

# NINGBO & GUIDE

Life Culture Business



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**LIFE IN  
COLOR**  
*an interview with*  
★ RORY PERROTT ★  
★ ★ ★

**FIGHT**

**NIGHT**

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MUSEUM OF ART  
*paintings from*  
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T.T. YEN**

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JAPAN**

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# A Life of Color

An interview with Rory Perrott

Rory Perrott is many things, but one constant will always remain. It could be said that he is a resident of Ningbo, a native of Ireland, a robust coffee drinker, and an ex-chef. But none of these titles fully describe him as much as being a painter. Rory lives and works as a painter in Ningbo and has done so since 2009. From his studio in Yinzhou, he has become a valued member of the art community in Ningbo and has recently begun exhibiting in Shanghai. We caught up with Rory in Yinzhou for a sneak peek into what he makes, how he makes it, and where all of this comes from.





**Who are you and what do you do?**

My name is Rory Perrott and I am a full-time artist working here in Ningbo. I have a home studio in Yinzhou and that's where I spend most of my time.

**Can you give us a little background on yourself? Where are you from? When did your interest in art begin?**

I am from a small town in the Republic of Ireland called Cóbh, pronounced 'cove'. It's quite a historic and picturesque coastal town situated on an island in Cork harbour. I studied both Fine Art and Art Education in two separate Irish universities, one in Limerick city and the other in Cork city.

My interest in art started in my childhood. Whilst many of my friends were out in the local parks and fields chasing footballs or engaged in other sporty activities I was very often found creating pictures or comics on whatever pieces of blank paper I could get my hands on. When I was growing up there was a lot of residential development in my neighbourhood. These building sites, as well as serving as excellent climbing opportunities, provided me with copious amounts of chalk 'dry-wall' that I would use to create huge pavement art that of course never lasted long in the overly generous moisture of an Irish summer!

In recent years I came across an old photo-album in which I found some drawings done by me around the same time I was learning to write. My name was practiced here several times, sometimes with the occasional 'R' backwards. I decided to choose one of these drawings for my business card logo and other publicity materials partially because it's an example of my work but mainly because it's an image I still find fascinating.

**How do you feel about the term "being an artist"? Do you consider your occupation to be that of a painter? Does it matter to you?**

I am very comfortable with that kind of terminology. I know some people may automatically conjure up an image of some sort of crazed, provocative eccentric, slapping a fish on a table in some type of weird, naked 'performance-art'. I am glad to say that that is not me. I have always had an interest in the skilled craftsmanship of art production whatever the media. I like to think I walk the line between artist and artisan. I am not someone whose work needs to be supported by a lot of 'arty' talk, my work stands for itself and I would rather let it do the talking. I would consider myself to be a painter but it's more like a vocation than an occupation. If I was an engineer, a teacher or anything else for that matter I would still be a painter. It's more attached to my identity than a profession could ever be.

**What medium of painting do you primarily work in (oil, acrylic, etc.)? And is painting the main media you work in? Are there any others you work in as well?**

I primarily use oil paint for my finished pieces although during the initial stages I may use watercolours, gouache or acrylic paint. It's often necessary to complete a series of studies before embarking on what will become the resolved/finished piece. Water based paints are very suitable during this stage as they are immediate and give me a glimpse of the direction a specific work should take.

Lately I have been using a variety of textured materials in my finished works. Strips of canvas, string, fabric and textured papers have all found their way onto the canvas surface.

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# Art / Entertainment

## Where do you find the inspiration for your work?

Inspiration for my works comes from a variety of sources such as the natural and urban landscape, people and their lives, the media including film, television, music and anywhere else that something creates a spark in my mind that demands attention and interpretation. One more notable point of inspiration is the potential of a blank canvas. The pristine white surface is gorgeous and it's nice to sit in front of one every now and again just to consider the possibilities.

## Do you do commissioned paintings?

Yes I enjoy the unique challenges of a commissioned painting. Very often the person, or patron, to give them a more appropriate title, has seen some example of my work and would like something in a similar style. More often than not this is a portrait of a loved one or a scene from a cherished day or even a place that has some personal significance. Sometimes the patron has a very clear idea of what they are looking for in terms of the work being a statement of some kind. This is a very special opportunity for me as it becomes more akin to collaboration than a straight forward commission. It's as if I become the tool that the patron uses to produce a work of art that they may not necessarily have the skills to produce themselves. There is a very unique satisfaction that comes from that.

## How long have you been in China and where have you lived? Has living here changed your painting style or the content

## of your work?

I first came to China in 2009 as an English teacher. I was placed here in Ningbo by a teaching company and feel very fortunate about that seemingly random placement. I have made a lot of friends here in Ningbo as well as meeting my partner Caroline. I don't see any stylistic changes to my paintings but there has certainly been some Chinese content creeping in to my portfolio. This is inevitable of course and if it didn't happen then there would be something wrong.

## You recently had an exhibition in Shanghai. Can you tell us a little about how that came about? And, what was your reaction to the exhibition, how do you think it went?

