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AUTUMN 2006 FASHION | CULTURE | LIVING | TRAVEL



ABSTRACT

EVOLUTIONS

Witney artist Chris Parks has more than one string to his bow, as Jennifer Hough discovers

It's not often you find an aspiring artist who has cracked Hollywood — especially not in a small Oxfordshire town.

But Chris Parks, a Witney-based abstract artist, has done just that, albeit under a different guise.

From the glitz and glamour of the movie world, to scuba-diving in Bermuda, to filming wildlife in Borneo, Chris has many irons in the fire.

But for now, he is concentrating his time and energy on a new sensibility: fine art.

First though, I have to ask, what's all this talk of Hollywood?

Chris, 34, explains: "My father and I are known in the business for being able to create a unique kind of special effect. This latest project was a sci-fi movie, *The Fountain*, where the director, (Darren Aronofsky) wanted to move away from digital effects to something more organic and real."

Starring Hugh Jackman and Rachel Weisz, *The Fountain* is a sci-fi love story set across time and space — a space which Chris and his father created.

So, how does an Oxford father-son team end up working in Hollywood?

"My father has worked in the industry for some time," says Chris modestly.

"He worked on the first two *Superman* movies in the late 1970s, *Supergirl*, *Flash Gordon*, and *The Lost World*."

Chris's father, Peter Parks, is not only a world-renowned natural history photographer, but a three-time Academy award-winning film photographer — including the Gordon E. Sawyer Oscar, presented to an individual whose technological contributions have brought credit to the industry.

Now, using unique equipment, developed over the years to film plankton and plantlife, Chris and his father create special effects that no one else can.

"Put simply, it's microphotography," says Chris. "But the way we do it, and the equipment we have developed, is unmatched thanks to our wide range of expertise."

"Basically, we bring together all of our

interests and talents: engineering, art, photography and design."

So, thanks to his father's influence, much of Chris's professional life has been concerned with the oceans, film and photography.

Couple this with his degree in engineering at Imperial College, London, and design at the Royal College of Art, and you have a truly fascinating combination.

Merging his talents, Chris is making his own mark on the world.

Using the same machinery he and his father have developed, Chris creates moving fluid paintings which continually change and develop over time.

A truly modern artist, he uses light, movement and depth, with technology as his tool, but not, as he is keen to point out, as a controlling influence.

"When I start off working on a new painting, I use a brush with paints, inks and dyes to create the form and feel that I want," he said.

"I then use light, heat, and other natural effects to manipulate the image and to create the depth and movement which I am seeking. Nothing is digitally manipulated in any way."

To capture his creation, Chris must photograph it; this is why some argue it's photography rather than pure art.

But Chris maintains that photography is just a tool.

"If I did not photograph it, it would be gone forever," he said.

"To me, it is very much painting, and art — I go through the same processes an artist would."

For obvious reasons, Chris likes to keep his art separate from the more scientific side of the business.

"I want people to approach the paintings like they would another piece of art, rather than as a scientific photograph," he said.

"Everyone sees something different in the paintings, and that is part of what I love about it."

"A lot of the images tap into people's experiences and can be quite powerful. I don't want people to see them in a literal way, as they might if they looked at them in the

context of special effects, natural history and extreme close-up photography."

Like any conventional artist, Chris is inspired by the world around him.

"I draw on the movements and dynamics that I discovered while filming some of the smallest organisms that inhabit the oceans, and what you see is a real fusion of everything I am interested in."

Although Chris is intent on pursuing his artistic visions, his works on commercials, and commissions, is also thriving.

"We recently completed a Gordon's gin advert, and a advert for BUPA, we are always working on something new."

But, with all this work, will he have time to attend the premiere of *The Fountain*?

"I'm not sure yet," he laughs, "the details have yet to be finalised, but maybe."

Either way, it sounds like he leads something of a Hollywood lifestyle, but Chris and his father still base themselves right here in Oxford.

"If I did not photograph it, it would be gone forever"

"It's pretty idyllic," he concludes. "We're based in 400-year-old Cotswold stone buildings. In summer we can have client meetings on the lawn under the ash tree. We have a pond which continually springs forth with life — the surrounding wildlife is quite inspirational, and is often used as subject or set for our work."

Not exactly Borneo, Bermuda, or LA, but the Parks pick Oxford as home any day of the week. □

Log onto www.chrisparksart.com or call 01993 704050.