**Framing**

Nicky Watts

He does these gorgeous pictures, and leaves them lying about the house, too modest to show them to anyone, nevertheless too proud of them to throw them away.  I take the pictures and bung them into old frames that we have in the house.  They look a hundred times better, and I display them proudly on the wall.

‘Oh,' he says ‘where have you found that one from... the  sky isn't right,' or' I haven't finished the foreground to that one.' Still he leaves them on the wall, and says things like ‘they don't deserve such a posh frame.'

My sister came to stay and saw the pictures.  She and her husband are artists.  He is a real one and she makes her house look like some kind of magical installation.  We always bow to their taste, because we don't have those talents, so never spend time on such stuff, and any kind of ambiance that we manage to create in our house is purely accidental.

‘You should get a proper frame for that one.'  She said.

So I took it down to the framing shop, and spent hours deciding on a mount.  This red one that I had originally thought was wonderful, was not right.  The girl in the shop said it was too overbearing. You need a pale colour that will take your eyes to the horizon where the storm clouds are.

I thought that she was probably right, but I had not thought of the clouds as storm clouds before.  I looked at the picture a bit differently.

She suggested more and more colours, and I was getting more and more confused.  The shop was busy and other customers were peering over my shoulder giving me advice.  They all loved the picture-I told this to my husband later- but they all had different thoughts as to how it should be presented.

At last I chose a colour in desperation, aware that I was taking up too much of the kind assistant's time, and left, thinking that I had done my duty by the picture.

When it was ready, I collected it, and put it on the wall.  I wasn't sure how I felt about it.  I didn't love it, but I had spent £26.00 on it so it was going on the wall ‘lump it or not' as my other sister used to say.

When my sister came for her next visit, she made a passing comment about the picture.  It perhaps should have a larger mount, a bigger frame.  I immediately saw that she was right.  Was it right because she had said it, and I always followed my sister's advice, or was it right because I had always known there was something wrong.

I put it in a larger frame and immediately saw that it was miraculously transformed into a beautiful picture again.

After several attempts of mounting other creations, I realise that I cannot anticipate what his pictures will look like until they are actually in the frames: until they are up there on the wall and looking at you.

This is a very expensive flaw, and I have a feeling that this flaw intrudes into other aspects of my life.

I don't know if the shoes I buy fit until I have left the shop, and have worn them for a week.  I am not sure about colour schemes until the whole room has been decorated. Sometimes, very rarely, my husband takes his pictures down from the wall, out of their mounts, insisting that he still needs to work on them.  I get rather cross, because he puts great thumbprints on the expensive mounts, and I think they look fantastic the way they are. We argue about it, and I say that I will stop being his agent, and he says he doesn't want an agent anyway, so we don't speak for a while.  He perhaps thinks I try to control his art, looking to the presentation rather than the content.

I wonder if these character flaws affect my research. I will not know where this research is taking me until I arrive, and it is framed by my writing, aided by experts.

In the meantime, I often feel uncertain- that something is not quite right.  I reframe ideas, theories, use different methods and seek new reference points until things start to settle comfortably with my own standpoint.  It has occurred to me that I might be controlling data in order to frame it in a way that is convenient and aesthetically pleasing to me: not giving enough thought to the contributors, informants, and their wishes. I try to guard against this by showing them what I have written to seek confirmation.  The whole process seems very complicated, messy and I have to concentrate hard not to get bogged down. I hope I will come up with a finished project at the end.

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