Well I was informed by an old college friend of mine that a mutual friend of ours had been living in Shanghai for the last ten years or so and was quite involved in the art scene there. I met up with him one weekend about a year ago and we discussed the possibility of me having an exhibition there at some stage. As he is quite a figure in the Irish community in Shanghai he suggested that I exhibit as part of the Irish Week celebrations, a week-long festival of Irish culture which culminates on St. Patrick's Day. I was fortunate enough to receive a grant from Culture Ireland which is an institution which promotes Irish culture internationally. Thanks to this funding I was able to cover the costs of transport, publicity materials, catalogues and the many other hidden costs involved in holding an exhibition. Overall I think the exhibition went well and was certainly a good initiation into the

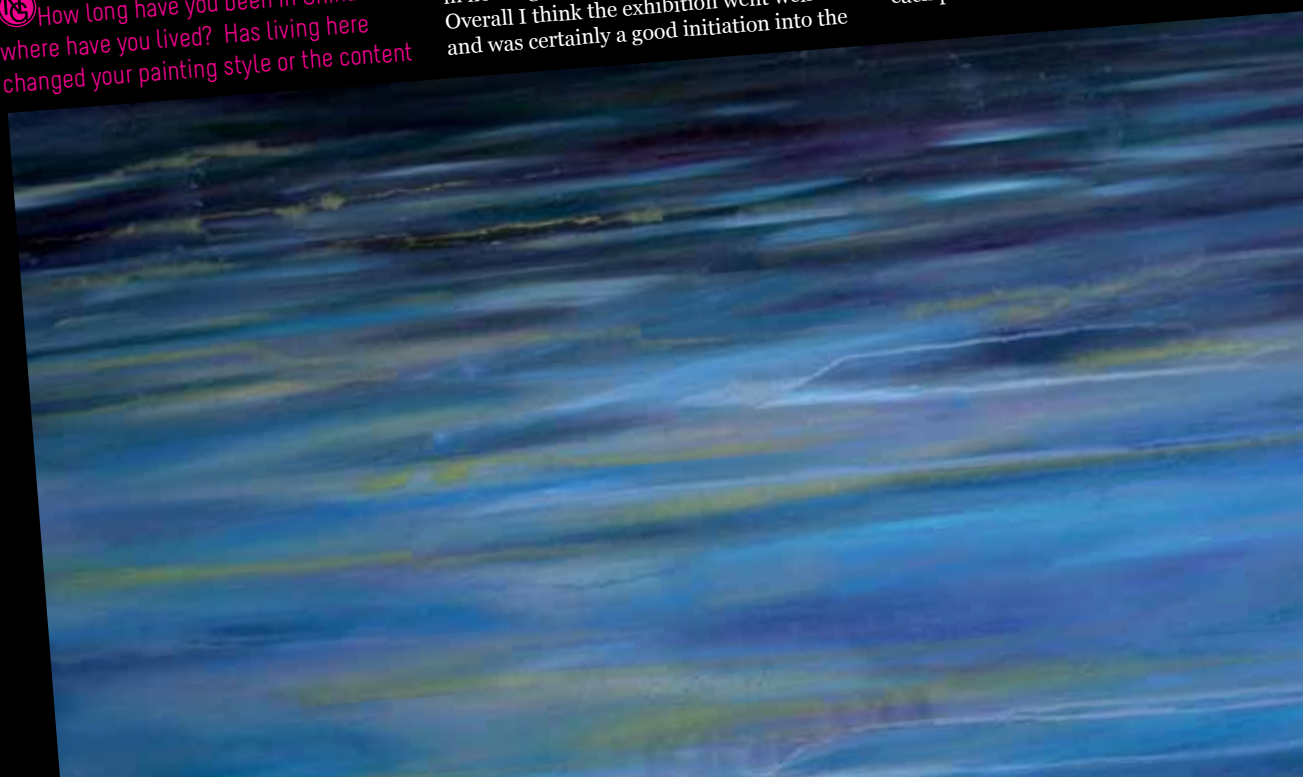
international art world. The reaction of the audience was also quite encouraging. I was particularly impressed by the number of my friends from Ningbo who made the trip to view my work in Shanghai so if I may I would like to express my appreciation again to them for that.

## What do you think is the most challenging piece of work you have completed and why?

For my most recent exhibition I painted a large diptych called 'Dumplings'. This image depicts a huge number of swimmers in a crowded swimming pool in Guangzhou. I was working from a photograph I had found but I selected a section to interpret. The sheer number of people shown presented a huge challenge for me. When I started the initial under-painting there were about 65 people but by the time it was completed the number had risen to about 85. I kept finding more and more people during the painting process. As well as the number of characters the challenge was also to make this a unique painting and not simply a reproduction of a photograph. Various compositions, selections and methods of painting were explored until finally the finished work was completed after 2 months of hard work. I think the hard work paid off as this painting has received the most positive feedback.

