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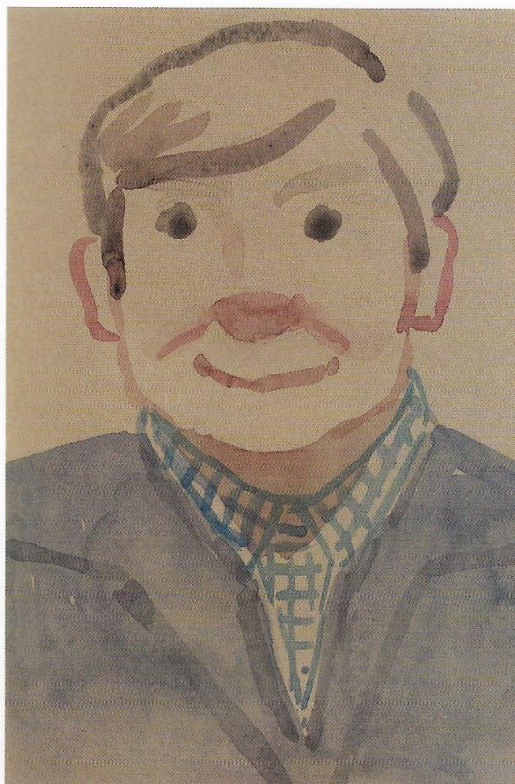
“I am interested in faces - how one tiny line can change a person's character”

**F**rom acting with Cliff Richard in *Summer Holiday* and a decade-long stint in sitcom classic *Till Death Us Do Part* to adding spark to her portrayal of Mrs Hudson in the TV sensation that is *Sherlock*, actor Una Stubbs has never been far from our screens. But this national treasure is less familiar to the public as a talented painter of watercolours who, despite describing herself as an amateur, has had paintings selected for the Royal Academy of Arts Summer Exhibition on four occasions.

The world-famous show is the most popular open-call art exhibition in the world, with artworks selected anonymously from approximately 12,000 submissions, meaning reputations - and celebrity - are left at the door. Works by amateurs are proudly hung on the Academy's walls alongside seasoned Academicians and other world-famous painters. Being chosen is no small achievement for a painter.

The actor is modest about her achievements but it is clear the thrill of being selected hasn't faded. That's why she keeps applying - it's the only open exhibition she enters. "It is just the fun in it," says Una. "And the fact that >

**LEFT** *Our Bill*, watercolour and graphite, 28x29cm  
**ABOVE** Una Stubbs at the Royal Academy of Arts Exhibition preview party  
**RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM** *Benedict Cumberbatch*, watercolour, 16x13cm; *Martin Freeman*, watercolour, 16x11cm



UNA STUBBS



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**BELOW** The eclectic artwork featured in the Royal Academy of Arts Summer Exhibition

professionals and really good painters accept amateurs alongside them. It is a privilege to get in." And then there's the pleasure of the pageantry of the gloriously named Varnishing Day, during which amateurs and professionals gather to see where their work is displayed for the first time. "It's lovely," she adds. "You all meet up and then walk to the Royal Academy. There's the excitement of everybody looking forward to seeing where their pictures are hung."

Her creative outlets – acting and painting – feed each other. She sketches on set and paints full portraits at home. Her 2017 Summer Exhibition success, *Our Bill*, was a watercolour of Bill Nighy, an actor she greatly admires. In 2015, her quirky portrait of artist Grayson Perry appeared in an adjoining room to one where one of his tapestries hung, while, in 2014, her paintings of *Sherlock* co-stars Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman were so popular the Royal Academy made them into notecards.

But the relationship between artforms goes deeper. Both furnish her fascination with the minutiae of character and tap into her a talent for capturing small moments of revelation. "I am interested in faces," she says, "how one tiny line can completely change a person's character. I love all that." When not acting, Una sketches when she is out and about with a portable watercolour set. "I paint quietly in coffee shops, observing people," says Una. "I am discreet. I don't want to embarrass people."

Her on-set and street scenes have been exhibited at London gallery Panter & Hall, and reveal a confident way

with line, which incisively captures a moment. Her witty portraits find the essence of personality while, despite their deliberately naive style, remaining highly recognisable. Watercolour is the ideal medium for this kind of work. "I love the immediacy of it, and the cleanliness and portability," she adds. "You can have a whole set in your pocket and, wherever you are, you can just do a bit."

She started painting around 20 years ago. "Only amateurishly, not seriously," she says. "I used to embroider but my eyes aren't so good. Just before she died, my mother said 'you should paint.'" Reassuringly for other amateur artists she is self-taught. "I got how-to books and learned from them," says Una. She complemented this by looking at the work of painters she admires. "It's about studying the best. When you say you paint in watercolour people go 'urgh'. They think it is a bit twee. But I find it such a challenge. I love the American watercolourists because they manage to be loose but colourful."

Although she's painted exclusively in watercolours to date, Una is keen to push her practice on and try her hand at oils. "I'd like to have a go," she says. "It's a matter of getting used to the smell and the mess." Her main artistic ambition, however, is to get better and carry on enjoying it. "It's such a lovely thing to do," she adds. "Talk to anybody who paints and they say it's the best tonic." And this artist's charming pictures give pleasure to their viewers, too.

Una's works are available at Panter & Hall, London. [www.panterandhall.com](http://www.panterandhall.com); [www.royalacademy.org.uk](http://www.royalacademy.org.uk)

