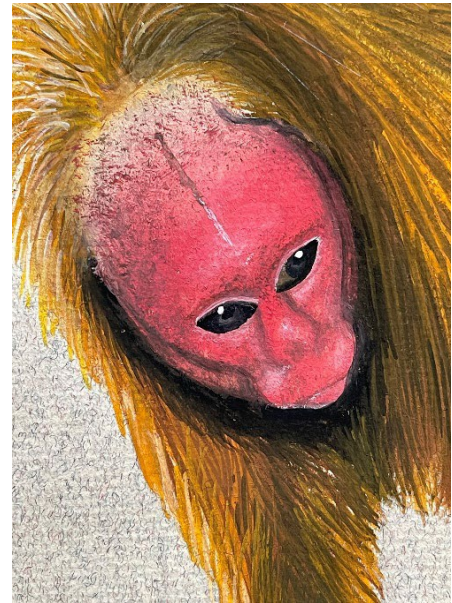
*Top left: Shell Ducks over a Caister Beach, 1968, aged 10.  
Top Right: Purple Crested Turaco, 1972, aged 14 (from a Brooke Bond Tea Card set - Tropical Birds).  
Bottom: Jaguar: 1971, aged 13.*

Oil painting was soon followed by pencil, charcoal, pastel and scratch drawings, and by watercolour and gouache paintings. It was also around this time that a small but telling detail began to appear at the bottom of my drawings and paintings: an insignia. One Saturday afternoon, Mrs Butler suggested that Paul and I design our own personal marks. As my initials spell the word *RAM*, the idea came easily, and my ram's-head logo, which I still use today, was born.

*NB: I had always thought it a delightful coincidence that the road I lived on, Marram Drive, named after the marram grass found growing on the dunes, spelled my initials both forwards and backwards.*



*Otter, Cat, and Lion, pencil, pastel, and scratch drawings, 1973, aged 15.*



Red Ukari, gouache painting, circa 1973.

During my teens, I was fortunate to see an exhibition in Great Yarmouth of the work of David Shepherd, the British artist and one of the world's most outspoken conservationists. His now-famous animal paintings mesmerised me, and I visited the exhibition several times. Determined to emulate his work, I went home, took out my gouache paints, and began painting a red uakari monkey that very same day. I believe it was my first serious attempt at a watercolour or gouache painting.

Years later, I was honoured with the opportunity to create a holographic portrait of David Shepherd, but he sadly passed away before the work could begin

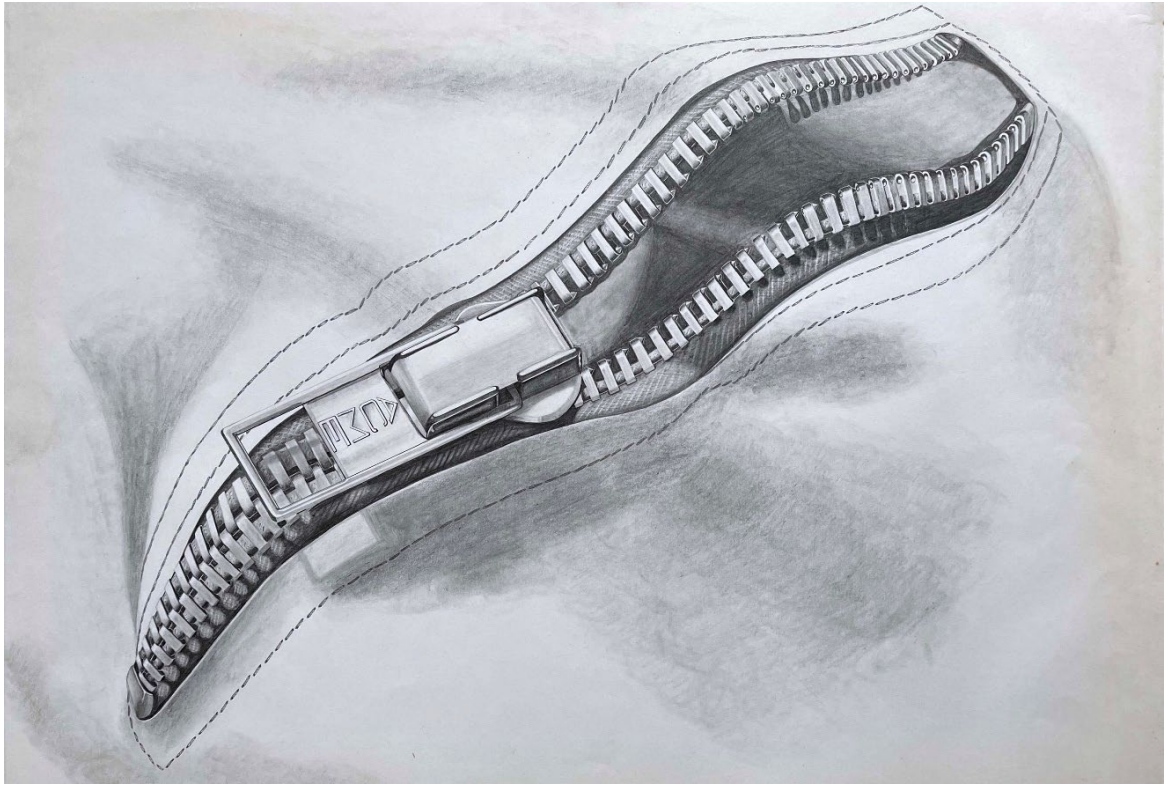
## Caister-on-Sea Secondary Modern School

