



# James Gillick

**JAMES GILLICK** is a Lincolnshire-based artist whose work is based on the figurative tradition. *Niki Browes* finds out more about the artist, whose large family is steeped in the arts

**J**AMES GILLICK'S FAMILY are predisposed to the arts in the same way that some families are overloaded with teachers, policemen or doctors. This has been a trait of several generations; his great uncle Ernest Gillick was a very well-known monumental sculptor whilst his wife, Mary, was a famous medallionist. Today, his cousin Liam is a Turner Prize nominee and a "big cheese in the art world." His twin brother Theodore, is a sculptor who has built and runs his own foundry. Growing up in a large family of 120 cousins, nephews and nieces, nearly all run their own businesses whilst only one isn't involved in the arts – he's a banker. "Nobody talks to him!" jokes James.

[gillick-artist.com](http://gillick-artist.com) ▶



Art Deco Silver  
Coffee Pot,  
oil on linen,  
19.7x45.7cm

**We were brought up in a house of pencils, pens and paper.**

We've always lived in the countryside and small towns. I come from a very big family who are busy, gregarious, emotional and argumentative. We all love each other very much.

**I was called "the painter" by my family from a young age.**

I did very well in my art exams at school but went to college to study landscape architecture to obtain a failsafe degree rather than art school. I qualified in 1991. After that, I returned home to study painting for two years and build my first portfolio of work. It was during that two-year period that I decided to concentrate on a painting method based on early 17th Century European techniques, a preoccupation that has stayed with me. This study of early painting techniques has become more common, but it was quite radical when I started doing it.

**As far as I can tell, I think people have a characteristic way of moving their hands, which normally shows in their handwriting.**

I developed a close understanding of my own mark-making, probably when I was about 14, and that hasn't changed since then because it can't change. Other than that, over the decades, the mood of my painting slowly blows hot and blows cold, and I move from one subject matter to another as clients demand me to. But overall, having consciously worked hard to find my mark at a young age, I have enjoyed the benefit that I haven't jagged left or right in my style since that time.

**My studios have always been agricultural buildings, unheated and basic; they have all had pitched roofs into which I have cut North facing skylights.**

I have a big easel and two smaller ones that face subject tables that look like a sculptor's trestle. I have cupboards for still life objects, shelves for ingredients for my paintings, a paint-making table, and a small old food trolley for my paint box, brushes and paints. It is an orderly but scruffy space.

**I don't have a favourite time of day to paint.**

When I go through my studio door knowing that I have clear time to settle there and concentrate, whether it is day or night, I'm



Honey Pot,  
oil on linen,  
17.9x11.5cm



Music,  
Manuscripts  
& Pens,  
oil on linen,  
30.5x61.1cm



Chicory &  
Balsamic Vinegar,  
oil on linen,  
28.6x45.7cm

**I try my hardest with my work as I love to do it and am interested in small details**

happy. Finding peace in order to do that is a difficult thing.

**The Spanish painter Velázquez was instrumental in encouraging me to find my mark early on.**

I competed with him in my mind as we both became fixated on art at the same age, and although he is a greater painter than me by an order of magnitude and lived in a very different time, we have a similar honesty about the way we look at things, and I think we both love our wives the same. When Velázquez died, his wife couldn't live for very long without him and died six months later. I am extremely jealous of Velázquez that he gained an 18-year-old King as a ▶



A Pale Red Rose  
in a Green Vase,  
oil on linen,  
42x38.4cm

## HOW I WORK HOW I PAINT



*Green Sauté Pan,  
Mushrooms & a  
Blue Egg,  
oil on linen,  
25x49.8cm*

patron when he was 19 years old who asked for only 134 paintings of him in a career that spanned 44 years. If the commercial art world now permitted artists to work with such care by giving them that much time, our art would be extraordinary. I dreamt of getting a patron before I was 20, but as I grew up, I locked that dream away in a box and bound it with chains.

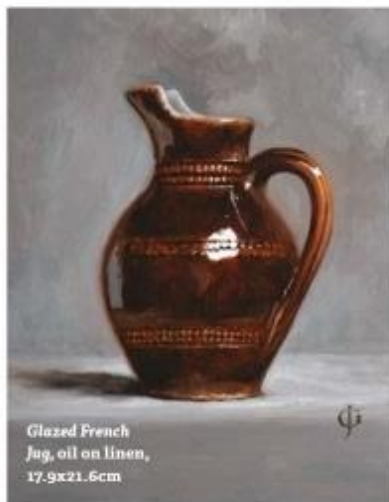
### **The chief variables in my technique are the brushes I use.**

I'm always on a search for better hog hair filberts; the quality of which has been deteriorating in recent years. But for detailed work, the round sable brushes that Rosemary & Co make are without comparison in this country. I also use Handover natural hair brushes, and Jackson's Shiro Professional Hog brushes are as good as I have found at the moment. My pigments, I source from various places.

I bought 25kg of genuine lead white from Cornellisons about six months before it was banned in Europe; I still use that supply. I make by hand my own panels, gesso, varnish, painting mediums and so forth. My paintings are hand-built in their entirety.

### **Every successful painter owes much of their early success to the generosity of a patron.**

We all have a small handful of individuals who we look to with great fondness because of their unwarranted and generous



*Glazed French  
Jug, oil on linen,  
17.9x21.6cm*

support. Meanwhile, I show in Chelsea, Kensington and Knightsbridge as it's where the highest expressions of culture and fine art in the UK are displayed and sold. It's the place to end up if you're worth your salt.

### **I try my very hardest with my work because I love to do it, and I am interested in perfecting its small details.**

But I have stood beside my wife several times as she has given birth to our children, and I know for a certainty that I would be a fool to overplay the brilliance of anything that comes from a man's hands, having seen the splendour, the commitment and the courage of that great night of art when a

woman brings a gasping, little new life into the world.

### **I have been asked to judge art competitions in the past, something I love to do.**

The thing I admire most is a total commitment to the task at hand, irrespective of hand skill. I have no time at all for people whose work is untruthful, flashy and fashionable. To my mind, success would be the artist who eloquently says one truthful thing. Still, I am not a good judge of my own art, and I never step in between something I have made and a viewer and sought to impose on them any idea of how they should feel about it.

### **Anxiety makes starting painting difficult, but experience has taught me that as soon as I get going my whole soul comes back to life.**

So, no, I don't ever lack motivation. I certainly miss painting sometimes, when other things get in the way.

### **If you want to become a professional artist, I would say find a way to be courageous.**

Courage is something you will need in buckets as stage fright and the fear of painting only gets greater as you get older. You will find the courage by breaking down your processes into simple steps, by keeping the job in perspective, and by simply refusing to overthink things. Step out of the boat; walk on the water. □