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Art & entertainment

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Passion rediscovered

How one artist made a life-changing decision to pin her future on art

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Three years ago, Beatrice Ridley was working for an international law firm. She was earning a six-figure salary and had just had her first child, Tabatha. While on maternity leave, an urge to reconnect with a long-lost passion beckoned.

Ridley realised that the last time she touched a paintbrush was when she was a teenager; she fondly recalls spending countless hours painting in her attic at home. Now, with a break from her usual job, she had the chance

to pick up a paintbrush and just paint. "It was a revelation," she explains. "I thought, I need to do something with this." And she did.

With six months left of her maternity leave, Ridley made the choice that later changed her world dramatically. She located a gallery for hire and made a booking for December 2009. The exhibition was only five months away; as soon as she put the phone down the pressure was on. "I called up all my friends, invited them to the exhibition, the only thing that was missing was the collection, the actual paintings," she said.

Countless nights of little sleep, hard work, and a focused mind had an astonishing result. Five months later she had 40 paintings. In her first exhibition, 80 per cent of her paintings were sold, and Ridley made around £9,000.

"I had to call up my law firm and say, 'Actually, I'm not quite ready to come back,'" she recalls.

Ridley was soon picked up by the established gallery, Arthur Ackermann's, and along her journey connected with many artists. When Ackermann's went into hibernation, Ridley decided to set up her own gallery, which is based online, and named it

the Pepper Gallery. The gallery supports both established and emerging artists.

She includes herself as an emerging artist. Ridley's paintings of animals are photo realistic, and show both skill and sensitivity. Particularly magical is the piece 'A Murmuring of Starlings', which captures "the liberty and the levity" of the birds.

"You get all of these names of flocks of birds – a charm of goldfinches, a murmuring of starlings, a parliament of owls, a murder of crows – all of these extraordinary names. I think I saw one night this flurry of starlings all taking off at

the same time; it was incredibly moving.

"It's beautiful, what you find in the natural world," she says. "I never cease to be amazed."

Ridley continues to paint and grow the reputation of the Pepper Gallery from her studio in London. As well as daughter Tabatha, now three-and-a-half, Ridley and her husband have an 18-month-old son, Hugo.

The "Serendipity" Exhibition, including work from the Pepper Gallery artists, is on from 11th-17th June in the Daggett Gallery, 225 Kensington Church Street, London.



Artist Beatrice Ridley