

Introduction

Polly Devlin, 2002

When you look at Charlotte Verity's new work, Robert Frost's dictum *the best way out is always through*, springs to mind. She is a true poet who paints through to the heart and essence of her subject. Intellectually and spiritually and passionately she is linked to what she is painting. She takes tremendous risks with her subjects which, paradoxically, seem the least risky of all: the things that are at hand and at home in every sense – still lives and those least still things of all, flowers, in all their mutability. The risk lies in choosing subjects which have been vitiated into banality by repetition, in trying to overcome the clichés, the hackneyed, in finding new places in what seems tired old territory. Who can paint flowers with freshness after Manet had plundered his way in those last great works? Charlotte Verity can. She rinses it all out.

What she is painting is as much the act of looking as what she has chosen to paint. "You could say as a still life painter you don't need imagination; but imagination is to do with putting together and what's within you and what's out, elements and chance and building the picture. Another consideration is the time of year – I live in England with its wonderful changing light, changing seasons, and painting flowers is all part of that. A picture takes a season."

The dailiness of things never ceases to be a miracle under her eyes. The roses that grow in her garden; the round table in her studio, whose surface is as changeable and as profound as that river surface she used to watch from her window in Chiswick. She is minutely interested in the tiniest elements of her subjects and certain things recur in her work over and over again. These are not used to make patterns or as symbols; they are imagery after nature. There never was a less contrived painter than Charlotte Verity nor a more cunning one. She has gone through changes to get to this place of organic simplicity; "All my work derives from landscape and I think about it all the time. It's to do with imagination, the difference between fantasy and imagination."

She has enormous facility which means she can be simple. "At one level when I'm painting a rose from my garden, I'm painting particular patterns on a particular petal in a particular light at a particular time of day in a particular place. On another level I'm thinking in layers, thinking through the meaning of the rose. Painting a rose is more like painting a human face than anything else, painting a pot is like painting the human body."

These lovely lucid paintings operate on different levels – as adventurous statements and poetic inventions, seductive surfaces covering a subtext to be read as a personal language by everyone who looks at them.

“When I was a student I was taught keep it flat, keep it flat, keep true to your material, but the more I looked the more I realised that the fantastic thing about painting is you can go through it, you can go so far through it, back and back and back.” The best way out is always through.