

# The Fellowship of Professional and Amateur Artists'

## Wellingborough Museum Summer Exhibition

1st to 8th August 2014

by David Rafer BA (Hons), PhD

It's hard to believe that I've been writing commentaries on FPAA exhibitions for seven years. In that time, new members have joined the Fellowship who may be interested in a brief autobiographical note before my discussion of this year's show.

My art interests became more academic when I first met the FPAA founder, John Black, then Senior Lecturer leading the art pathway at De Montfort University, in 1994 when I enrolled on a Bachelor of Arts degree. Although primarily English, the course had a strong art strand and proved a great opportunity to explore art history and theory and the galleries of Paris and London. Since my university days, art continues to enrich my life, working with ceramic sculpture and watercolour painting for personal pleasure. Thus while my commentaries undoubtedly come with my own 'baggage', hopefully they've been pertinent and useful for artists to ponder the kinds of reaction their works inspire when they stand as finished objects of contemplation.

Once again, judging was made difficult this year due to the high standards achieved. The Mayor attended and addressed the preview evening's gathering, launching the 2014 exhibition. This year 150 entries were displayed, once again highlighting the great creativity and talents of the artists who have used this opportunity for self-expression. This year's eclectic artworks cover a wide variety of subjects, themes, techniques and skills.

### Landscapes

One of the exhibition's outstanding works has to be John Frederick Black's magnificent landscape painting, 'The Fullness of Time' (oil on canvas), No. 9. This remarkable work was started by John in an hour's painting master class and completed in the studio. Working to a tight schedule, he has produced a magnificent, numinous work that radiated and permeated the entire exhibition with a warming sunset glow. In this oil on canvas painting, John's treatment of light, brushwork and subject matter are heavily influenced by Samuel Palmer. The viewer is treated to an elevated perspective onto a symbolic landscape and has an uninterrupted view across a valley that is cut with a winding path leading to a horizon bathed in deep sunset reds, yellows and oranges whilst in the foreground loom idealised swirls of burgeoning vegetation. There's fecundity in this pastoral vision of a land swelling with harvest ripeness. The scale of this canvas makes the work less a window onto this scene than a man-sized doorway through which we're invited to step. The Palmeresque qualities implant a sense of rising to the spiritual, of aspiring to a Christian idyll somewhere high above the mundane. The aesthetic values call for us to take flight over a glorious realm. The words of a psalm accompany the work:

Psalm 65:11-13

- <sup>11</sup> *Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness.*
- <sup>12</sup> *They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness: and the little hills rejoice on every side.*
- <sup>13</sup> *The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing.*

In these lines, the wilderness touched by God becomes valleys of abundance yielding a bountiful harvest. Through capturing such a visionary landscape, the artist wants the joy of life to sing to us from his work, realising a vision from which we emerge feeling inspired or

perhaps having glimpsed, as Samuel Palmer wrote, visions of landscape 'passed thro' the intense purifying separating transmuting heat of the soul's infabulous alchymy' (Palmer, *Letters*). This reminds us of the ancient wisdom that through alchemy the post-Fall soul might be purified and the world glimpsed anew.

John also exhibited No 10, 'The End of the Day – Heacham' (acrylic on canvas), a highly atmospheric painting of figures nearly lost in a hazy sunset glow as light falls on a calm sea on Heacham foreshore. The effect created is like bathing in light, the work exuding a mysterious dream-like quality.

Another seascape was exhibited by Claire Chilver, 'Old Harry Rocks' (pastel) No 17, being a picture of a Dorset chalk stack with sea and sweeping red sky. This artist also showed 'Swaffham' (pastel) No 18 realising a pastoral scene across some fields to a church.

Jean Daker showed 'Bluebells at Coton Manor' (oil) No 21, capturing the imposing straight trunks of Coton Manor bluebell wood with its flowering carpet of bluebells with just the suggestion of figures on the path.

David C. Hunt showed 'Beaulieu River from Exbury' (pastel) No 46, capturing an autumnal looking scene from the New Forest National Park.

Ann Mayhew exhibited 'Pen y Fan in Autumn' (watercolour) No 74, a landscape of the Brecon Beacons, and 'Autumn Walk' (watercolour) No 75 showing a solitary figure among trees.

David Miles draws on elements of nature, displaying two watercolours including 'Early Arrivals' (watercolour) No 82 with brooding sky, focal tree to the left and birds in flight over water that gleams with light below (for more on Miles's art, see Vivian Schofield Prize below).