## Do you have a favorite piece of work that is yours?

Again another difficult question to answer, each work that gets to the completed stage has a special significance for me as each piece represents a part of my life





devoted to its creation. I will say though that the pieces I am most enthusiastic about are the ones I have most recently completed. I'm not talking specifically about my recent exhibition but in a more general sense, that is to say that shortly after the completion of a painting I have a great feeling of accomplishment and well-being and this transforms into a sense of satisfaction in me.

#### Do you have a favorite piece of work that isn't yours?

There are many pieces of art that I love but there is a work by Piet Mondrian called 'Grey Tree' that sort of sums up what I love about the painting medium. He made many much more abstract pieces based around the same idea about the use of the pictorial space but the 'Grey Tree' gives a great insight into the whole abstraction process. I love the levels at which this painting involves me.

#### How do you know when a painting is finished?

It's not knowing that a painting is finished; the problem more often than not is accepting that a painting is finished. As an artist there is a tendency to improve one's work constantly as there is always a wish to just adjust 'one last little thing'. This is the reason I have no paintings in my living room or any other space designated for relaxation. It may

seem strange to non-artists to have bare walls when you have tons of paintings lying around but the majority of my artist friends agree with me on this. Living with your work is like having those 'imperfections' taunting you constantly.

#### Do you have a favorite artist? And why is he/she your favorite?

I mentioned Piet Mondrian already as his abstract work has always engaged and made some sort of sense to me. Now though I shall mention another favourite artist of mine and that is Egon Schiele. His work is a world away from my own but there are certain stylistic qualities of his paintings that I admire greatly. He was a protégé of Gustav Klimt whom I also admire and is perhaps the more well-known Austrian painter. It's evident in Schiele's work who his mentor was but I believe it's definitely the case of the pupil surpassing the teacher. Whilst Klimt's work is undoubtedly highly skilled and extremely beautiful, Schiele's is more humanistic and natural. It caused some controversy at the time when his work was deemed pornographic due to its frank representational quality. To me his work possesses the beautiful continuous line of Klimt's masterpieces but then manages to ground itself in the real world.

#### What art do you most identify with?

I have to admit that I would call myself quite a traditional painter and the art I would identify with has been the painting of the last 100 years or so. I certainly cross a few 'isms' in my own work but my paintings generally look like what they are paintings of. To sum up I would say I am a Neorealist cexpressiopostimpressionisticpost-modernocontemporary artist. Take that Google translate!

#### What work do you most enjoy doing?

I am and always have been fascinated with water surfaces. The first one I painted was way back in 1996 but each one I paint is always unique due to the very nature of this ever shifting subject. What I like most of all is the connection between the water surface and the canvas surface. Very often there is no indication of land or anything other than the water with the natural light working across its surface ripples. The production process is energetic so it's nice to get some movement happening in the studio when very often I am standing still for long periods of time.

#### What themes do you pursue in your work?

There is a constant theme in my work addressing the very nature of the painting process as well as the physical qualities of the paint itself. Sometimes this is not evident to the viewer but I am attempting to increasingly involve the viewer whilst they are standing in front of my paintings. I like to believe that if someone can see the elements of my paintings as well as appreciate the overall image I have allowed them to see the 'forest' and the 'trees' at the same time. I hope that metaphor is clear as I was previously talking about water surfaces and now I'm going on about 'trees'!

#### Can you describe a real-life situation that has inspired you?

Wow, there are simply too many to pick one. My work has been a series of real life situations transformed into paintings. Be it a personal experience of a place, a person or a new emotional concept, all have made it to the canvas. Even if something is not deemed to be 'real-life' such as a piece of music or a movie, the emotional reaction and assimilation of that stimulus is

always real.

#### What jobs have you done other than being an artist?

When I was an art student I needed to support myself whilst attending university so I managed to pick up a job as a trainee chef in a local restaurant. I really enjoyed that work, partially because it had a creative element but also because the chefs I worked with were passionate about their profession. You can't help but be affected by someone else's enthusiasm. I also worked as an Art teacher back in Ireland for a few years but the jobs were few and far between so I updated my skills through a couple of computer design courses and ended up working a variety of creative design jobs such as graphic/media design and I even worked in furniture design for about 5 years.

#### What do you eat while you work?

Unfortunately I have to admit that whilst I am working food is often an afterthought. Sometimes I get so engrossed that entire meals are forgotten and it's only when I stop painting for the day that I realise I am hungry. Up to this point I have been fuelled by caffeine.

#### What is something you love and why?

I love the age of modern communication we now live in. It's simply wonderful how everybody now has the ability to communicate their own ideas in a variety of media formats.

#### What is something you don't love and why?

I don't love the age of modern communication we now live in. It's simply terrible how everybody now has the ability to communicate their own ideas in a variety of media formats.

#### And finally, what's your favorite color?

That's an almost impossible question to answer. It's like asking a musician 'what's your favourite musical note'? After all, notes and colours are only as relevant and valuable as their placement in a composition. Each is just an element of a larger cohesive structure, therefore I have to say that I like all colours but I will say that it is evident in my work that I use all colours liberally and vividly.