Having been sent to oil-painting classes from the age of ten, and drawing and painting constantly in my own time, I was bound to shine in the art class at school. This, however, occasionally landed me in trouble with my art teacher, David Cooper. On one occasion, I rather arrogantly told him that the task he had set, to paint a simple colour wheel, was far too easy for me. He promptly ordered me out of the classroom and sent me to spend the afternoon picking up litter in the playground.

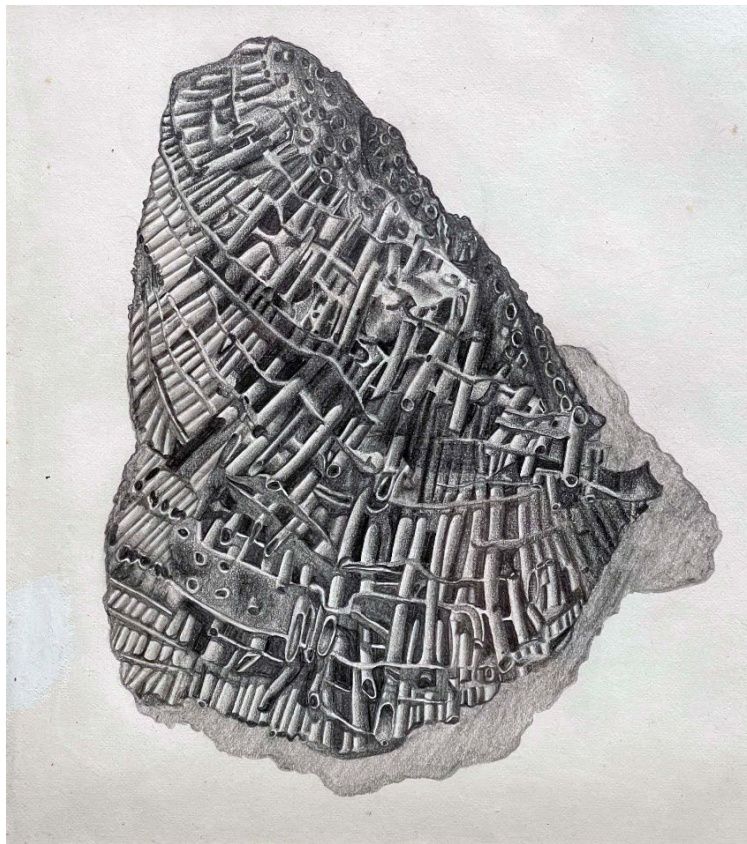
Despite this, David Cooper, along with Mrs Butler, was one of the most inspirational figures in my artistic life. Without his excellent tutelage, I might never have gone on to record the first-ever holographic/stereographic portrait of Queen Elizabeth II some thirty years later.



