

# BERNARD OLLIS — *PARIS REVISITED*

## Artist Statement

When I was 23, I won a scholarship from the Royal College of Art London, where I was a Masters student in painting. I had 4 months in a grand studio, on the banks of the Seine, a stones throw from Notre Dame, at the Cite International des Arts Paris. It was the summer of 1974.

All Artists refer to defining moments in their careers; these were singularly and cumulatively mine. It paved the way for directions which have shaped the rest of my life. Each day I walked, looked and absorbed the culture, the aesthetics and the mesmerizing intensity which is Paris. It was the first time I had the total freedom to paint what I liked, when I wanted, without the input from lecturers or peers. At the end of the scholarship, I reluctantly returned to London and the Royal College of Art, with hundreds of gouaches, unstretched canvases, pen and ink sketches and oil pastels, with which I covered every square inch of my studio walls. I went to Paris as an art student and came back an artist.

I have travelled to Paris many times since, for varying lengths of time and like so many people, before I feel a kindred spirit with this incredible and pervasive place. This is at odds with reality, because in truth I have no French ancestry, do not act like a Frenchman and speak little of the language. Yet there is something indefinable that makes me feel such affinity with its beauty and humanity. Paris, therefore, has always remained important to me. Street Cafes, back alleys, crowds of tourists, balcony views, bridges, gardens and everything in between are all fair game.

35 years or more ago, I remember stepping afresh into the Tuileries or viewing the bridges of the Seine and feeling overwhelmed by all the great artists that had made images of the same subjects, en plein air, impressionist, cubist, futurist etc. Today I am greatly indebted to these masters but more assured about my own language of mark making and my own vision, which has been honed down over many years and many visits.

This exhibition is the culmination of recent visits. Most of the work was made in Paris, working on the spot, and developing ideas back in a makeshift studio while the experience was fresh in my mind.

It is both a personal acknowledgment of a continuously inspiring city and a celebration of what the French call the joie de vivre!

**Bernard Ollis**, March 2011