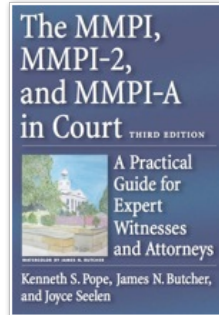


LONDON GRIP online exhibition

a late life adventure:
the watercolours of

JAMES N. BUTCHER
2009



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Just a few years ago, James N. Butcher, Professor Emeritus at the University of Minnesota, had already reached world-famous professional heights in his long career in several fields of academic psychology (see text box, right). Then, when most people would be settling into doing sweet-blow-all, he found himself adding a completely new string to his bow. He embarked on what he calls "a late-life adventure" and started painting in watercolour.

Very quickly an astonishing talent revealed itself. Needless to say, Professor Butcher is as surprised as anyone but also professionally curious about the phenomenon of a person's manifestation late in life of a previously unrevealed creative gift.

London Grip, the journal without journalists, the magazine concerned with culture without boundaries, specialises in publishing the lateral creativity of people whose energy is usually applied elsewhere. If London Grip could be said to have an archetypical contributor, James N. Butcher would be it.

This exhibition of selected works is followed by a short informal account by the artist of the adventure which in five years transformed him from a non-painter to an artist whose work is valued and published internationally. But he remains a psychologist.



Fall in the Midwest, 2009



Barn in Rural Wisconsin, 2009

James N. Butcher was born in 1933. When he was a boy, his father, a coal-miner, was killed in a mining accident and two years later his mother died of a heart attack. Unassisted, the five young children brought themselves up determined not to be separated or sent to an orphanage. Butcher went to work at the age of 11 to help support his siblings. He joined the army at 18, seeing action in Korea. Slowly, taking odd jobs, he found ways to fund an education, beginning at an all-black university where he was the only white student, and later discovering that academia suited him. In 1964 he joined the clinical psychology department at the University of Minnesota, contributing to its magnification on the academic map when he led research radically to improve the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. In the world of psychology the MMPI is now a ubiquitous assessment tool reliably used to describe mental health symptoms and personality and to direct treatment across a wide range of settings. Butcher was instrumental in its 20 year long revision and in 1989 MMPI-2 appeared followed in 1991 by the adolescent version of the test, the MMPI-A. Butcher's training workshops took him around the world, augmenting his further research into cross-cultural personality assessment. He also devised the Butcher Treatment Planning Inventory (BTPI), a self-reporting tool to detect problems in patients in psychological therapy. Interested in aviation since childhood, and a qualified pilot, he also specialises in aviation psychology, developing programmes for airline disaster response management and for airline pilot selection. Butcher has also pioneered research into computer modeling and computerised assessment of psychological processes. He has written or edited 50 books and some 185 articles and continues to publish.

About the cover illustration for the book
The MMPI, MMPI-2, and MMPI-A in Court
(in header, above)

James N. Butcher's painting shows the Warren County Court House in Vicksburg, MS, selected in 1978 by the American Institute of Architects as one of the twenty most outstanding courthouses in America, and now a designated a National Historic Landmark. Begun in 1858 and completed just prior to the Civil War, it was built by the Weldon Brothers using skilled slave artisans. Jefferson Davis, a local planter, launched his political career from these grounds. During the War some Northern prisoners were housed in the courtroom. With Vicksburg's surrender in 1863, Union troops raised the Stars and Stripes from the building's cupola. It remained the official courthouse until 1939. Since 1948 it has been preserved as the Old Court House Museum, housing artifacts from pre-historic local peoples to the present day.



New Bridge on a Wisconsin Farm, 2009

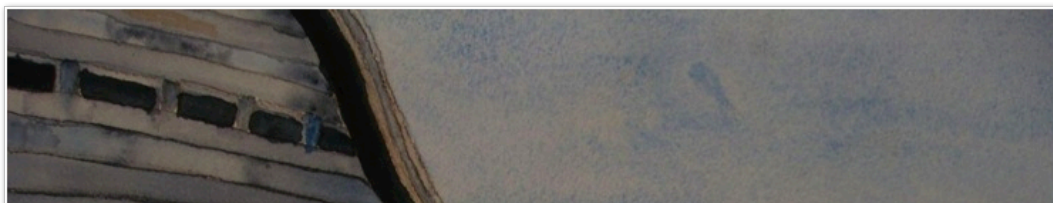
Wheelbarrow of flowers in Sussex, 2009



Blue Jar, Santorini, Greece, 2005



Marjorca: a view, 2007





Jay's Barn, 2004



Little Venice, Regents Canal, Maida Vale, London. 20 February 2004



Imperial Palace, Tokyo, Japan, 2004



Bike Trail in Excelsior, Mn. (American Psychologist cover, Oct., 2005)



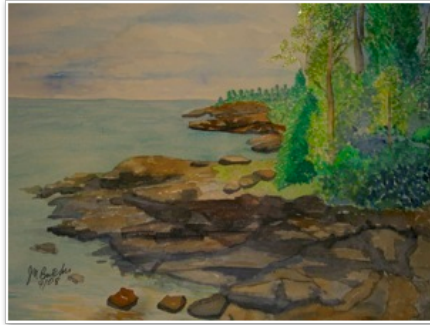
Great Wall, China, 2007



Lake Minnetonka Farmhouse, 2007



California Coast, 2008



Minnesota, North Shore, 2008



Irish Sea, 2007

NEW PATHS

by

James N. Butcher
 Professor Emeritus of Psychology
 University of Minnesota

Many people possess unrecognized or dormant abilities that are never expressed in our fast moving and task-oriented society. Given a chance, or an accident of fate, new areas of functioning can emerge. With a receptive and encouraging environment, a different and unexpected direction in life can unfold.