*Boxing Glove, soft material, pencil drawing, 1975, aged 17.*



*Zip, hard and soft materials, pencil drawing, 1975, aged 17.*



*Coral, pencil drawing, 1975, aged 17.*

Of course, scores of creative projects were conducted in the art class at school, but one stands out to me. It was a project to carve an image into lino block material and create a lino print. I remember being interested in optical effects and decided to create a moiré pattern by carving a single pattern into the block and then overprinting it at various angles in two different colours. Moiré patterns are also described as interference patterns, which, of course, are directly related to holograms and diffractive imaging. Little did I know then that I would spend my life making 'moiré' interference patterns via holography.



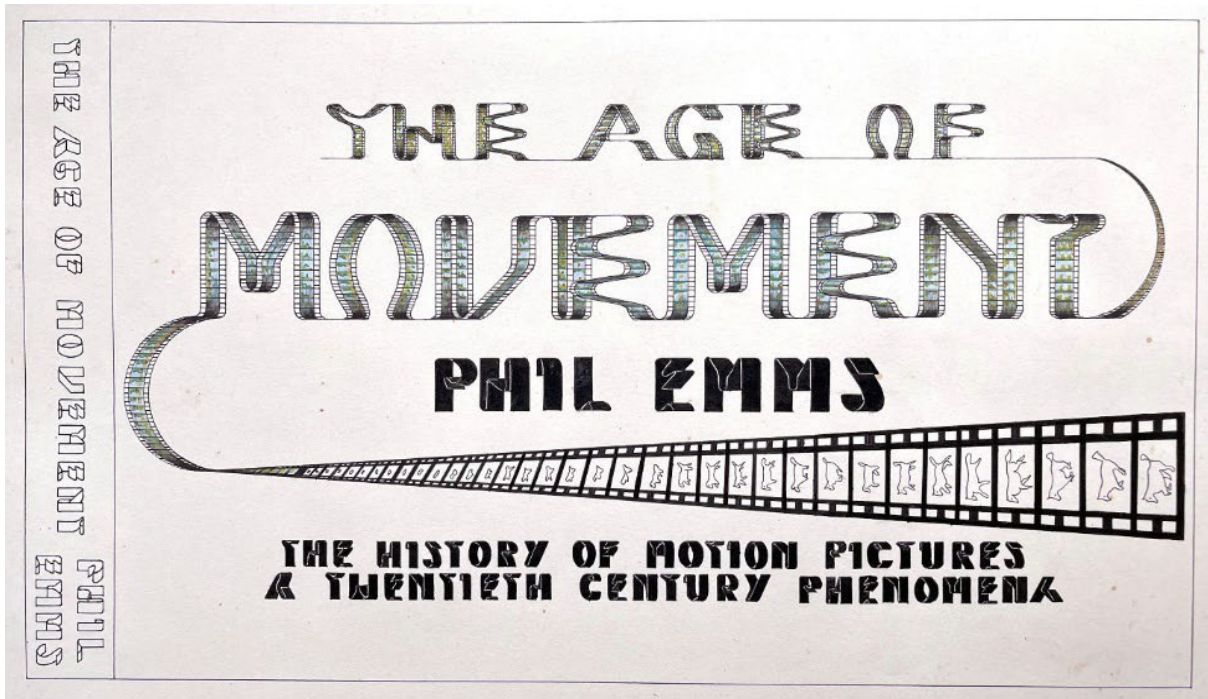
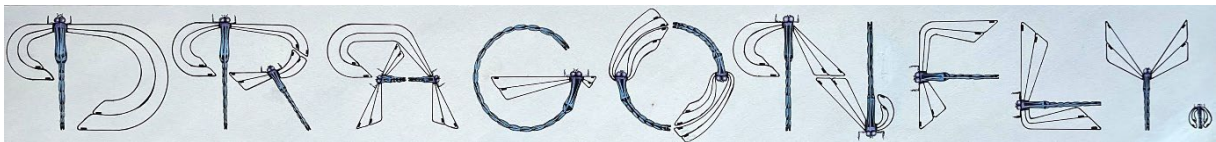
*A hand-carved lithographic printed image of a moiré pattern, 1975, aged 17.*

While still attending Caister Secondary Modern School and with the help and support of my art teacher, David Cooper, I earned an A-Level in Art with Grade A two years early, along with eleven O-Levels, by taking art evening classes.

