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## *Painting A Thousand Words: Great-Great Granddaughter of Charles Dickens*

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SLIDESHOW: A peek into some of the Ritz London paintings of Lucy Dickens, capturing pomp and circumstance, costumes, uniforms and old traditions enacted daily as hotel guests come and go.

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*Just like her great-great grandfather Charles, Lucy Dickens is a keen observer of character and society, especially in hotels and fancy restaurants. However, she captures the scenes not by words but by her works on canvas.*

"I am an avid people-watcher, a bit of a nosey-parker with a vivid imagination," says Lucy Dickens, great-great granddaughter of notable novelist Charles Dickens.

The London-based painter is fascinated by the glam of grand hotels, especially at the Ritz on Piccadilly. "My characters are based on real people, but they somehow become exaggerated, larger than life as the painting progresses," says Dickens.

She further narrates her paintings by imagining: "What's the story with that group of men in the hotel bar? Are they planning a heist? Or just discussing their last board meeting? What about that woman in the red dress? Is she a hooker? A trophy wife? Look at the doorman — what dramas has he witnessed over the years?"

It seems that the storytelling gene runs deep within the family. Dickens began drawing while writing a series of children's books in the 1990s. This was before she worked as a fashion stylist for Condé Nast.

Dickens now enjoys spending many hours sitting quietly in the Ritz London, observing the scene of pomp and circumstance, costumes, uniforms and old traditions. First making sketches, the illustrations then become large-scale paintings in her North London studio.

"These are real situations; vignettes of ordinary life and I am there with my sketchbook as an observer and reporter, capturing the moment, which I will later interpret and develop," she says.

As a self-taught artist, her influences are as far-stretched as her musings. These include visual realist Andrew Wyeth from the US, German artist Otto Dix and controversial avant-garde painter Walter Sickert, who had a fascination with Jack the Ripper, as well as the darker side of Victorian life.

Dickens describes her own painting style as airy, yet dramatic. She says: "My technique as a painter involves layering and weaving many colours to bring life into my figures and spaces. I want to feel the air and see movement in my paintings, and I avoid solid blocks of colour. I work in oils using rough canvases, which helps to create the diffused, airy quality that I strive to achieve."

*An exhibition of Ritz London paintings will run at Osborne Studio Gallery from 27 April to 13 May 2016.*

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