



Mr. Harry Barr, with samples of his own paintings, at his London flat yesterday

Picture by PETER ELINSKAS

The Cassius Clay of art finds fame at 70

AFTER 50 years of painting in watercolours, Mr. Harry Barr, at 70, is getting the international recognition he deserves.

A one-man show has just come back from Russia, minus a good many sales: British galleries are vying for him.

It is about time. Barr, short, vigorous and torrentially vocal, has made watercolour a strong, virile medium that astonishes people who associate it with gentle maiden ladies painting pastoral scenes.

"When I put a cloud on a sky, I am putting a cloud in THE sky," he says, his powerful, stubby hands waving in a blur of emphasis.

"I use a knife to sketch, scoring the paper. It is an act of creation, and creation is not polite and hesitant."

Lonely

Neither is Harry Barr. From his flat in Marylebone he sets out daily to paint, tramping through marshes and sitting under dripping trees. Sometimes his paintings get wet: "I never mind. No painting is so perfect that accident cannot improve it."

In mid-sentence Harry Barr can switch from vast self-confidence to criticism: "Why is an artist unhappy? Because he is trying to create a world of his own, and creation is a lonely, unsatisfactory, awful business, and you can never be satisfied with what you have created."

"Of course" — and his glasses twinkle with self-mocking humour — "some of my things do come off, and I'm often amazed that I was responsible."

He turns introspective. "I talk too much, that's my trouble. Somebody once called me the Cassius Clay of art, and it's true." Pause for change of mood, smile to spread: "And don't forget, Cassius Clay is a champ."