**Great Yarmouth College of Art and Design**



After leaving school, my first choice was to enrol for a one-year Foundation course and gain a further art A-Level at Great Yarmouth College of Art and Design. I graduated from the Foundation course and gained another A-Level with Grade A in Lettering and Calligraphy in 1976.



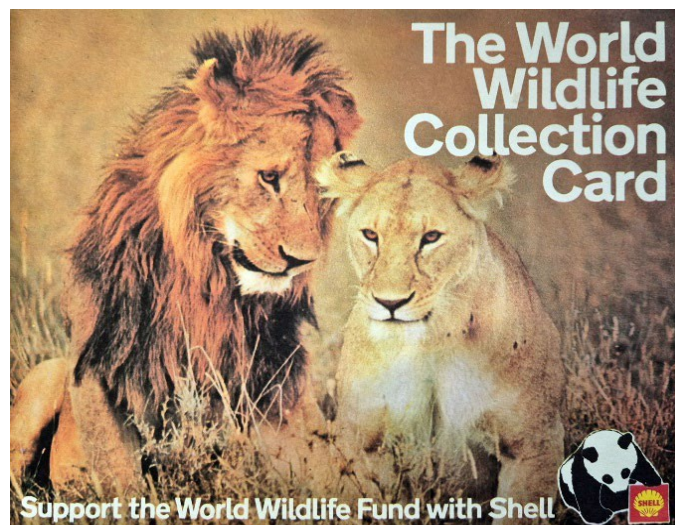
*Two A-Level Lettering and Calligraphy projects conducted in 1976, aged 18.*

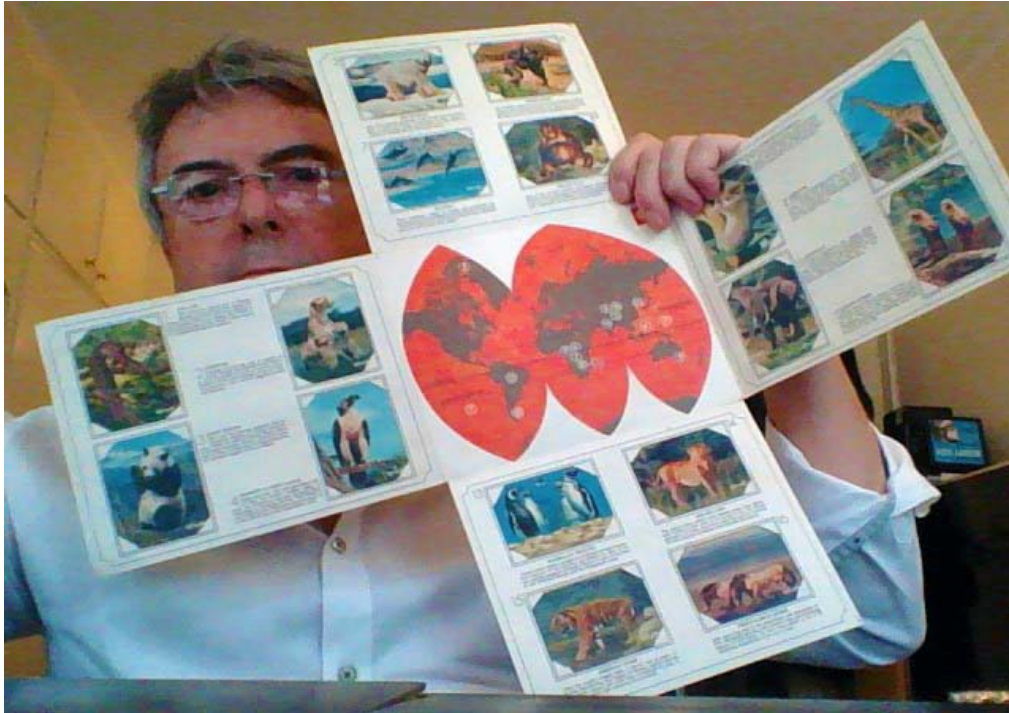


*A Naturalist's Desk, ceramic glazed sculpture, 1976, aged 18.*

### 3D Imaging inspiration

From an early age, I was fascinated by 3D stereoscopic imaging and photography, and in the late 1970s I shot many stereoscopic photographs using my first 35mm SLR camera, a Praktica L. My inspiration to do so almost certainly came from a collection of 3D lenticular cards given away as a promotion with purchases of petrol from Shell garages in 1975. The promotion supported the World Wildlife Fund, and the cards depicted endangered species. At that time, my father drove a taxi and acquired many of them, which he would bring home for my collection. In addition, 3D imaging appealed profoundly to my love of both art and science, and to my enduring desire to unite the two.





