

David Bridgeman



Image: David Bridgeman (2014), *Thistles*, from the collection of the artist.

“I enjoy merging landscapes from my past in Oxfordshire, where I grew up, with the landscapes of my home for almost 30 years here in the Cayman Islands.”

The Artist

David Bridgeman was born in Oxford, England in 1959 and grew up in the market town of Abingdon, on the outskirts of West Oxford. Trained as an educator, he has been an artist for the second half of his life, inspired by a move to Cayman that was only ever intended to last two years.



Photograph courtesy of: NGCI

According to Bridgeman, art classes as a child and teenager were a form of escapism that he wouldn't return to

until much later in life. His other academic interest was science and he went on to study biology as part of his degree in education at the University College, Worcester, in England. After working in Chatham, Kent and Liverpool as a science teacher, he arrived in the Cayman Islands in 1987 to teach in one of the government primary schools.

During this move, he met several artists and decided to return to artmaking. Bridgeman's work is characterized by an autobiographical approach, intertwining elements from his youth with his life in Cayman. In 2005 he left his teaching to pursue art full-time; he now juggles artmaking, curatorial practice and arts instruction.

Bridgeman has exhibited throughout the Caribbean, Canada, England, Scotland and France. His works are featured in the collections of the National Gallery of the Cayman Islands, the Cayman Islands National Museum, Cayman National Cultural Foundation and Government House as well as numerous private collections.

He is a founding member of the local art collective, C4, and a notable highlight of his art career is a solo exhibition, *The Road Not Taken*, that he curated at the National Gallery in 2014.

The Artwork

Thistles is a mixed media – mostly oil – artwork painted in 2014 in preparation for *The Road Not Taken*, Bridgeman's solo exhibition at the National Gallery. In preparation he spent several weeks on location in his childhood home recording his fondest memories. Included in the painting are the Wittenham Clumps – a pair of wooded chalk hills, Castle Hill and Round Hill, in the upper third. Bridgeman would often explore these woods as a child and adolescent. In the centre of the painting is a heavily stylized illustration of thistles-- flowers that are ubiquitous in the English countryside. These motifs, among others, are recurrent in much of Bridgeman's portfolio as they symbolise the first half of the artist's life.

On either side of the canvas are vividly hued jagged lines, that occur in most of Bridgeman's work. These represent gumbo limbo trees – locally known as birch – that the artist reverently admires. As with other paintings these trees are rooted in Cayman's "cliff rock" – the rough limestone landscape that was once the seafloor. This is shown with a wash of white overlaid with crude ellipses. These two symbols are typically used to illustrate the artist's time in Cayman.

Discussion

- Consider if you have made a major move in your life, for example if you have moved to Cayman from elsewhere or perhaps just changing schools. What are some symbols you would use to represent your past?
- Consider what objects and activities would characterize who you are right now.
- Consider what role choice of colours may play in giving your symbols meaning.

Making Comparisons

• British artist, David Hockney, has long explored a fascination with the depiction of landscape, especially that of his childhood home, East Yorkshire. In 2012, Hockney with the Royal Academy of Arts arranged David Hockney: A Bigger Picture, an exhibition spanning 50 years of painting the Yorkshire countryside while living mostly in the United States. Visit <http://www.patternpeople.com/art-david-hockneys-landscapes/> to find out more about the exhibition.

• Bridgeman's *The Road Not Taken* was a similar undertaking. Visit <https://www.nationalgallery.org.ky/whats-on/exhibitions/david-bridgeman-the-road-not-taken/> to find out more about the exhibition.

• Consider Hockney's use of large-scale works as the impact of his exhibition. What was Bridgeman's emphatic focus of *The Road Not Taken*?

• How are the paintings themselves similar? How do they differ?

Follow Up Activities

- Sketch a few symbols of the natural environment from your past in your sketchbook.
- Sketch some natural motifs that may symbolize who you are currently onto a separate page in your sketchbook.
- On another page create a composition containing some elements from your past and some presently. Consider if this accurately chronicles your life.



Image: David Bridgeman (2014), *Industrial Landscape*, from the collection of the artist