

Art

Crouch captures breezy cliffs, sandy paths and turf miles

Art is poetry in pictures

Preview

Michael Williams

IMAGES of Betjeman Country is an inspired idea for an art exhibition in this, the poet's centenary year.

Fact is Sir John, the best loved Poet Laureate of them all, has immortalised his northern corner of Cornwall. Travelling around it or looking at these paintings by James Crouch, you can almost hear his plummy voice:

"I know so well this turf mile,
These clumps of sea-pink
withered brown,

The breezy cliff, the awkward
stile,

The sandy path that takes me
down."

A Celt, James Crouch was born in South Wales in 1939. He was educated at Barry Grammar School and gained a scholarship to Cardiff College of Art. In 1961 he submitted the winning brochure cover for the National Eisteddfod.

An all-rounder in art, his work ranges from oils and watercolours to inks, pastels and mixed media. But here all 21 exhibits are oils, prices going from £475 to £1,350.

This group of paintings at the Chase Art Centre, Wadebridge, he says, "is the result of my fascination, over a period of nearly 40 years, with the natural wildness and unique beauty of the North Cornwall coast.

"I have concentrated on the footpaths, both marked and unmarked, on the shores, sand, hills and cliffs round the Camel Estuary and the famous St Enodoc golf course."

Sir John's poetry often contained colour and James Crouch's work here has "oil on canvas with colour and texture freely and expressively applied". There are lovely greens and blues and flashes of copper:

View of Tregirls, Walk Over Dunes to Rock with View to Iron Bridge, Brambles with View to Camel Estuary and Estuary Walk



■ Brambles with view to Tregirls

along the 16th with Iron Bridge are just four of his subjects. John Betjeman once described himself as "an edge of the ocean man". This is edge of the ocean art.

Individually and collectively, these paintings are an invitation to don our walking shoes or boots and get out and about this energising coastline.

During his career, Mr Crouch worked for several years at HMP Everthorpe, a maximum security Borstal for 20-22 year-old serious

offenders.

In 1967 he and his family moved to Cornwall, where he continued to teach while exhibiting in galleries around the country. In 1972 he was appointed as the head of creative studies faculty in a large Community College where he worked until retiring – which has allowed him more time to devote to developing his art.

This is James's debut at Chase. He deserves to return.

Downstairs there is an ongoing

mixed exhibition of more than 100 paintings, sculptures and prints along with a selection of more than 150 signed limited edition prints – the whole area oozing with art and vitality.

Images of Betjeman Country at the Chase Art Centre, Tre Street, Wadebridge, runs from Friday 14 to October 28. Last opening on Oct 14 until 5.30pm. Otherwise open Monday to Friday 9.30am until 5.30pm.

Call 01208 816880 for details.

Picture by Emily White