Fred West – I’m staggered someone can be that bad

The unending quest that drives you on. To keep on painting. The poem that touches your soul. A Man’s A Man For A’ That by Robert Burns. It says that after the achievements of any life a man is a man, just that. The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase. That I’m a nightmare to live with! My girlfriend says it’s the truth, but I like to think I’m considerate and pretty OK.

The event that altered the course of your life and character. The day in 1989 when two of my paintings were accepted by the Royal Scottish Academy and sold immediately. I realised I might have a future in painting. The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it. I’d steal Francis Bacon’s Tragicus. May-June 1973. I love its haunting darkness. The song that means most to you. A Red, Red Rose by Burns. It tells you how deep true love can go. The happiest moment you will cherish forever. The opening of my A Con- trat Of Styles show in Edinburgh in 1991. All 25 paintings sold, and suddenly I had some money and a career.

The saddest time that shook your world. The death of my father. He was a miner and there was never a person prouder of what I’d achieved. No one could stop him from his house without him showing them a picture by his lad. I’m still coming to terms with his death. The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you. At least I tried!

The philosophy that underpins your life. Always be kind. The order of service at your funeral. I’d want a church service in Scotland with a reading of Burns’ ‘Ae Fond Kiss. I’d like my ashes to rest next to my parents. My mum Catherine died in 2010 at 86. For decades we had a geographic separation – me in London, them in Scotland. But we were also living in other worlds, so on a deeper level we never really connected.

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The person who has influenced you most. W Gordon Smith, the Scottish art critic, playwright and TV presenter. He encouraged me at the outset of my career when I was getting flak from other critics. He died in 1996. The figure from history for whom you’d most like to buy a pie and a pint. I’d have a wild night with Vincent van Gogh around the time he was losing his mind, so I could try and understand what he was going through.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child. Follow your dreams. The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity. I’m intrigued by evil. I’ve read several books about Fred West because I’m staggered someone can be that bad.

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