HAMISH BLAKELY

MY FAVOURITE five

Have you ever wondered what makes an artist tick? In this feature for Fine Art Collector we get up close and personal with some of your favourite artists. Here, renowned figurative artist Hamish Blakely reflects on what brings joy to his life.

Songs

'SALUT, DEMEURE' SUNG BY PAVAROTTI The most astounding tenor of all time in my book. I grew up listening to him and was lucky enough to take my wife Gail to see him in his last performance in the UK in 2003. This aria will pin your ears to the back of your head.

'LIBERTANGO' BY ASTOR PIAZZOLA Intoxicating Tango at its best. This, to me, expresses the spirit of Gail. It also makes me think I can tango myself and after enough wine, I really think I can!

'CHI IL BEL SOGNO DI DORETTA' SUNG BY ANGELA GHEORGHIU This is a heart breaking beautiful aria and one of the songs played at my wedding. It stirs the souls every time I hear this and transfers all thought to that joyous moment when Gail entered the church and made her way towards me.

'SHAPE OF MY HEART' BY STING One of his best ever songs, this moves me each time I put this on. The lyrics are, on first hearing, obscure, but once you get a sense of what he's on about, the song just gets better. It plays during the closing credits of the movie 'Leon'.

'KENTUCKY AVENUE' BY TOM WAITS As previously, you have to like less than obvious lyrics and Tom is about the best at that. My brother, Cameron, introduced Gail and I to this and it is just so evocative and moving; it tells the story of two kids doing what kids do, but while we hear of their trouble-making antics, there is a sense of restlessness. One of them is wheelchair bound, but this in no way impairs them from dreaming of getting out of town - just wonderful!
Art Galleries

THE WALLACE COLLECTION
Packed with treasures and free to get in, this is worth a visit when in the centre of London. You’ll find classic masterpieces, incredible ceramics and the armour room is eye popping.

THE PRADO MUSEUM IN MADRID
I was overwhelmed with their collection and, though I can’t recall the individual Artists’ names, remembering being absolutely hypnotised by some of the paintings. The fact that some of them weren’t commonly known, made me mystified as how great some people are and remain under the radar. It wasn’t fame that mattered, it was the quality of the work.

THE POMPIDOU CENTRE
You can feel your hair move before you enter this place, the architecture is so striking. This is fitting as the extensive collection of Modern Art is unrivalled in Europe.

THE HAYWARD GALLERY
Years ago I worked here and had the privilege of seeing Dali and Picasso, amongst many others, up close day after day. The prolonged exposure taught me that the more you look, the more you see.

THE NATIONAL GALLERY
I’ve visited this more than any other gallery or museum and it never tires. I particularly enjoy the BP Portrait award when it is running. The amount of talent in one room makes it the best art competition in the country and one that should humble any painter.

Films

12 ANGRY MEN BY SIDNEY LUMET
This 1957 film is a masterclass in ensemble acting. It has been remade, but the original is untouchable. The performances are just unbeatable.

SPARTACUS
As a child, this is one of the movies I would watch over and over again. It has to be one of the most moving, majestic epics of all time and of course, the ending still makes me blubber like a gin soaked floosie. “I am Spartacus!”

THE CLOSET
This French comedy is a real tickler. With Gerard Depardieu and Daniel Auteuil, the acting is beautiful, not clownish, and the storyline is all the more believable for its seemingly unlikely premise.

ANGELS WITH DIRTY FACES
I would say the best of James Cagney. Again, with my brother, we would watch this obsessively as children and it is probably the most engrossing and original gangster movie of that era.

GONE WITH THE WIND
Tastes can shift as you get older, but this southern masterpiece holds its grip on me, no matter how many times I view it. Gail has enhanced my love for this film over the years, so much so that it only feels right to watch when we are together.


Caravaggio
The drama and uncompromising sense of reality in his paintings put the Italian master at the top, for me. Pure theatre on canvas, his highly realistic technique was made more remarkable by the bold, painterly expression of his brush and the violence of his passion.

Ilya Repin
A Russian genius, this man displayed astounding nuance and depth in his paintings. “Burlaki” is an astonishing piece and in his portraits, he could reveal the profound truth of his sitters’ personality.

Philip Jackson
This is a living artist! His sculptures are haunting and exquisite and I am so grateful that Gail, my wife, introduced me to his work, after she discovered him at the London Art Fair. I defy anyone not to be moved by this brilliant man.

Ron Mueck
Photo realism is not usually my favourite thing, but in the hands of this Australian sculptor it becomes something quite startling and unnerving. His manipulation of scale and subject demands the viewer to reconsider his/her perception of reality.

Glenn Harrington
Another living artist whose virtuoso painting skills take my breath away. His is acutely adept at depicting people in many guises, as well as producing shimmeringly beautiful landscapes.
PARIS - HOTEL COSTES This is one of the places we stayed at on our honeymoon and the hotel is simply the most romantic, evocative and dreamy small hotel I have ever been in. There is a signature scent that permeates the entire establishment and the whole experience gets under your skin. Paris is special because originally, I didn’t take to it. School and college trips sucked the life out of it for me. Gail changed my mind however - travelling really must be down to who you’re travelling with, don’t you think?

CALIFORNIA - ALL OVER From San Francisco to Los Angeles and San Diego. I loved this and it was one of the finest holidays our family ever had. I was 10 years old at the time and naturally enthusiastic about all it had to offer.

ITALY - FLORENCE AND ROME Two very different cities but two very sweet, memorable experiences. I adored the food, the opera, the restaurants and the art. What more could you ask for?

HOME I love being at home and where we live is a sanctuary. It’s not just where I paint, commonplace pootling about is just the ticket when I am here. Such is the pull of the homestead that, when not working, Gail and I balance our time between periods of blithe sociability and intervals of complete reclusiveness.

AFRICA - ZAMBIA I haven’t been yet, but I know I will fall in love with this place. The stories I have heard and the stamp it is meant to leave on your soul make this complete my list. The fact that it is Gail’s birthplace means my heart is saving a very important space for this land of poetry.

Phrases

- Get rid of anything that isn’t useful, beautiful or joyful.
- Frame every so-called disaster with these words. ‘In five years, will this matter?’
- Don’t take yourself so seriously. No one else does.
- Overprepare, then go with the flow.
- When you’ve met the girl you love, marry her.

Books

ELEVEN MINUTES BY PAULO COELHO An incredibly easy to read, wonderful novel that explores eroticism, profane and sacred love. When I read it, some of the passages and themes revealed uncanny parallels with my life with Gail. I suppose great writing induces this in the reader.

PERFUME BY PATRICK SUCKIND Weird and wonderful, this examination of one man’s desperate fight against isolation and desertion, monstrously intensified by his singular, bizarre gift, is headspinning.

TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE BY MITCH ALBOM The true story of Morrie Schwartz, a professor whose many simple, sublime lessons in life are taught to one of his students, Mitch. You are compelled to take note as they are the last lessons he will ever give.

THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE BY C.S. LEWIS Pure nostalgia! This is one of the first books I read as a child.

OF MICE AND MEN BY JOHN STEINBECK Tragic and tender, this story of two travelling ranch workers explores friendship and its veracity and longevity when pitted against the unremitting stranglehold of the Great Depression.