



# The Art of Living

MINENT SURGEON AND ARTIST **SIR ROY CALNE** SHOWS BEBECCA SKINNER HOW THE HUMAN BODY HAS PROVED TO BE HIS CANVAS OF DISCOVERY AND INSPIRATION

**A**S HIPPOCRATES, the Greek physician said, "Life is short, the art long." Transplant surgeon Sir Roy Calne has not only prolonged human life but has immortalised it, through his own unique art. Since the Renaissance many doctors have made names for themselves in the art world. But what makes Sir Roy different is the fact that he facilitates the healing process utilising both his talents.

His paintings and sculptures, many depicting the surgical world of transplantations – some even showing patients during operations – go on show in Kuala Lumpur next month and offer a unique insight into his scientific world of discovery.

Sir Roy was only 16 when he entered medical school in England, in the days when the average student age was 25. He admits, "Many had distinguished service careers in bravery. Only three or four of us were direct from school and we felt very insignificant and miserable." But this in no way deterred the inquisitive student who was recognised for his work in clinical transplantation and immunosuppression in 1986 and was twice nominated for a Nobel Prize.

Sir Roy's links with Malaysia date back many years. As a young medical officer in the army stationed in Hong Kong he married a nurse he had met at an English hospital. The next day his regiment left for Malaya where he was to spend the next two years. But he felt his calling lay in surgery. "I wanted to teach anatomy to enable me to take my surgical exams, so we went back to England and I got a job at the princely salary of

300 pounds a year, which even in those days was pitiful. We were very hungry so my mother used to bring us food parcels."

During this time he was exposed to pioneering early work in immunosuppression, using skin grafts on mice, being done by celebrated biologist, Sir Peter Medawar, who was later awarded a Nobel Prize. Sir Roy says at the time was amazed when the venerable physician said he didn't think his findings could be of value to sick people in the future.

"I couldn't believe it. I went to my then boss and asked him if he could put in a word for me so I could work in Medawar's lab, but he told me to learn how to treat hernias instead – which I did." But the unstoppable Sir Roy went on to teach himself how to transplant kidneys in animals and studied how to prolong graft survival, and in the process discovered an anti-leukemia drug that showed hopeful results. After having the results published in a leading UK medical journal he made his own contact with Sir Peter Medawar. The professor was to become very supportive of Sir Roy's transplant work, even visiting the patients who were indeed benefiting from his own early work.

A grant enabled Sir Roy to go to Boston in the US, the home of clinical transplantation. Despite relative disinterest in his work from the laboratory in which Dr Francis Moore had carried out the first identical twins' transplant, Sir Roy tirelessly continued studying chemical immunosuppression, particularly with kidney transplants.

Later, in 1965 he went back to the UK taking up the new chair of surgery in Cambridge, and continuing his research. While his colleagues continued to say successful transplants could never be done, he never gave up hope. A new drug he was working with, cyclosporine, was to offer consistently good results and went on to become a watershed in organ transplants worldwide. "So instead of about 10 centres doing transplants, within two or three years of cyclosporine there were more than 1,000

