

Adrian Daintrey

ADRIAN DAINTREY, who has died aged 87, was an underrated English artist and engagingly eccentric Bohemian figure, who produced delightful cityscapes in the Post-Impressionist manner.

Much to his surprise and satisfaction, late in life he became what he called a "film star" thanks to a bizarre television documentary about a police stake-out at the country home of his friend Laura, Duchess of Marlborough.

The police, tipped off about a likely burglary at the Duchess's house in Buckinghamshire, arrived with a television crew in tow which did not prove to the liking of another house guest, Sir Arthur Bryant.

Feeling that the constabulary were not treating "the two old gents" (as they referred to Bryant and Daintrey) with quite the proper degree of respect, the artist took an officer aside and confided, in front of the camera, that Sir Arthur happened to be an extremely distinguished historian and that he himself was "a semi-well-known painter".

The film included such hilarious moments as the Duchess warning Daintrey that unless he did up his fly-buttons he would be arrested for indecent exposure. "Surely that is one of the more minor offences?" Daintrey asked the attendant policeman.

But as an artist he was worthy of more serious consideration than such farcical incidents suggested, possessing a delicate sense of place, an affection for buildings and a deep love of nature.

Daintrey was an enthusiastic traveller: Paris, Bangkok, Istanbul, Singapore, Delhi and most of Italy featured in his work. But London seemed his real subject.

Daintrey used the metropolis, as he liked to put it, as a tourist, setting up his equipment in the middle of Trafalgar Square or South Kensington and painting the view (sometimes, as he recalled, he would be thrown a few coins). He was also adept at giving an atmospheric insider's view in such interiors as the Travellers' Club, the Crush Bar at Covent Garden and the Winter Garden at the Ritz.

His friend John Betjeman placed Daintrey in "the great tradition of London from Thackeray and Sir John Leech to Max Beerbohm and Osbert Lancaster."

Betjeman (with his teddy bear Archibald) and Lancaster were among the subjects of Daintrey's sympathetic portraits, together with other friends like Anthony Powell, Peter Quennell and Paddy Leigh Fermor in Cretan costume.

Adrian Maurice Daintrey, the son of a solicitor, was born in 1901 and brought up in Tooting and Wimbledon. He disliked his time at Charterhouse ("a mass bullying, persecution beginning to Coventry"), but won the drawing prize and a place at the Slade School of Art, then ruled by the formidable Henry Tonks, with whom he soon crossed swords.

His preferred teacher was Wilson Steer who told him: "Well, you can't do better than the Old Masters; we all know that!" Daintrey took to copying paintings in the National Gallery (where he became friendly with Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant) and continued this practice in the Louvre when he went to Paris in 1924.

His modern heroes were Utrillo, Manet, Derain and Matisse, though the latter, he was always careful to stress, he never attempted to imitate. As a student he became a drinking partner of Augustus John, having boldly approached him in the street and asked if he could visit his studio.

John invited him round and presently said: "I have to go now, but stay as long as you like." John often steered him to a pub where they would meet "some charming girl behind the bar who well merited a visit."

Daintrey's first one-man show, shared with Paul Nash at the fashionable Warren Gallery in 1928, brought him many aristocratic patrons most of whom he retained throughout his working



Daintrey's portrait of Leigh Fermor

life. Despite this, he experienced continual financial problems and never acquired the steady support of a gallery until recently: his last show at the Sally Hunter Gallery, earlier this year was a great success.

On the outbreak of the 1939-45 War he joined the ARP; then, in 1940, he switched to the RASC as a driver before transferring to the Camouflage Corps and taking the opportunity to paint in such exotic locations as Iran, Iraq, Egypt and Italy.

At one stage he was surprised to find himself appointed Garrison Engineer of Sardinia. The legendary ineffectual Daintrey explained to the authorities that although he was indeed attached to the Royal Engineers, this was rather out of his line.

After the war he held regular exhibitions of his own work at his Chelsea flat and also contributed art criticism to Punch where his friend Anthony Powell was literary editor.

Daintrey's reminiscences, *I Must Say* (1963), moved with much charm from pre-war Bohemia to the world of the socially smug in a way faintly reminiscent of Powell's great novel sequence, *A Dance to the Music of Time*.

Daintrey was an endearing, very untidy and in many ways rather innocent man: in the 1930s he shared a house and played golf with Donald Maclean, later observing that he found his political views rather strange but nothing more sinister.

In recent years he became a familiar figure in the so-called "Paddington Set", the coterie that gathered round the ageless beauty Lady Diana Cooper in Little Venice. Although often looked faintly bemused and bewildered, his interest in the fairer sex, wine and cigars remained undiminished to the end.

Daintrey described himself as "an incurable sentimentalist who liked savouring memories of the past" and used to say "I am always in love with somebody".

He appeared to take the vicissitudes of his life cheerfully, mainly because he was fundamentally very serious about his art.

Daintrey was fond of quoting Derain's remark "Sit down in front of nature and show whether you are an imbecile or not". His rhythmic drawings, full of life and acute observations, and with broad patches of carefully observed colour describing so precisely atmosphere, light and texture, show just how studiously he took this dictum.

Anthony Powell writes: Adrian Daintrey was a friend of mine for over 60 years. He was one of the

few artists I have known who could specify the precise moment when the visible world took shape for him in painters' terms.

He was coming back from school, standing on Earl's Court Station platform and a cigarette kiosk suddenly came to life as a pictorial composition.

Daintrey had a peculiar wit of his own. I remember him recommending George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* to me with the words, "You must read it. You'll never enjoy sauté potatoes again."

Early in our acquaintance we spent Easter at Le Havre, a holiday which opened in some commotion as Daintrey mislaid the tickets for the night boat. They turned up later in his suitcase. I believe some rebate was recovered but fresh tickets put some strain on our limited resources.

Daintrey was keen to cross the bay to Honfleur, painter's country, where Bonington, Corot, Courbet, Boudin, the Impressionists, had all worked. He wanted specially to visit a pub called La Ferme Saint-Simeon, between Trouville and the sea, where some of these painters used to find cheap accommodation.

We found La Ferme Saint-Simeon without too much difficulty, decided to lunch there. I see now with the sophistication of age that the bright yellow shutters ought to have been a warning. We were each handed a menu bound in leather.

We studied it aghast. "You never ought to have allowed me to come here," said Daintrey. We lunched as modestly as we could, spending the last couple of days in Le Havre with extreme economy. In the glossy papers one occasionally sees pictures today of provincial French restaurants with many stars, among which La Ferme Saint-Simeon is likely to figure.

Daintrey's friendship with Augustus John had given him some of John's gruff manner which did not indicate an enemy of conviviality. Daintrey also shared John's wholehearted admiration for the opposite sex, many of whom showed their appreciation in the most practical manner.

Like his fellow Carthusian, Thackeray's Colonel Newcome, Daintrey ended his days in the Charterhouse where to the end he was visited by many charming young women.

I have lost an old friend, and I do not doubt that Daintrey's passing will bring a tear to the eye of more than one lady of quality and black-bus conductress.

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