

Painting of *Titanic*
Gordon Frickers



Emotion in oils

> **The sinking of the *Titanic* prompted** hundreds, if not thousands, of paintings. The most recent of these paid tribute, in one way or another, to the 1997 James Cameron-directed romance/disaster at sea film. More serious artists seeking fresh inspiration have had to ignore the popular fascinations.

British painter Gordon Frickers would have preferred not to have chosen this subject but does not regret it now. “I have had to accept she remains a very big interest story,” he says. “Painting *Titanic* gave me a new and deeper appreciation of her.”

Working with her for many hours, he came to appreciate the ship’s lines and grandeur. Frickers acknowledges he becomes emotionally attached to his subjects. Among the very best of these, in his opinion, are two large-scale panoramas of first light on the morning of the battle of Trafalgar, 21 October 1805, showing the deck of a French warship with the crew preparing for the impending conflict and the deck of a British vessel with its crew in a similar state of readiness. Every man on both ships has been

given his intimately-researched uniform; the ships’ rigging is reproduced painstakingly, strand by strand. First light heralds a momentous occasion.

Frickers also chose sunrise for his *Titanic*. It’s a very special time of day: “Having painted many a dawn and sunset, I discovered most people can’t tell the difference.” Most of us rarely get a chance to enjoy sunrise, which is a pity because it’s a real gift, he adds.

“I decided to paint from the heart, emotionally rather than for the exact historical accuracy for which I am known. *Titanic* was such a tragic ship, such a tragic waste and her loss so unnecessary,” he explained. “I painted her in colours and in a way I felt appropriate to her grandeur and demise.”

He built a model as an aid to perspective and detail and, as usual, researched some of *Titanic*’s history looking for a time and place to show her. “I had in mind her last morning afloat.”

But when the painter began to analyse the ship’s structure, he saw *Titanic* from an

altogether fresh perspective. At first Frickers thought the ship compared with the *Mauretania*, which he judged “quite ugly”.

“I still have the feeling *Titanic* was built to price not to quality, that she was an accountant’s ship and that accountancy drove her to her doom.”

“There was penny pinching on the bulkheads, a relatively angular boxy shape; and she was driven at a suicidal speed when there was never any chance taking the Blue Riband from *Mauretania* because she was not built to be that fast.”

As the painting developed, Frickers began to believe there was no excuse for building the ship with half height collision bulkheads and far too few life boats and rafts. “Cunard had already built with full collision bulkheads by that date so awareness was there ...”

“Had she sunk in rough weather there would have been very few survivors; however, given there were more than 1,000 and they landed in New York, I suppose we should not be surprised by the still growing hype over her loss. I think there are other more significant disasters but this is one ship name almost everyone I speak with has heard of.”

Gordon Frickers lives his painting but he has learnt to keep his thoughts about his work to himself, “because so many people like to make up their own mind about what it means to them”. He added: “I feel slightly privileged that I now have a connection with this famous story.”

The challenge was to find a different solution to a story that has taken on mythical proportions and to a tragedy that has become, for many, a romance. This painting of one of the shipping industry’s most influential subjects is an inspiring contribution to the 2012 focus on safety at sea. **E**

Richard Clayton

> **Gordon Frickers’ work can be seen this summer at Salcombe Yacht Club and HMS *Nelson* in Portsmouth, UK. He was the first, and only, marine artist to be invited to exhibit at the European Parliament in Brussels. The original painting of *Titanic* measures 24” x 16” (610 x 405 mm) and uses Winsor and Newton artist’s oil paint on canvas faced board.**

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