

Artist Sandra Menant, renowned for vibrant use of colour in her glorious abstracts, has an extraordinary family history of painters, one of whom used his art skills to help the French Resistance.

Paris-born Sandra, who has lived in the UK for 40 years, started painting nine years ago when she was on sabbatical from teaching during a difficult period of her life.

Sandra, 60, says: *“I went to an art shop and bought my first canvas and acrylic paints – because I don’t like the smell of white spirit that comes with oils!”*

“It started as therapy and as a mindful exercise. I didn’t do it to sell initially.”

Her first painting sold in August 2011 as part of the Wandsworth Artists’ Open House trail when she opened the doors of her south-west London home to art lovers.

Since then, Sandra has sold more than 80 paintings, having left teaching in 2016 and become a full-time artist. Her work has also featured in numerous exhibitions in London.

“It has been quite amazing – I would never have imagined it would have turned out like this. I was so surprised at my drive and enthusiasm, the hours I spend painting.”

“Colours, textures and atmosphere are the essence of my paintings.”

But her family history reveals clues as to where this inspiration and artistic drive may originate.

Her great grandfather Marius Menant painted at an atelier in the Marais district of Paris about 100 years ago. He could not make a living from art so became a draughtsman for a lamp designer.

His son Jean, a skilled painter of Turner-esque skies (or ‘ciels’), also turned to work as a draughtsman because it was so hard to earn money as an artist. However, Jean also used his skills to fake papers for the French Resistance in the war.

And his son Elie, Sandra’s father, cycled the papers to the resistance fighters when he was 17 years old. It was not until many years later, after Elie died in 2007, that Sandra discovered a medal he had been awarded for his bravery.

Elie worked at CERN, the European Organisation for Nuclear Research near Geneva as a metrologist, having trained as a cartographer at the IGN in Paris, helping build the accelerators used to study the fundamental particles of the universe.

But he too started painting in his sixties, creating Japanese-style paintings after masters Hiroshige and Hokusai. His house in Ferney -Voltaire, near Geneva, was full of his work.

It was her father who introduced Sandra to the major art galleries and museums of the world.

One aspect of her work that resonates with Sandra is the reaction of people who buy her paintings. In some cases, they even re-decorate their house around the work of art they have bought.

“A painting is so personal, I am really surprised when people like something abstract and love it for years. When I go to someone’s house and see a work there, it is a very odd feeling, quite humbling.”

“They can go as far as changing the wall colour or the sofa to go with the painting. It’s very emotional – and very touching.”