

Mural brings a piece of Sussex to world's most luxurious ocean liner

SHIP'S GALLERY



IT'S the sort of view passengers on board one of the world's most luxurious ocean liners hope to see as they travel the high seas.

But guests on the magnificent Queen Mary 2 have only to wander up its stairs to see a dramatic image of the Seven Sisters towering above them.

The stunning, 5-metre tall oil and canvas work is one of two painted by New York-based artist Charles Wildbank, who confesses to have been in awe of the famous cliffs since a trip to the South Coast three years ago.

The canvas, along with his other mural depicting the California coast of Monterey, has been hung in the stairwell in the aft section of the ship between decks two and three.

The murals took Charles, who has been profoundly deaf since birth, almost a year to finish.

The 55-year-old has exhibited his work around the world and says the Queen Mary commission is among the proudest moments of his career.

He said: "I finally got to see my work five months after the maiden voyage while the ship was anchored in New York.

"Needless to say, I was enthralled by the scale of everything and it exceeded my expectations in terms of its grandeur and presentation. It didn't seem like a ship at all, more like a large resort on an island."

The Queen Mary was launched from Southampton in January.

It has already sailed into the record books by being the longest, tallest, widest, heaviest and, at a cost of almost

by **SAM THOMSON**

£550 million, most expensive liner to be built.

It boasts enough room for 2,600 guests to sail comfortably, ten restaurants, a library, theatre and even a planetarium.

Although bowled over by the scale of the liner, Charles nevertheless believes the stunning natural beauty of the Seven Sisters is the more jaw-dropping sight.

He said: "I rented a car out of London in search of a setting for the murals. I drove as far north as the highlands of Scotland, through Wales and as far south as Land's End.

Then, heading back toward London, I headed south and stumbled upon the cliffs, near Eastbourne, and found it to be a breathtaking wonder.

"I had only seen a small photo in a travel guide and had to get directions from the locals in Eastbourne to find it. It was as if it was a well-kept secret.

"It was the sheer scale and dramatic profile of the Seven Sisters that won my heart."

The artist has promised himself another visit to England in the near future.

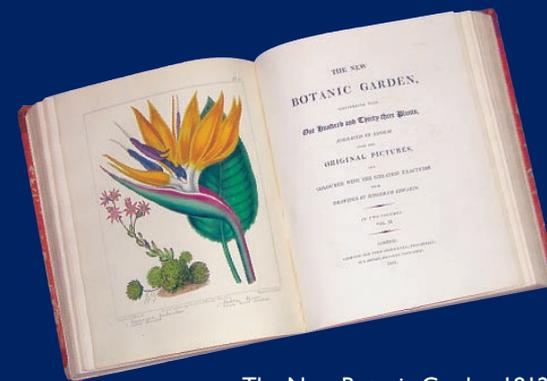
He said: "I would want to return to Seven Sisters, perhaps with a new friend to share this wonder. I couldn't but help envy those Eastbourne residents who live so near this beauty.

"I would love to paint more paintings with the Seven Sisters theme and capture the cliffs in varying colours of the hours and seasons."

Log on to www.wildbank.com to see more of Charles's work.

sam.thomson@theargus.co.uk

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