

Michael Fell

“A Taste of Armagnac”

**Grosvenor Gallery
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Grosvenor Gallery (Fine Arts) Limited

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A Taste of Armagnac and the Comfort of Friends.

Twenty three years ago, during a wet February, almost broke and with a borrowed car, my wife and I found and bought a ruin in Armagnac in south-west France. Even the notaire's clerk got the giggles as he walked around Barrere with us. Later we discovered that the skies are extraordinarily blue, the buildings sit white-hot, the vines shimmer and dance and the range of leaves and shapes is limitless. Since then I have worked there every summer, buoyed up by the magic of the place and the enthusiasm of friends and neighbours. The results of the last few summers are in this exhibition

I believe in the translation of the physical impulse that one gets from things seen, felt or imagined. The creative bit is to hang on to that spark and go on re-inventing it until everything sings the same tune. The colours, forms and shapes are banged around in the brain until they match. Simple, but at the same time immensely complex. For me, art is being able to successfully communicate one's sense of wonder

I have always felt uneasy discussing my work. Once, when asked to talk a painting through I found myself totally tongue-tied but was saved by wise Peter Coker who said quietly "I am sure Michael and the picture have talked it through", which we had. One is dealing with earthy things which are touched by heaven; it is the stuff of thought untrammelled. I fear that for me the process can be diluted or upset by too much discussion and explanation.

As an artist one occupies one's space, small or large, cheered on and up by friends who loom tall, strong and invincible. John Lessore, Sargi Mann, Roger de Grey and Peter Coker have shown me optimism, subtlety, and a breadth of knowledge and understanding built up over years of re-thinking and challenging; plugged always into fundamental simplicities.

For twenty years I have taught at City and Guilds, a small, and crucially, independent art school, first under the wise care of Roger de Grey PRA who died last year, now under Michael Kenny, and all of us guided by the legendary Elizabeth Fitzgerald. I enjoy the questioning and the wondering, and working with a greatly respected company of innovatory minds, in an atmosphere of healthily shifting ideas.

The final element that makes an artist in this or any other age is the art lover; for without their response all is lost. I have been fortunate over the years to find people who have responded to my work. Last year, as part of a working sabbatical whilst preparing for an exhibition this May in the near-by abbey of Flaran, I worked partly at Barrere and partly on a commission from Michael Estorick, stalwart, friend and patron over years, in and around his house 'Routges', which is also in Armagnac. For the first time I was there in spring and saw the buds pop, the flowers grow. I worked and worked and then 'over a weekend' the harvest was gathered, the mosquitoes emerged as the holidays and the family arrived and it was summer.

Michael Fell
Ipswich 1996

EXHIBITIONS - COLLECTIONS

- One-Man Exhibitions: Jordan Gallery, London
Halesworth Gallery, Suffolk
Mall Galleries, London
Halifax House
Oxford University
Clementi Gallery, London
Chappel Galleries, Essex
- Group Exhibitions: Galleria Renata, Chicago
'Academician's Choice', Mall Galleries, London
Allan Art Galleries, Singapore
Belanthe Gallery, New York
Comteroux, Perpignan, France
- Collections: Victoria National Gallery
University of Melbourne
Churchill Library, Massachusetts
Arts Council
British Museum

MICHAEL FELL

At first glance, Michael Fell's paintings are quite different from his prints and drawings. The paintings are full of fresh and sparkling colour and light, of bold expanses of space and of crisp, sweeping lines. Many of the drawings, by contrast, are delicate and small, darkened by mysterious shadows and tentative, wiry lines of infinitesimal richness and lightness. Each technique seems at first to offer us a different way of seeing.

After a while this immediacy of appearance gives way to the complexities of interpretation. Only then can we begin to see that the paintings and drawings have a lot in common. Looking at the paintings demands that we stand back and allow our eyes to be led, criss-crossing and interweaving amid familiar events or suggestions of half hidden moments. The intimacy of the drawings brings us to scrutinise them at close quarters, but the effect is similar. The eye wanders within a multilayered fabric, on a journey of discovery, of surprises and mysteries combined with familiarity and human warmth.

Michael Fell has said himself that the two disciplines of painting and printmaking complement one another. At the root of both is a keen observation of people. Not just the human form is seen but the character of human life in its variety and particularly that which is secret and half hidden is as expressive as that which is recorded in graphic detail. In selecting and searching for poignant details or effects Michael Fell draws on a wide range of techniques. This reflects his deep knowledge of and respect for the traditions in which he works.

Michael Fell draws inspiration from a variety of sources. From his summer sojourns in France comes the light and colour of the landscapes such as *Summer Leaves in France*. The directness of working before nature is reflected in the energetic application of paint. Each element is seen for itself whilst at the same time interacting one with another to create a playful surface of colours and forms.

A number of large paintings have begun as ideas and sketches and have been developed in his Suffolk studio. Away from the original source Michael Fell works from drawings and memories to create a kind of *teatrum mundi* of events, people and places. In *The Fête at Rozès* a village fête is in progress. Characters are recalled and brought to life, often by means of telling details - an eye, a brow, a jaw or a gesture. The painting conveys sensations of what it might be like to be present and as in the landscapes there is a playful interplay between whole and detail.

His work reflects Michael Fell's fascination with biblical and literary sources. There is great subtlety in the handling of psychological and emotional drama; it is as if the images succeed in showing us the difference between the mask of formal display and the nature of inner life.