## AT A GLANCE

### STATUS

Married to Patsy, with six children and 13 grandchildren

### MENTORS

Lord Brock; Sir Peter Medawar; Dr Francis Moore and Dr Joseph Murray

### RETIREMENT?

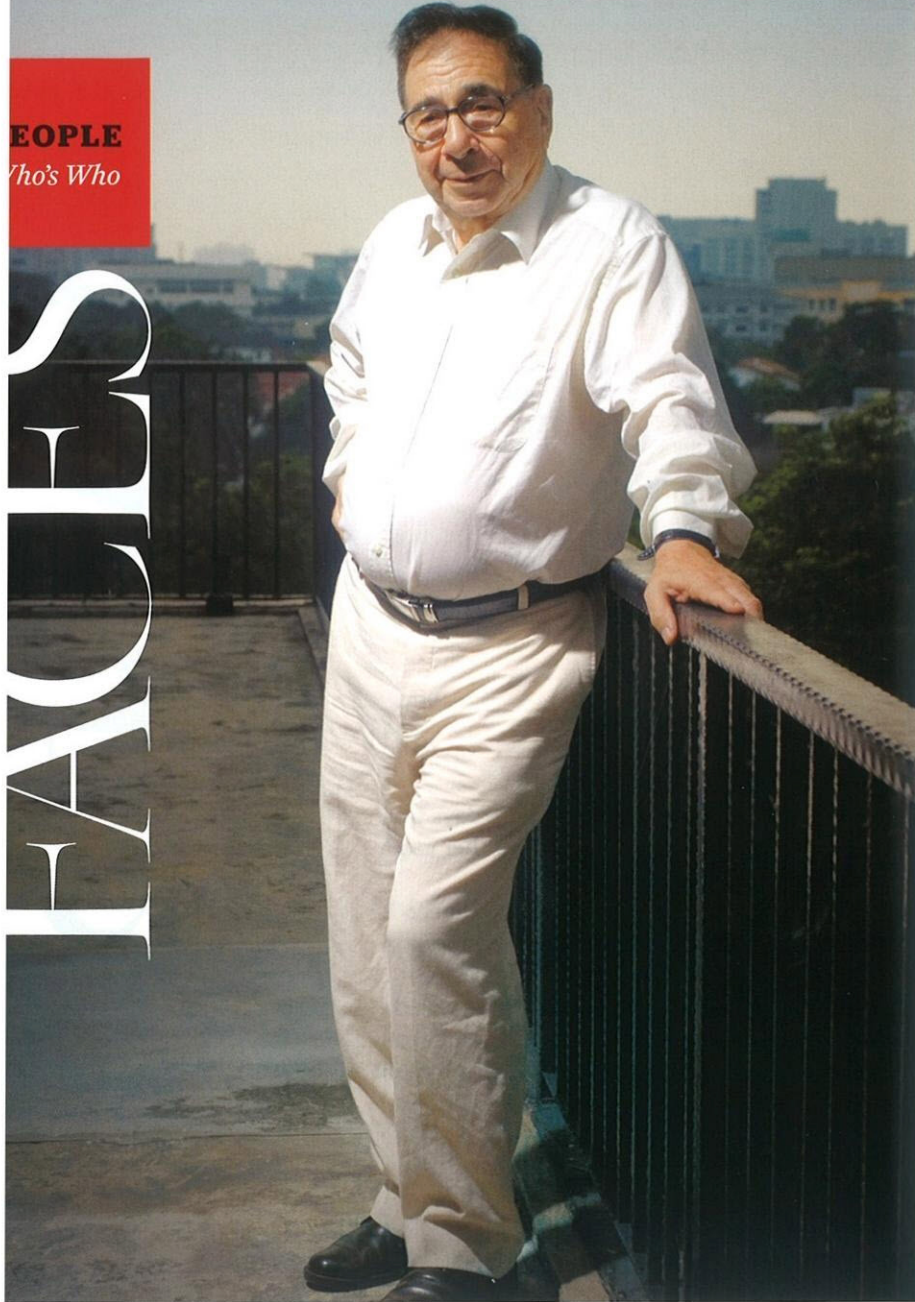
"My wife said it would drive her mad and I wouldn't last long."

### FAVOURITE BOOK

Biography of J Robert Oppenheimer

### AMBITION

To see his research into gene therapy for diabetes move into patient treatment



*Sir Roy was delighted to find painting offered unexpected therapy, with both children and adult patients*

centres. It was also to herald several new and successful drugs," he explained.

His links and love of South East Asia was to also continue well into the future. Now aged 78 he comes to Kuala Lumpur every few months to conduct transplant operations at Universiti Malaya Medical Centre (UMMC), after visiting Singapore where he is a visiting professor at the National University of Singapore. There he continues to study immunosuppressants while also researching the treatment of diabetes with cell transplants.

But wherever he goes in the world, his paints and sketchbooks come too. "I've always been interested in images. I think in images

**SECRET OF LIFE**

One of Sir Roy's favourite sculptures is his Double Helix portraying the three pioneers of DNA, James Watson, Francis Crick and Franklin Roslyn, pictured on previous page

rather than words, and I've always been painting and drawing."

New inspiration came from one of his liver transplant patients, the distinguished Scottish artist, John Bellamy in 1988. "He gave me some lessons, especially with colours. One lesson was to paint him while he painted me. As he recovered over three weeks he did 60 watercolour paintings showing what it was like to have a liver transplant, giving a fantastic record of how a patient feels. But while he portrayed himself as rather a saintly character being tortured by the surgeons, I painted him as a poor patient who was just about able to sit in an armchair. The contrast in perception prompted me to start painting my patients."

Sir Roy was delighted to find it offered unexpected therapy. "Especially with children, rather than being terrified of the doctor, when I took off my white coat and brought out paper and charcoal and began drawing, they become interested and we became friends. Adults enjoyed it as well, often talking to me about little things that bothered them that they wouldn't normally have time to during my formal ward rounds."

He then began painting his colleagues, and sometimes even surgical procedures. "I did one of the first complicated operation of a combined heart, lungs and liver transplant. When I had finished my work on the liver, the heart and lungs surgeon took over. So I was able to finish my drawing in the operating theatre."

He admits, "This is unusual in the art world. Some doctors have used their artistic talents to demonstrate anatomy like Sir Charles Bell of Bell's Palsy. But most medical people who paint tend to paint outside their profession - landscapes, seascapes that sort of thing."

He is also a sculptor. "Modelling in clay and wax has many features in common with surgery, being three dimensional, requiring two hands and a knowledge of anatomy also helps."

Sir Roy has been exhibiting his art around the world for the past 16 years with shows in New York; New Orleans; Rio de Janeiro; Kyoto; Thailand; Singapore; Germany and in the UK at Cambridge and at The Barbican and Royal Academy in London.

His exhibition in KL runs at the KLCC Convention Centre from May 5th to 8th before moving to the Private Gallery from May 9th to June 5th where he has exhibited twice before. On show will be works on paper, oil on board and bronzes and it comes as no surprise that the benevolent artist is offering most of the proceeds from sales to the Malaysian Transplant Society. Now Sir Roy hopes to improve Malaysia's paucity of organ donors. "There is a high incidence of road traffic accidents particularly among young motorcyclists. If I could do anything to help Malaysia develop a programme for organ donors for transplantation, I would be very happy to do so." ■