This situation occurred with me around the year 2000. After a 35 year career as an academic clinical psychologist, I found myself with a strange object in my hand moving paints along a blank paper - with surprising results.

There had been few hints of artistic ability or particular interests in the creative arts in my life prior to this time. I recall only one time, when I was in the third grade, my teacher appeared to like my drawing effort and encouraged me to draw more. I did not follow through on this plan. My own artistic expression for most of my life was limited to mindless doodling in long faculty meetings.

In the past, some members of my family showed artistic ability. One of my sisters and my brother have had stints at painting and both were excellent. My sister, Joan Hissom, painted animal figures onto driftwood and old saws, and for a time her work was sold in a little tourist shop in West Virginia. She gave me this picture of a coal-mining tipple from Bergoo, West Virginia, the small town in which I was born (see left). My brother, Rev. Jerry Butcher, a Methodist minister, went through a period of oil painting that resulted in a number of outstanding pictures (see his landscape below left).

There has been some research to suggest that genetics plays a role in creativity (Reuter, Roth, Holve, & Henning, 2004) although research in this area is only beginning to make connections and negative findings are also reported (Rothenberg & Wyshak, 2004).

In 2000, during a sabbatical leave in London, my wife, Carolyn Williams, was concerned that I'd get bored after I'd finished the work I'd brought with me. She persuaded me to take a watercolour class at the Hampstead School of Art. This was certainly a new direction for me. I concluded, "What do I have to lose? No one knows me here. If I make a fool out of myself, what difference does it really make?" On the right are examples of those first paintings of 2000, a vase of tulips and a still-life (see right).

How does one go from a blank space to a complex web of colour and form on a canvas? Finding captivating subject matter is essential. However, something more is needed - a willingness to experiment with life, go out on a limb, to do things differently.

Receiving encouragement is important and three people have played an important role in this. My wife has been a major force in encouraging my painting. In addition, she is an excellent photographer who took the pictures on which some of my paintings are based. Second, one of my instructors at Hampstead, John Crossland, has been particularly helpful. I have had another mentor, Linda Bennion of Queensgate Studios, who has been a very strong supporter.

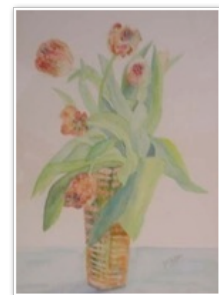
My ideal topics have been flowers, because of the color, and landscapes, because of their peacefulness: a nice commodity in these trying times. I paint for enjoyment when I can . . . and enjoy the surprises. There are a number of things I can see that for me, my watercolour painting is *not*:

It is not a question of lifestyle. This new form of expression does not represent a new mode of living.

It is not a replacement for a life-active career direction that has been terminated.



Coal mining tipple, Bergoo, West Virginia, Joan Hissom, oil on canvas and Landscape, Rev. Jerry Butcher, oil on canvas.



Earliest watercolours: Tulips, James N. Butcher, 2000 and Still Life, James N. Butcher, 2000.





Being a college professor has some advantages - a flexible life-style. Some retire early in life; others never do. But, the well-kept secret is that no one ever knows whether a professor is retired or not! I am still involved in psychology - writing, consulting, and lecturing but now I take a paint set along with my Powerpoint files!

For some people painting can be a distraction from unpleasant life circumstances. Winston Churchill, a notable artist among his many talents, wrote in his little book about painting as a pastime, "Painting is complete as a distraction. I know of nothing which, without exhausting the body, more entirely absorbs the mind. Whatever the worries of the hour or the threats of the future, once the picture has begun to flow along, there is no room for them in the mental screen. They pass out into shadow and darkness." (pp.44-45.)

For some people, painting can serve as a buffer against emotional pain. It does not work for me that way. For me, watercolour painting is neither a distraction, nor an escape, nor a pain-killer; but it is somewhat of a cage against the intrusions of the real world. When I am involved in a painting, time stops - until the process itself requires a break, for example, for the paint to dry. I use that time to work on an article! I have always been a sort of multi-tasker.

For some successful people painting can be an expression of a lifelong interest and fulfillment, a secondary but extremely rewarding additional career. This is not so for me.

What has my new found artistic expression meant to me? It has been an interesting glimpse of an unexplored avenue of my early life. I look back at a street untravelled - not with a sense of regret but with a sense of amazement that it could happen now at all. I only wish I had discovered this path sooner in my life. Who knows what would have happened if I had?

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