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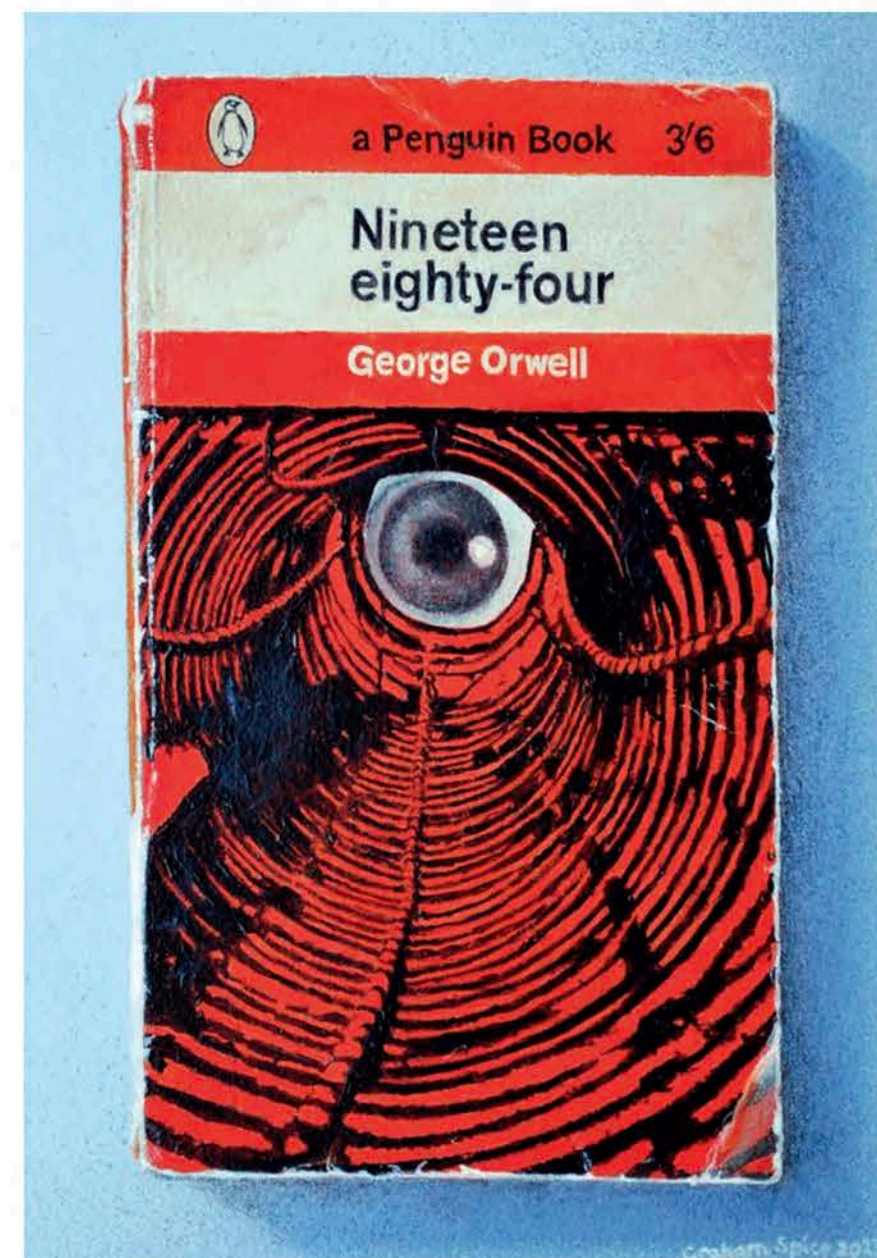
**NEW YEAR, NEW  
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MAIN IMAGE Old Oil  
Paint, acrylic on canvas,  
90x90cm TOP RIGHT  
Nineteen Eighty-Four Still  
Watching, acrylic on  
canvas, 18x24cm



# Graham Spice

This still life artist tells *Sarah Edghill* about his love of lino printing, design and working with acrylic ►



After studying at Medway College of Art, Graham Spice worked as a graphic designer in London for leading design groups with clients in Europe, the Middle East and the USA. He then began running his own agency. He now lives in Suffolk and specialises in still life where a selection of his work is available through the Aldeburgh Contemporary Arts Gallery, [graham-spice-artist.com](http://graham-spice-artist.com)

**I had an amazing art teacher, who suggested I take extra lessons.**

From then on, about a quarter of my time at secondary school was spent in the art room. That teacher even got me a place at Medway College of Art on Saturday mornings and, when I left school, I was accepted at Medway full time. After completing the foundation year, I decided to take the three-year graphic design course, while still keeping an interest in my painting and printing.