Victoria Mitchell

1 **The Fête at Rozès**

oil on canvas

190 x 190cm

£15,000

3 **Summer Leaves in France**

oil on canvas

112 x 86cm

£3,200

2 **Virginie**

oil on canvas

132 x 100cm

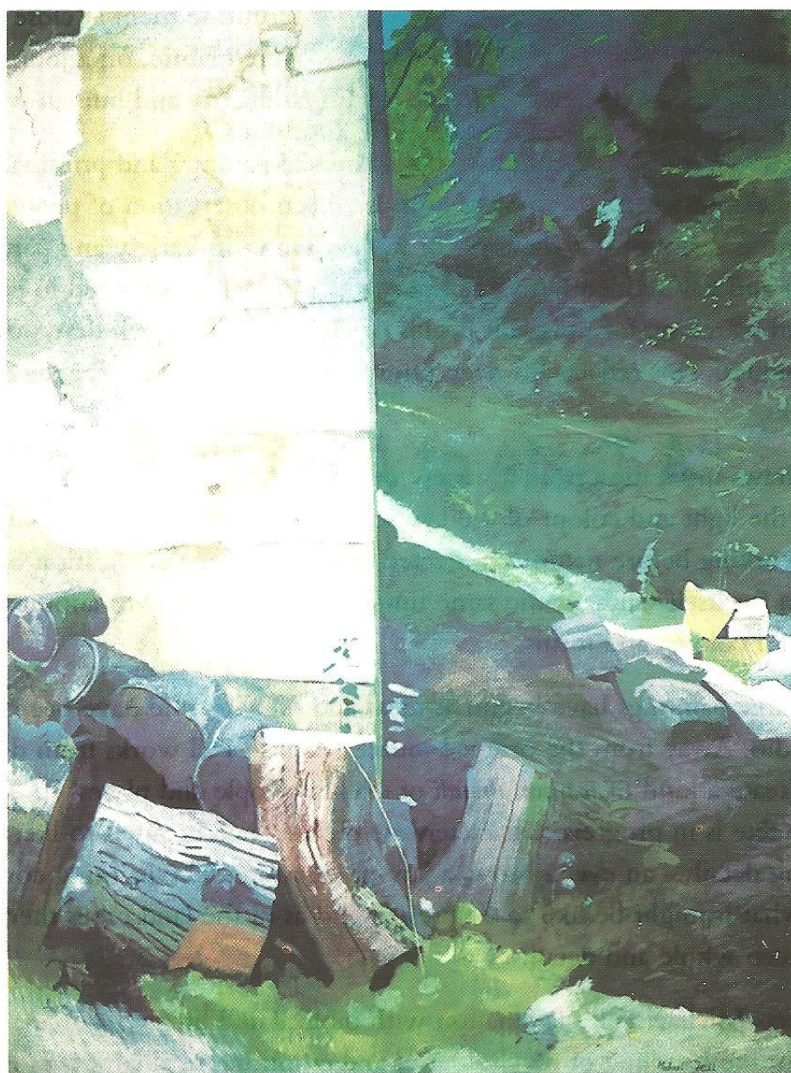
£5,600

4 **Ruins, Logs & Sunlight**

oil on canvas

130 x 100cm

£5,200



4 **Ruins, Logs & Sunlight**

- | | | | |
|---|--|----|--|
| 5 | Afternoon looking towards Bonas
oil on canvas
80 x 80cm
£2,900 | 10 | Robert at The Music House
oil on canvas
127 x 189
£7,000 |
| 6 | Light and shade
oil on canvas
110 x 80cm
£3,400 | 11 | Michael's Vineyard
oil on canvas
81 x 96cm
not for sale |
| 7 | Little valley with sunflowers & woods
oil on canvas
97 x 97cm
£3,800 | 12 | La mare, Barrere
oil on canvas
178 x 107cm
not for sale |
| 8 | Midday - Really hot on the hill
oil on canvas
126 x 110cm
£5,300 | 13 | Routges, towards Larressingle
oil on canvas
96 x 66cm
not for sale |
| 9 | Long Landscape from Barrere
oil on canvas
86 x 163
£4,200
 nv. 1205. | 14 | Through the little stone window
oil on canvas
55 x 66cm
£2,600 |

15 Kitchen door at Routges

oil on canvas

66 x 43cm

not for sale

20 Little pond, Barrere

oil on canvas

38 x 63cm

£1,500

16 Under the walnut tree, looking south

oil on canvas

94 x 76cm

£3,400

21 The woods

oil on canvas

38 x 63cm

£1,500

17 Changing weather in the valley

oil on canvas

35 x 42cm

£1,300

22 Distant sunlit fields

oil on canvas

28 x 33cm

£1,100

18 The crooked road to Bonas

oil on canvas

50 x 50cm

£1,700

23 Blossom

mixed media

57 x 46cm

£1,000

19 Mist in the valley

oil on canvas

35 x 50cm

£1,100

24 Warm fields

mixed media

57 x 46cm

£700

- | | | | |
|----|---|----|---|
| 25 | Birds
pencil
<i>46 x 55cm</i>
£550 | 29 | Water
pencil
<i>57 x 46cm</i>
£550 |
| 26 | East from Barrere
pencil
<i>46 x 55cm</i>
£550 | 30 | Trees
mixed media
<i>57 x 46cm</i>
£550 |
| 27 | Vineyard through trees
pencil
<i>46 x 55cm</i>
£550 | 31 | Group of small Figure Drawings
pencil
<i>58 x 74cm</i>
£750 |
| 28 | Farm in the valley
pencil
<i>46 x 55cm</i>
£550 | 32 | Group of small Figure Drawings
pencil
<i>58 x 74cm</i>
£750 |

Also sold 2 Etchings



1 The Fête at Rozès