



TRUE GRIT

Kevin Line's People of the Cotswolds

27 June - 5 September 2026

Deeply observed charcoal paintings of human endeavour

Wed-Friday 10.30-4.30 | Sat 10-3
www.johndaviesgallery.com

Charcoal as commitment

Kevin Line works in charcoal. That matters. These are not graphite drawings, and they are not studies on the way to something else. They are finished charcoal paintings: slow, exacting images made through pressure, touch, patience and restraint.

Charcoal gives Kevin the depth he needs - dense matte blacks, softened greys, skin, cloth, metal, leather, stone, instruments, tools, faces and hands all emerging from the same dark material. It is also unforgiving. The brightest passages are bare paper, protected from the beginning while the darkness is built around them. One wrong passage can close down the surface; one held edge can keep a figure alive.

That physical truth belongs to the meaning of the exhibition. These paintings are full of men and women who understand the world through making: silversmiths, potters, musicians, stone dressers, farmers, cobblers, engineers, riders, sculptors, models and working people whose knowledge lives in the body as much as in the mind. Kevin is drawn to that knowledge - not performance, not display, but the quiet authority that comes from doing something seriously over time.

The intelligence of the hand

The Hart silversmith paintings sit close to the heart of **True Grit**. They are portraits of men, but also of a workshop, a family line and a way of working that reaches back into the Arts and Crafts history of Chipping Campden.

The benches matter. The tools matter. The lowered heads, bent shoulders and absorbed hands matter. A pause before a cut. The weight of a tool. The touch of silver. The ordinary rhythm of tea, talk, interruption and return. Kevin understands that skill is not an abstract quality. It is visible in the body.

The Hart story is inseparable from the Guild of Handicraft. When C. R. Ashbee moved the Guild from London's East End to Chipping Campden in the early twentieth century, he brought with him a serious belief in handwork, honesty of materials and the dignity of making things well. The original communal experiment did not survive in its first form, but the work continued. The Harts remained. The silversmithing remained.

That continuation is what these paintings hold. They are not nostalgic, and they do not place the silversmiths behind glass as heritage figures. William Hart, Julian Hart, David Hart and Derek Elliott are seen as people absorbed in work that is still alive. History is present, but not announced. It sits in the room.

Under the Cotswolds surface

Kevin's Cotswolds is not the polished version sold back to itself. It is not only honeyed stone, expensive houses, perfect villages, clipped gardens and the soft light of a lifestyle photograph. He looks under that surface.

In *Hard Labour*, stone is being dressed. The work is blunt and physical: bodies bent into force, dust, repetition. The painting quietly unsettles the romance of beautiful buildings. Stone houses do not simply appear. Someone cuts, carries, shapes and finishes the stone. The view begins with labour.

The Blockley Cobbler is more intimate. Shoes are close to us. They take the shape of our walking, our habits, our weather and our weight. A cobbler understands wear. Repair is knowledge of a particular kind: patient, useful, unsentimental. Kevin gives that knowledge its place.

The farming works are not rural nostalgia either. *Horsework* and *Workhorse* are about continuity and routine: feeding, tending, lifting, moving, keeping things going. The titles hold the relationship between man, horse and machine - who serves whom, what labour means, and what keeps the day moving.

This is part of the importance of **True Grit**. At a moment when the Cotswolds is so often flattened into a curated dream of houses, leisure and taste, Kevin's paintings restore weight. They remind us that places are made and kept by hands, trades, memory, fatigue, skill and stubborn care.

Practice, silence, sound

The music portraits belong fully within this world of making. Kevin is not interested in instruments as beautiful objects alone. He is interested in what long commitment does to a person.

Michael Bochmann carries that weight. His career as a violinist has included international performance, a world tour with Lord Menuhin, and a lifetime of public playing, private practice, listening and repetition. In *Michael Bochmann* and *Echoing Sounds of Sadness in the Soul*, Kevin is

not simply painting a man with a violin. He is painting someone formed by the instrument. Shoulder, neck, hand and head learn its demands. The instrument becomes companion, discipline, memory and burden.

David Watkins brings another sort of force. *Taming the Wild Spirit* is not a decorative harp picture. Watkins is a harpist and composer of real standing, and the harp itself is formidable: large, architectural, highly strung and physically exacting. The title resists prettiness. The instrument is not an ornament here, but a body of tension, history and sound that has to be understood before it can be released.

The self portraits belong beside these works, and so does *Full Moon*. In *Self Portrait 1* and *Self Portrait 3*, Kevin's looking turns back on himself. That is not vanity; it is the same discipline directed inward. The artist becomes maker and subject at once, measuring his own presence with the same patience he gives to a silversmith's hands, a violinist's shoulder or a rider's machine. *Full Moon* has a related quietness. Its world of fishing, waiting and held attention feels very close to drawing: the long stillness, the watchfulness, the respect for what cannot be forced.

There is solitude in these works, but it is not emptiness. It is the solitude of people committed to something larger than themselves: a practice, a craft, an instrument, a landscape, a discipline handed down and altered by each person who receives it. Kevin honours that chain without grandstanding. He shows knowledge as something human and fragile, kept alive because people continue to value it, practise it and pass it on.

