

Bridge & Andrews

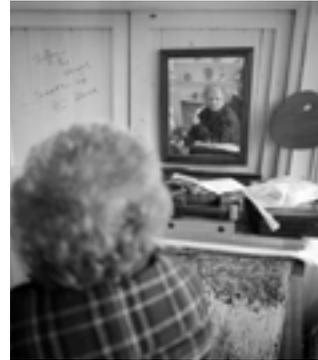
Maggi Hambling

Mr and Mrs Andrews could so easily appear smug, enthroned monarchs of their several acres. But although the garden seat is placed, for the purposes of the portrait, it would seem rather artificially beside a cornfield, and although the couple's clothes are delicate and elaborate, more suited to a promenade on their terrace, these two people and the gun dog are convincingly real.

Mr and Mrs Andrews look out of the painting at Gainsborough, and at us, in a questioning and engaging way, as hosts might meet new guests. Every inch of surrounding landscape, from oak shading them to the far horizon beyond, is as incisively painted as they are. It is a daring balance of a composition, over half the painting given to land and sky, and Mr and Mrs Andrews on their intimate patch become almost visitors. It is the wholeness of the painting

that makes it work, as does its immediacy, its sense of a charged moment. The dramatic Suffolk sky might produce rain in an instant, Mr Andrews' gun dog might escape and make a dash for a rat. This harvest scene could so easily be a sickly-sweet idyll but Gainsborough's passionate observation creates a masterpiece.

In 1981 I was commissioned by Greene King Brewery to paint the Chairman, Johnnie Bridge. We met in his office and I understood at once that he was not an indoor city-suit



RIGHT: JOHNNIE BRIDGE, CHAIRMAN OF GREENE KING BREWERY, Oil on canvas By Maggi Hambling 1981



RIGHT: MR AND MRS ANDREWS, Oil on canvas By Thomas Gainsborough

man but an outdoor country tweed one. We therefore agreed that I paint him in his landscape. I had Gainsborough's Mr and Mrs Andrews in mind.

It was decided he would stand beside a line of trees he had planted, his gun dog in attendance, Suffolk fields and sky stretching beyond and above them. Although the Gainsborough is horizontal and mine vertical, Johnnie's position in my composition is likewise left of centre. October suited us both, so in anticipation of an 'Indian Summer' and good light we began. In 1981 we were out of luck. The wind howled,

the rain fell, my easel often crashed into the mud and my subject clutched a hand-warmer in his left pocket. Johnnie's gun dog posed beautifully but his wife's white Highland terrier, determined to be in on the act, dashed everywhere, appearing in the painting further along the track about to disappear into a ditch.

Mr and Mrs Andrews is in the collection of the National Gallery, London, and Johnnie Bridge is in the collection of Greene King Brewery, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk.