

Preface

Nature was and is always superior to art.
George Stubbs, 1754

In the 1970s, I was commissioned to write a feature on the new Graham Sutherland Gallery at Picton Castle in Pembrokeshire. Shortly afterwards, I was to do an interview with Graham, with my late husband taking the photographs. We booked into a bed and breakfast in Haverfordwest and on the journey there met with atrocious weather. In Pontarddulais – of male voice choir fame – I found a telephone box and called the bed and breakfast to explain that we would be delayed and asked if a key could be left out for us. A kind lady suggested dinner on arrival. It would be at least 11.30 p.m. This was no ordinary bed and breakfast. Before the opening of the M4 into Wales, one route to Pembrokeshire was via the Brecon Beacons. I thanked the lady and we accepted the offer of dinner. On arrival, we were quickly ushered into the smart Chez Gilbert dining room and to my horror, I noted a table at which Graham Sutherland and his wife Kathleen were sitting with a few friends. I had taken my notebook to the table and as we were ordering, I heard Graham telling his guests that a girl was coming to interview him the following day and she was particularly interested in the decentralisation of works of art – was I? As I was about to write a brief note to my husband to relay this conversation – he was a little deaf – Kathleen Sutherland suggested to her friends that Albert Schweitzer had just come in. My husband did have a lot of white hair. Graham

assured her that Albert Schweitzer was dead. Kathleen was adamant that he was sitting in the dining room. Everyone turned to look at my husband. I kicked him under the table, wrote him a further note; we then ate whatever we had ordered and hurried up to our room. My husband questioned the hasty retreat and I told him about the conversation I had overheard.

The following day, I backed the car over the camera case – the Rolleiflex camera survived the tyres but I then felt that the interview was doomed. Drawing up to the Lord Nelson Hotel in Milford Haven where the Sutherlands stayed while in Pembrokeshire, I began to hyperventilate and suggested to my husband that we abandon the interview. As I was about to have a panic attack, my husband motivated me to proceed. Once inside the hotel, we found Graham sitting in the lobby, a hand cupped over his walking stick. He stood up, stretched out his arm and said ‘Good morning, Mr. Schweitzer’. The ice was broken and we were whisked away in his Jaguar car for the first of many trips to creeks and crannies through winding lanes overhung with brambles. Every adventure in his company included a trek through Pembrokeshire.

Many people would find it difficult to articulate an informed response to their own painting in the way that Graham and others have done and continue to do. It is through his eyes, his thoughts, his process, his wisdom and his intellect that he was able to develop

and produce works of integrity and originality. Throughout his life, he focused on a few subjects which earned him enormous respect and sometimes dislike in equal measure. I remember Lilian Somerville of the British Council, explaining in an interview

with me that Francis Bacon was the star of twentieth-century British painting and Graham Sutherland the follower. Graham, however, in conversation with me, liked to think that the reverse was the case (GA/RT archive).

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