One maker looking at another

A portrait of Johannes von Stumm brings another kind of making into the exhibition. Von Stumm is a sculptor, and that changes the meaning of Kevin's portrait. Here, one maker looks at another: an artist whose work is built from charcoal studying an artist whose own language is bound up with material presence - steel, glass, stone, weight, balance, transparency and resistance.

Kevin is not painting von Stumm at work, tool in hand. He is looking at the face of someone whose life has been spent thinking through matter. What does material do? How does it hold surface, density and light? How does it occupy space? How does something heavy become poised? The title *Johannes von Stumm PPRSS* places him publicly, but the power of the work lies in the meeting of two kinds of attention.

Machines, roads, endurance

A mechanical thread runs through **True Grit**: farm machinery, motorcycles, cars, engines, tools, workshop equipment and the practical intelligence of people who understand how things work.

An Engineer's Tale is one of its warmest expressions. Jim Sked belongs to the Chastleton farming community: someone known locally, held in the memory of place and people. The portrait has the feeling of a man recognised by neighbours rather than by institutions. Kevin's attention is the same whether the subject is locally known or internationally celebrated.

Spirit of the Bentley Boys belongs near this world, though not simply through racing glamour. The title carries an echo of Bentley racing culture, but the local thread is quieter: drivers of cars for the wealthy Cotswolds elite in earlier decades; men whose lives were bound up with machines, status, service, discretion, speed, waiting and control.

Kevin's portraits of Nick Sanders are about distance, appetite, solitude and endurance. Sanders has made a life from extreme journeys: cycling and motorcycling across the world, often alone, then turning those journeys into books, films and stories.

In *Nick Sanders MBE*, Kevin gives us the man. In *Nick Sanders, Man and Machine*, he gives us the man partly through the machine. The motorcycle is freedom, exposure, weather, danger, exhaustion, repair, noise and momentum. It is not an accessory. It is a way of being in the world.

What links Sanders to the rest of the exhibition is not simply extremity. It is knowledge acquired through doing. He knows distance because he has crossed it. He knows machines because he has depended on them. He knows solitude because he has lived inside it for long stretches of time. That sits beside the silversmiths, musicians and farmers. Their worlds are different, but the principle is the same: understanding comes through commitment. The body learns. The hand learns. The mind follows.

The private work of being seen

Not every work is about labour in the obvious sense. Some are about the private labour of being a person.

I have 400 Friends and I am Lonely (II) has one of the sharpest titles in the exhibition. The contradiction is immediately familiar: connection without closeness, visibility without comfort, contact without company. Kevin does not explain the figure too neatly. That uncertainty is part of the painting's strength. We recognise the posture before we know the story.

Shoe and *Just Leaving* belong to this quieter territory. Dressing, preparing, putting on shoes, pausing before leaving - these are small rituals, but they are full of feeling. They belong to the moment before a person meets the world. Kevin treats them without sentiment and without drama. He understands that a small gesture can hold a whole inner weather.

Places that remember

Some works open beyond the sitter into a wider history of place. *Vyse Street* (Jewellery Quarter, *Birmingham*) was made for an exhibition responding to the photographic work of Phyllis Nicklin, who documented Birmingham as it changed after the war. The painting is not just a street scene. It belongs to a conversation about memory, industry and urban change.

The Jewellery Quarter is exactly the kind of place Kevin would be drawn to: streets shaped by workshops, metal, small trades and specialist making. In charcoal, *Vyse Street* becomes atmospheric rather than descriptive. It holds the feeling of a city where hand skill and industrial history sit close together.

Paul de Felice belongs to another kind of place: Ruskin College. Made at the request of the College for an exhibition of people associated with it, the portrait carries a quiet social history. Ruskin was founded to open education to working people who had been excluded from conventional university life. Its history is bound up with adult learning, labour politics and social purpose.

The still lifes also matter, because they show Kevin testing charcoal against difficult subjects: a translucent nautilus shell, an inscribed ceramic form, pewter, a pipe. Objects whose character depends on surface, curve, weight, reflection or delicacy. These are hard things to describe in black and white. That is partly why Kevin chooses them. They prove the range of the medium, and the seriousness of looking itself.

What the work asks of us

Taken together, these works are not a celebration of grit in the noisy sense. There is no swagger here, no mythology of toughness for its own sake. The grit is quieter than that. It is in the patience of charcoal, in the stubbornness of making, in the hands that keep returning to a task, in the lives shaped by doing something over and over again until skill becomes instinct.

Kevin Line's portraits ask something similar of us. They do not give themselves away at speed. They ask us to slow down, to stand still, to enter the silence of the work rather than merely look across its surface. We begin to notice how a hand rests on a tool, how a shoulder carries effort, how a face holds concentration, how a room gathers memory around a person.

In that sense, looking becomes part of the work. Kevin's commitment to making is also an invitation to our own attention: not passive viewing, but a kind of witnessing. We are asked to recognise the knowledge a person carries, the work that formed them, and the dignity that can sit quietly in a workshop, a field, a rehearsal room, a college, a street, a chair, a bench, a pair of shoes.

That is one of the lasting gifts of **True Grit**. The paintings do not polish these lives into symbols. They let them remain human - particular, weathered, skilled, private, present. And by looking properly, we take our place in the same chain of care: keeping visible the work, patience and inherited knowledge that too often disappear from view.

True Grit is exhibited at John Davies Gallery, Moreton-in-Marsh from 27 June to 5 September 2026. Visit www.johndaviesgallery.com for more details.