A DAY WITH IDO

Holland in May – a cold, fresh breeze, quite windy at times, in the morning the sky is very grey, there are ominous-looking clouds, later some blue patches appear in the sky and at sunset, the sun is reflected in the windows of the buildings and on the water.

The city of Amsterdam – bridges over canals, narrow streets, buzzing activity, people talking, long, flat boats, barges, cruise ships, speed boats, tourist boats full of tourists looking up at the narrow, tall houses, beautifully ornate, sometimes crooked or leaning, with big windows and angular roofs, flowers, lights, graffiti, historic home to many famous paintings and painters, bikes everywhere – people on their bikes holding hands, girls sitting on the back of their boyfriend's bike, babies perched on handlebars, bikes whizzing by (don't get in their way!), bike bells ringing.

A train journey from Amsterdam to Woerden - flat, green fields, sheep, cows, trees in lines, farmhouses, straight channels of water, tall industrial-looking windmills turning in the distance, not at all romantic like the traditional windmills, a huge blue sky, clouds racing over, sun rays shining down only to disappear a few minutes later.

I was on my way to talk to a very special man. This was my first visit to Holland. I was there on holiday and it was the chance to meet Ido Vunderink, a Dutch painter who has created an important part of Kolmar's identity. Ido's paintings had already struck me when I came to Kolmar for an interview. I thought to myself, I'd like to work in a place where they have such beautiful paintings on the walls! They emanate peace, beauty, radiance. They are relaxing and at the same time challenging to the mind – that's a contradiction, but it makes you feel good to look at them.
Ido's friend, Lex, kindly picked me up at Woerden station and we drove down a road at first long, straight and narrow, later following the curves of the river Meije, which is next to Ido and Lex's house and also an important source of inspiration to Ido.

I received a very warm welcome from Ido and Lex. Ido was wearing blue, his favourite colour. Other favourites are purple, mauve, lilac and pink.

Ido and Lex were very busy that day sorting Ido's many paintings and having them photographed, but Ido sat down with me so we could talk and Lex brought us a tray of coffee and goodies.

We looked at some of Ido's paintings. I mentioned to Ido that I liked his paintings of roses, especially the combination of colours. He replied that he wasn't so happy with those paintings, because one flower has perhaps 100 colours – red, pink, soft, hard, but that isn't what really interests him in a painting. He wants to capture feelings, movement and light. He said that sometimes he saw a beautiful sky, then went inside, picked up his camera and came back outside, but after just three minutes, the sky he saw before had already disappeared. That kind of scenario appeals very much to Ido the painter – to transfer it onto canvas.

He showed me two of his paintings. One was very obviously trees by the river, the other was of snow and much reduced. This was the one that Ido preferred. In the second painting, you can use your imagination. Every time you look at it, you see something new or you see it a different way, it arouses changing emotions. To create a work like that is a challenge for Ido and it gives him the most satisfaction. He paints what he feels.
Ido started painting when he was young. When he was 22, he did something which he later found very stupid - he threw all his work on the fire. He thought it was not good enough. His subjects used to be artists at work, eg dancers, pianists... now he does what he wants to do. He says to himself: "Ido do what Ido can make". He wants to express his feelings.

I was surprised that Ido painted portraits as well, because there aren't any people in the paintings hanging on the walls of Kolmar's Zug office. Ido said he likes to paint people. He even paints portraits with his fingers and nails, delicate and fine paintings. The beauty in the world is what Ido reflects in his painting. If he sees a beautiful person, his first thought is that he would like to paint them. He is fascinated by every person he meets because each of us is unique.

Ido paints a lot. A painting can take one day, 15 days. He might like a painting very much, then the next day, he can't stand it! But of course he can always change it and sometimes he does.

He likes to listen to music when he paints. His tastes are very wide, from Olivier Messiaen (he loves Messiaen's organ music, this is music you can really feel) to Susan Boyle – she has a heavenly voice.

Ido spoke about his parents. His mother died six weeks after his father. Ido painted the sky on the evening his father was buried and the sky on the evening his mother was buried, one reflecting the introverted nature of his father, the other his extravert mother. Ido also painted his mother on her deathbed. I see a lot of love in these beautiful paintings.

Ido has always led a very busy life. He used to breed and train Irish Wolfhounds and Deerhounds and show them, winning many prizes. He had as many as 30 dogs. He was drawn to their beauty and just like people, he preferred good-looking dogs! But eventually he realized

that it was too stressful, so he gave it up. As he put it, you put the food in one end and it comes out the other end, the whole day long! Ido has the simplicity of a child but at the same time he's a little devil... there's a mischievous twinkle in his eye.

Ido's concept of life is very simple. At the very start of your life, the moment when you are created, it's just chance, but you alone are the winner. We are all winners, all of us who are alive. He finds that a very positive thought.

These days Ido concentrates on enjoying life and doing what he likes. He considers himself very lucky. He can look out of the window and think – this is the most beautiful place in world. He isn't far wrong. His house is in an idyllic setting, surrounded by green fields. The windows of the living room are huge and allow the outside to come into the room, you feel very close to nature here.

The house: stone floors, shades of brown, leather settees, big windows, a fireplace, very comfortable, very open, a huge lawn with many different trees and bushes, Japanese influence – simplicity, good for the soul, looking out at the fields, the colours of nature, relaxing, peaceful, meditative.

Ido told me: "I love my garden, I like to sit in the sun in the summer, in the evening. I go outside if I feel nervous. I am in heaven when I am in the garden. Heaven must be very nice, no more problems, no more pain, but I think here is very nice too. Make beautiful things and you are a little in heaven. We have to be grateful for what we've got, make the most of it.

"We all speak the same language. I paint pictures, some people take photographs, others write, Ruth is the CEO of Kolmar. It is so simple. I like Ruth very much, she is very lovely and she has so much in her head, so much in her soul. She has the sky inside her. She doesn't wait until tomorrow."

All too quickly it was time to go. Ido and Lex are very generous and sweet people, it was a pleasure to spend the day with them. And Ido is a man, a child, a philosopher, an entertainer, a joker, a wise man – but above all else a tremendously talented painter who weaves magical spells with his creations.

by Teresa Oliver