*My WWF/Shell collection of 3D lenticular animal cards.*

### **Great Yarmouth College of Further Education**

After graduating from Great Yarmouth College of Art's Foundation course, I faced a dilemma. I was not overly enamoured by the idea of signing up for a Graphic Design degree, which seemed to me to be far too commercial in nature. Throughout my childhood and school years, I had been equally interested in science and technology, and in particular zoology, and so, after much deliberation, I decided to give the second love of my life a chance. I moved across town to the Great Yarmouth College of Further Education to study for yet more A-Levels, this time in the sciences. My thought was that, if I were to obtain qualifications in both the arts and the sciences, then I would be better placed to find a career that combined both disciplines. I graduated three years later, in 1979, with four more A-Levels, in Biology, Chemistry, Pure Mathematics, and Statistics. I had also studied Physics, but found taking five A-Levels at the same time difficult.

Upon graduation, I needed to decide on the next step of my journey. Determined to combine both art and science, the only course that I could find, amongst the pages of the multitude of further education handbooks in the college library, was a little-known diploma course in Wildlife Photography and Illustration, based in Dyfed College of Art, Carmarthenshire, South Wales. I duly set forth to Wales, with my mother, in my orange Mini Clubman to attend an interview.

Upon arriving, I was somewhat surprised to find that the course was based in a semi-detached house. It was not what I was looking for. I returned to Great Yarmouth disappointed, thinking that I was unlikely to find a discipline that combined both art and science. Having already explored an art career, I opted to go the science route, telling myself that I could continue to draw and paint in my spare time. I thus applied to study for a BSc degree in Zoology at Bath University. At the interview, I proposed researching a method to artificially inseminate rare and endangered species of butterflies, and in particular Queen Victoria's birdwing from Papua New Guinea, the rarest as well as the largest butterfly in the world, as a method of ensuring their survival (I had also been a keen entomologist from a young age). Whatever the merit of this idea, it gained me a place on the course.

I returned to the College of Further Education in Great Yarmouth to attend various events before leaving for Bath and found myself waiting in the college library for my best friend Steve Ward. He was late, and so I started thumbing through a Polytechnic handbook that I hadn't seen before. The book accidentally fell open on a page that described a brand-new, four-year honours degree, commencing that autumn, entitled BA(Hons) Scientific and Technical Graphics. It was based at Cornwall Technical College, Plymouth Polytechnic (now Plymouth University), and Plymouth College of Art. The degree specialised in the fledgling fields of computer graphics, television, and video, together with the more traditional subjects of photography, graphic design, and illustration. It seemed the perfect course for me, combining art, science, and technology. I immediately applied and was extremely fortunate to be offered one of only fourteen places in the first-year group of the first and only course of its kind outside of the USA. Forsaking my Zoology degree only a couple of weeks before it was due to start, I drove to Cornwall and began the most exciting and rewarding four years of my life.

