

Travels of a Painter

JAMES REEVE



Unicorn Press



DESCRIPTION

Since 1961 James Reeve has been exhibiting and selling his paintings, first in Florence, then in Madrid. From 1974 onwards he has travelled widely, often with subsequent London gallery exhibitions. Here he vividly describes and illustrates the characters he meets and the adventures which unfold in Haiti, Madagascar, India, Australia, Jordan, the Yemen and Mexico. The historian, Antonia Fraser, remarks in a letter to him: 'Dearest James, When God gave you your great artistic talent, He made a big mistake, contrary to what is generally thought. This because you are really meant to be a brilliant writer!'

And so, encouraged by authors Rachel Billington, Selina Hastings, Alexander Waugh and Tom Roberts, James Reeve has at last put his talents together in a series of self-contained short stories recalling travels, anecdotes and encounters which he has illustrated with his vividly colourful vignettes. Always travelling with the purpose of work, in Italy James came across relics of past time: Harold Acton, Freya Stark, Violet Trefusis, Edith Sitwell. In the Australian Outback he draws among other things, dumps, and there too is Madam Tongere catching a Wichetty grub. He meets Princess Elizabeth of Toro in Uganda and is captured by pygmies in the Congo forest. He paints the fearsome Mrs Gilbert Miller's portrait in Palm Beach and travels in Rajasthan with Diana Wordsworth, a last relic of the Raj. At last, weary of wandering, he discovers a distant cloud-forest village in Mexico, where Edward James, as the only other Englishman, had preceded him. There he built a house. Living in Mexico for 35 years, among his friends are Doña Olive, the retired prostitute, and the Dominican nuns of an enclosed order who let him in to teach them how to make marmalade.

THE AUTHOR

Born in a Salvation Army Home for unmarried mothers (there was no room in the local hospital), James Reeve was sent, age six, to the then inevitably eccentric prep school. Following five years of misery at Rugby School, a scholarship took him to Oxford, but after only three months this seemed not the place to pursue a mission to paint; so he removed to Florence and then to Madrid where the Real Academia Bellas Artes de San Fernando was unique as an art school in providing instruction in Anatomy. Here he enrolled to study for five years, and observe the dissection of vagrants' corpses in the morgue. Then to his surprise, a Divine Revelation in the Metro convinced him to enter the enclosed Order of the Jeronimites in Segovia as a novice. But at length the intense winter cold, the rigours of nightly interruptions to pray, and a diet of water and lentils, persuaded him (and the Prior) that, after all, he should rejoin the world and begin in earnest to paint.

From a slum house in London, James Reeve set forth to work in (then) remote places: Uganda, Jordan, the Australian Outback, Haiti, Madagascar, Rajasthan, the Yemen ... and at last he found his proper home in Mexico: first in a house he built in a cloud forest, and then when tourists discovered the place, a tenement in the old centre of Mexico City.

When it became obvious that Britain's National Health Service would soon trump the surreal enchantment of Mexico, James Reeve retreated to Somerset where he continues to paint and now to write.

Key Sales Points

- Highly descriptive and entertaining short travel stories illustrated by the author

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