

You said the Charenton Studio philosophy and your own philosophy are in complete harmony. What do we have in common ?

We both believe in setting children free, in allowing them to explore the world on their own terms, to play without expectations or targets, to create with spontaneity and joy. When it comes to painting, you have to give a child time and space to find his own path, to make his own magic. The same goes for every other part of childhood.

In your book, you quote your 7-year old son : "I don't want a teacher who tells me what to do. I just want to draw". In today's society, the simple act of drawing has become an issue ?

Every aspect of childhood has been infected by our impatience, our obsession with competition and our tendency to micromanage the young. But this approach does not work. A child is not a project or a product or a trophy or a piece of clay you can mould into a work of art. A child is a person who will thrive if allowed to be the protagonist of his own life.

The parents who take their children to the Studio are looking for a place which is free from the "performance race". There are also parents who expect some results. Could you explain why children need to withdraw from daily pressure ?

Children who are raised under pressure often turn out to be less creative. They are so worried about pleasing adults and "doing the right thing" that they never learn to take risks and make mistakes. They do not learn to think for themselves. And they don't learn to look inside to work out who they are because they are so busy trying to be what we want them to be. They also suffer from more stress.

Children who have had every moment of their lives micromanaged, organized, supervised and scheduled by adults will later find it hard to stand on their own two feet. In other words they never grow up. That is why university students are suffering mental health problems in record numbers. These days you also hear professors tell of 19-year-olds handing over the mobile phone in the middle of interviews with the words: "Why don't you sort this out with my mum? ". Parents are even turning up at job interviews to help negotiate salary and vacation packages !

Too much pressure is also killing off the simple joy of being a child – what William Blake called "seeing a world in a grain of sand....holding infinity in the palm of your hand." We've turned childhood into a race and taken much of the magic away. And when childhood loses its magic, being a parent loses its magic too.

If you were living in Paris, what would be your motives to register your children for the Charenton Studio ?

To give them a place where they can play, learn, laugh, create and dream. A place where they can be children.