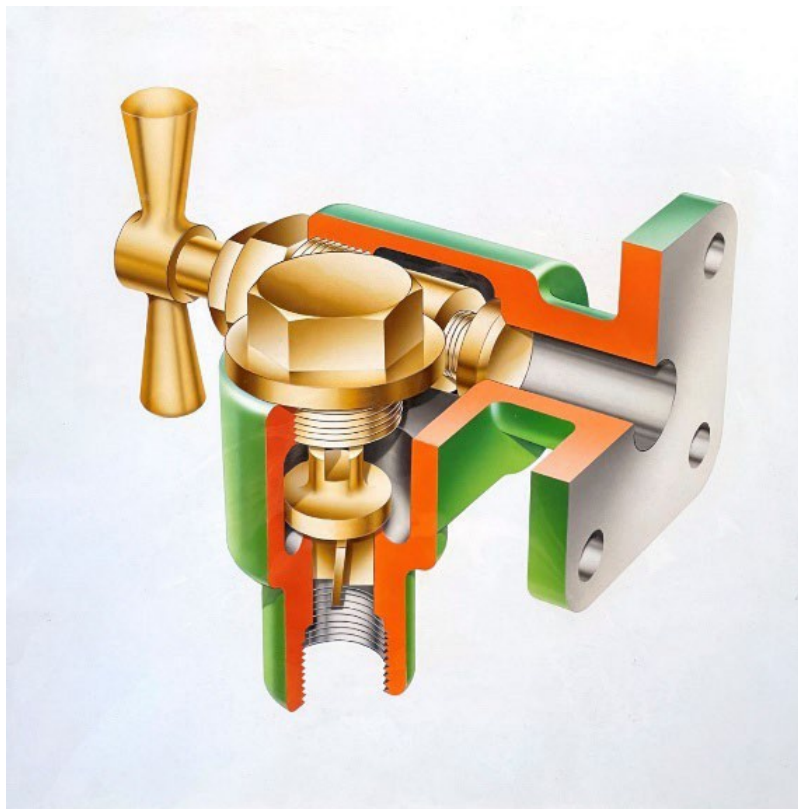
### **Cornwall Technical College, Plymouth Polytechnic, and Plymouth College of Art.**

The very first project we were tasked with, on the very first day of the course, was to go to the college greenhouse and draw a plant. I was frankly worried, as I had done little, if any, drawing over the prior three years whilst studying for my science A-Levels. I chose a tomato plant, and, frankly, now feel that it is one of my best drawings.

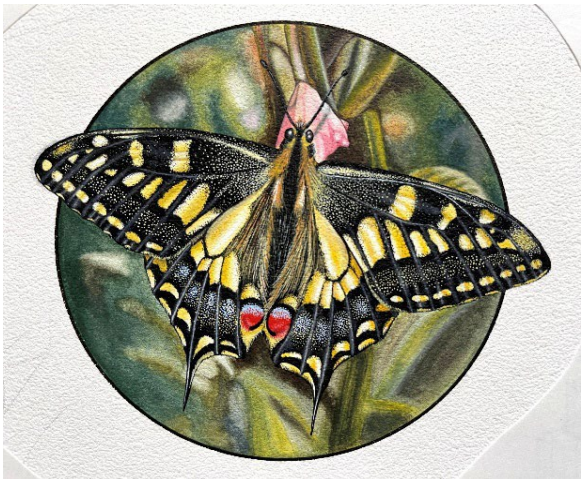


*Tomatoes, pencil drawing, 1979.*

*Yacht, my first pen technical illustration, 1979.*



*Valve, my first air-brush technical illustration, 1979.*



*Top left: Shell, pen and ink stippling, 1980  
Top right: Shell, gouache painting, 1980.*

*Bottom left: Swallowtail Butterfly, miniature gouache wildlife book illustration, 1981 (close-up).  
Bottom right: Caracara, unfinished miniature gouache wildlife book illustration, 1981 (close-up).*



*A cell of a stop-frame animation made during the first year, showing the class of 1979-1982.*

In 1981, while studying for my degree, I travelled to London on a college trip and saw my first hologram. It was another unexpected but extremely fortunate moment in my life. I was walking down Great Newport Street, unaware that a photography gallery was there, when a glint of light caught my eye. I turned to find the first-ever international exhibition of creative holography held in the UK, called Light Years Ahead, at The Photographers' Gallery. It was, of course, a revelation. I was mesmerized, almost frozen to the spot, and I cannot easily describe the feelings I had at that moment. There was an immediate realization, and epiphany if you like, even before entering the gallery, that I had found my destiny in holography, the perfect melding of art, science, and technology, and a brand-new and fundamental imaging medium. It was meant to be, and so I returned to the University, vowing to teach myself holography and become one of the UK's first generation of holographers. After borrowing a Helium-Neon laser from the optical fibre communications department at Plymouth Polytechnic, securing the use of Plymouth College of Arts' photographic darkroom facilities, and receiving a copy of the late, great Fed Unterseher's book, Holography Handbook, I finally created my first hologram in the spring of 1982.

It was a simple single-beam Denisyuk hologram of a ram's head belt buckle, as was popularly worn by teenagers, and me, in the 1970s, and which forms the basis of my personal insignia today.



*My first hologram - a 4 x 5-inch Denisyuk reflection hologram, 1982.*



