

**Derek Mundell
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The interview with Derek Mundell takes place at the Culture Centre Gerðuberg in Reykjavik which is the venue of his exhibition "Moss - colonist of fire and ice". Derek Mundell was born and raised in England where he was accustomed to rolling hills, large forests and lush gardens. At the age of 25 he emigrated with his Icelandic wife to her home country and has been gradually adapting to Iceland for the past forty years. He has for long felt integrated into his adopted country's society and has fully embraced its culture, but it has taken him all this time to truly appreciate the beauty of the Icelandic moss heaths which are so prevalent in this sub-arctic landscape. These inconspicuous plants form a soft quilt-like covering of the rugged lava landscape and can be found in many shades of green according to the season and the weather.

Derek Mundell has not always been a full-time artist. He majored in art in high school but chose a career in agricultural industry, a subject he also found fascinating. About thirty years ago he became interested in painting in watercolour and admits to being a lifelong student of this medium. He practiced in his spare time while working in governmental research and also private industry. He initially attended classes at an Adult Education Centre in Reykjavik, but eager to learn various styles and techniques, he began to seek different teachers abroad as well. He attended a course in Florida with Jeanne Dobie after having read her book "Making Colour Sing". He also sought out other master painters, such as Joseph Zbukvic and Alvaro Castagnet. The person who has had the greatest influence on him, however, is the English artist, Bridget Woods. The first course with her in the mid 90'ies led to many more. He and a friend arranged for Bridget Woods to come to Iceland to teach and later to exhibit. Since then she has held 10 watercolour courses and 3 exhibitions in Iceland.

In 2007 Derek Mundell was still a leisure painter, attending painting courses and taking watercolour classes at the Adult Education Centre while having a daytime job. It was time for a change in direction, and he was contemplating on what to do next when he received an offer to take over the teaching of watercolour classes at the Adult Education Centre where he himself had been attending courses during previous years. After consulting his wife he agreed to take the position and became a full-time artist and instructor.

Derek Mundell then went back to school. At the University of Iceland he took a four-year art history degree at the same time as teaching 5 fully-booked art classes every term. After eleven years at the Adult Education Centre he has now decided that 2017 will be his last in regular teaching and he is going to concentrate on his own painting and on teaching occasional workshops.

Back at the exhibition it is clear to see that Derek Mundell is a figurative painter, and a very skillful one. His works can be breathtakingly beautiful as he captures the light of the scenery he is depicting. He is not attracted to abstract painting nor to realism, but he loves experimenting. Most of his paintings are landscapes, but they convey a state of mind. He varies between minute details

and a loose style that can be seen as almost abstract, though it never results in what you might call geometrical abstracts.

Like many other painters, he is attracted to watercolour partly due to the elusive and unpredictable nature of this medium. You have to be focused and prepared to adjust your plans in a split-second. This kind of challenge obviously suits his personality very well. Derek Mundell considers that watercolour is the best colour medium for capturing short-lived moments and he first made this discovery while painting the human figure. He also finds it ideal for rapid painting of landscapes and seascapes where the light is rapidly changing. He will allow primary colours to run and mix together in water on the paper. Any attempt to completely control every wash and brushstroke can kill a painting. For him it involves the delicate balance between controlling the water and collaborating with it. This lends a certain unpredictability to watercolour which keeps the paintings organic and gives them a life of their own.

The specific interest in moss as shown in the Gerduberg exhibition began a couple of years ago when he discovered a small passage in the novel "Justice Undone" by the Icelandic author Thor Vilhjálmsón. In this story a few lines describe several varieties of moss in a most poetic way which Derek Mundell found very inspiring. After years of cherishing the English woodlands and hillsides he discovered the wonders of Icelandic moss heaths. He went on trips to the countryside, especially around the Blue Lagoon area, but contrary to all other visitors he turned his back on the lagoon itself and stayed for hours on end in the company of the moss-covered lava. He sat alone and sketched and made colour notes, he took a lot of photos - and above all, he took in the atmosphere, the colours and the textures by just being there and observing. Back in the studio these impressions turned into many paintings where moss plays the leading role.

It took 40 years of living in the country for Derek Mundell to appreciate this landscape of his adopted homeland and he employed watercolours to assist him in this journey.