**Before computers, graphic designers had to have manual skills.**

Back in the 1970s and 1980s, when you designed a brochure or a piece of packaging, you had to produce a visual/mock-up to show the client exactly what it would look like. This is where I gained many of the skills I needed to produce very realistic images. Towards the later part of my career as a designer, I turned back to my first love of printing and painting.

**Over the years I have evolved into a painter of still life.**

We are surrounded by everyday objects, brands and products which I find fascinating. I collect and gather numerous objects and products and have them stacked in every corner of my studio, and these form the subject matter of my paintings. I start by setting up a still life; this can involve building a mini set, mocking things up to produce the whole scenario, from an American Diner table set-up to an interior of a cupboard, or just a simple product on its own. I like to use natural light and, as my style of realistic painting is not the fastest, I use photography to capture the moment when the lighting is right for the atmosphere I am creating, and it means I can also vary the positioning. I then base my painting on these photographic images, which allows me to choose the best composition and get the maximum amount of detail, which is an important feature of my work.

**I love to portray the dents and scratches that life has left in it's wake.**

I like painting glass and silver, metal objects



*Cafe Table In The Morning Sunlight, acrylic on canvas, 50x40cm*



*Chrome Topped Soda Syphons, acrylic on canvas, 70x100cm*



*Bialetti Moka Express, acrylic on canvas, 60x60cm*



*Chateau Margaux, acrylic on canvas, 50x40cm*

**HOW I WORK HOW I PAINT**

that have reflections, even old rusty things, the way the light glints on their surfaces, emphasising the dents and peeling labels. A recurring subject of mine is a collection of old blue soda syphons which I've obtained over time. I never get bored painting them. I begin by putting down an overall base colour onto the canvas and then draw in the basic image. Working over this, I build up the general shapes and structure of the objects, and once this is done, I can get into the detail: the way the light falls on an object, and the reflections. I prefer to paint with acrylic on canvas. It dries quicker than oil and allows me to work over and over on the same area of the painting without the colours getting muddy. I find it more controllable and there's no smell!

**Nostalgia is a strong emotion.**

I choose subjects which may have memories for me or I think will have memories for the viewer. Linking back to my time as a designer, I like iconic products and brands, their logos, and the different typefaces, these all form a part of people's everyday lives and the memories they can relate to. Ralph Goings, an American artist from the 60s and 70s, has been a real inspiration for me.

**I always loved the directness of lino printing.**

Cutting into a block of lino and printing from the remaining surface. It's so basic but, like everything I do, it ends up being a much more complex process of producing highly detailed, multi-coloured images. I use the reduction method of printing, which is also called the 'suicide' method: if you make a mistake at any time, it's a total disaster! Each print is cut from a single block of lino, printing the lightest colour first, then cutting into the same block to produce the second colour and so on until the final result is achieved. This means that a cut can never be reprinted.

**I get most of my commissions from individuals.**

They are often from people who want a painting of an object that has a special meaning to them. I had a commission from a client in London who wanted a painting of a Tabasco sauce bottle two metres tall, while someone else wanted a painting of a much-loved old Aga.

**I'm not a perfectionist but I like to think my work has some individual style.**

It's not just wanting to make something look photorealistic, it's about wanting to ►



*Pears From The Allotment*, acrylic on canvas, 20x50cm



## I love to portray the dents and scratches that life has left in it's wake

reflect the life that the subject has had and showing it. I do abandon some paintings if I feel they're not working or not good enough. Some of my paintings may have more than one image hidden, as I tend to paint over the abandoned ones.

### **My studio is a small room in my house.**

I've been known to have to do a painting sideways when it was too tall to fit in the room. I also have an outbuilding in my courtyard where I do my printing. I use linseed oil-based inks and they have quite a strong smell, so it's better not to have them in the house. About 15 years ago, I relocated out of London to Suffolk, where I live with my wife Hilary, who puts up with me painting all of the time, as well as me taking over the other parts of the house when my studio is not big enough or I need to set up a still life in a different place where the lighting is better.

### **I wear out a lot of small brushes.**

A painting can take up to six weeks to complete depending on size and complexity. I paint nearly every day and the mornings are best. It's my full-time occupation since retiring from being a designer and I have to keep busy. I don't know how I would cope if I couldn't paint anymore. □



*Jennie's Aga*, acrylic on canvas, 100x70cm