

The Cancer Diaries

Struggling to come to terms with being diagnosed with breast cancer, artist **Barbara Price** resolved to keep a visual diary of her experiences

“Cancer – the word really sticks in your head,” says Pembrokeshire-based artist Barbara Price, describing the moment she was diagnosed with breast cancer in December 2012. After the devastating news was delivered, Barbara’s doctor handed her a small leaflet that attempted to summarise the disease. She skimmed through it but the words were lost in a thick fog of confusion and disbelief. However, a blank diary at the back sent the cogs of her imagination whirring and distracted her almost immediately.

“I didn’t really fancy writing everything down but I decided to make a visual diary – it’s more me,” explains Barbara, who has painted 65 pictures so far. “Everyone was giving me flowers when they found out I was sick so I started painting them in my own patchwork-style.”

Born in Dorset in 1955, Barbara studied textiles at Farnham College of Art and has always painted alongside her passion for patchwork. Since 1995, she has taught introductory painting and drawing classes to adults in Fishguard – something she missed terribly whilst undergoing her treatment. Art evidently played a huge part in her life before her diagnosis and she was determined that cancer wouldn’t overshadow this.

“Everyday I would sit at the kitchen table with my sketchbook and watercolours and wait for inspiration. I



love playing with colour and it genuinely made me feel better to mix the paints. It removed my mind from my worries,” recalls Barbara, who attempted to paint daily but found it particularly wearisome around her operation back in January. “The new year looked bleak. I managed to sketch something the evening before the procedure but it took me a week to summon the energy to paint again, which is when I made *Blue Teardrop*.”

However, putting paint to paper lifted her spirits promptly and the pictures began to flow at a rate of knots. Barbara shared her artworks on Facebook and was overwhelmed by the response. “I have two friends who are going through [cancer treatment] now and they said my paintings helped them,” she says. “It’s definitely brought us closer together. It’s like this exclusive, horrible club that you don’t want to be a part of.”

Though the works are incredibly personal, Barbara has made the decision to sell her paintings in the hope of increasing awareness of the importance of early diagnosis, as well as raising the money for Breast Cancer Campaign. At £95 each, Barbara donates £20 from each painting to the charity and we’re pleased to say she has sold six so far, including one through her Portfolio Plus account on the *Artists & Illustrators* website.

But the best news of all is that Barbara is in a successful state of recovery and catching up with a few commissions she agreed to paint before she became ill. She has also made a triumphant return to the classroom, much to the delight of her students in Fishguard. “This past year has given me a real focus and I feel honoured to have met so many inspirational people along the way,” she says. “The most important thing I’ve learned is to live – and paint – for the day!”

www.artistsandillustrators.co.uk/barbaraprice



ABOVE Barbara (inset) and her latest work in progress, *Woven Lilies*

LEFT *Robin*, watercolour on paper, 21x29.7cm

BELOW *Blue Teardrop*, watercolour on paper, 29.7x21cm