Robert Pearce exhibited a large canvas entitled, 'Snape Maltings, Suffolk' (oil) No 96, showing the Quay beside the arts complex in Suffolk with moored boats beside the old brewery buildings. I particularly enjoyed the way that Pearce treats light in this work, creating the reflected colour of the larger boat hull in the river.

Jacqui Tomlin exhibited 'Nene Valley, Irthlingborough' (acrylic) No 130, showing that snow and cold are not necessarily projected through white but here have a pinkish quality.

Margaret Watts showed 'A Frozen Lake' (acrylic) No 137, a painting of a winter scene reflecting shadows of trees in icy water.

Freda Warwick displayed 'Amongst the Trees' (acrylic) No 135, in which we find two silhouetted figures amongst looming tree trunks and a sense of perspective as we're drawn into Warwick's wood.

Mary Waudby showed 'Kinderdijk' (acrylic) No 139, a picture of the 18th century windmills in the Netherlands beneath a cloudy, impressionistic sky with two figures adding a sense of scale. The overall work retains a certain textured quality.

Marion Whittle's 'Memories' (acrylic) No 142, presents the silhouette of a soldier with a rifle and helmet standing over a symbolic poppy field with blazing sun behind, appropriate for this year's anniversary of World War I.

Carol Woodland's 'Swiss Alps' (chalk pastel) No 144, is a mountain scene with sky and rolling grassy slopes, pine trees and fenced path channelling our gaze through the valley pass whilst ahead lies a mountain realised in cooler colours.

## Flora and Fauna

Margaret Davies exhibited 'Poppy' (acrylic) No 24, using the startling contrast of a black cat popping up through vibrant yellow blooms.

Fiona Hagger showed 'Ready for My Close-up' (watercolour) No 31, painting the imposing head of a lion with staring green eyes.

June Heath used pastels for her picture 'Snow Leopard' (pastel) No 38, concentrating on a looming leopard with intent expression, ears pricked, staring pebble eyes possibly fixed on prey. The darkness of the background comes through the leopard's spots.

Eileen Mason's 'Feeding Time' (pastel) No 73, shows a green woodpecker positioned with chick against a tree trunk.

Others have exhibited plant studies, including Elizabeth Culley 'Sweet Pea' (pastel) No 19, showing violet sweet pea blooms in a glass of water against a plain background, and also 'Rose' (pastel) No 20 with a single yellow rose bloom, picking up the deeper colour tones of the rose's petals in the border.

Christine Fitch exhibited 'Hollyhocks 2' (watercolour) No 28, crowding her picture with blooms and foliage.

David C. Hunt showed 'Red Poppy Head' (pastel) No 45, a single striking red bloom against a black background with wide, white border, the frame's colour corresponding to the poppy's heart.

Juliet Illsley's 'Wisteria Simensis' (watercolour) No 49, shows a set of colourful wisteria blooms characteristically trailing down, and the artist also showed 'Teasles' {sic.} (watercolour) No 50, a study of dry-looking teasel heads against a vague, muted background with brown stems and spines.

Maureen Lynn's 'Tuscan Table' (oil) No 72, is a still life showing an arrangement of richly coloured fruit.

Helen Olden displayed 'Sea Holly' (watercolour) No 88, painting the splendid, pale blue, spiky structures of this Eryngium.

Maureen Parnell brought in two botanic-style, illustrative works including 'Camelias' (watercolour) No 90, showing the pink blooms of a flowering camellia with an iridescent blue butterfly above, and in 'Hollyhocks and Hydranger' (watercolour) No 91, amalgamating the titular blooms.

## Buildings

Mrs A.B. Bentley exhibited 'Coton Manor I' (acrylic) No 7, a view of a 17th century house in Northamptonshire showing a profusion of blooms in pots etc., arranged about the steps to an entrance. The heavy plank door is almost obscured by a climber in bloom.

Peter Phelps's 'Floodlight' (acrylic) No 101, shows an aspect of St Mary's church, Higham Ferrers, lit up at night.

Richard D. Jones, in contrast, showed 'Evenlight, Market Square, Higham Ferrers' (oil) No 59, showing part of St Mary's church rising behind a row of houses whilst just edging the picture's right is part of the conical base of the market cross. Crossing College Street,

Chris Holden exhibited 'Chichele College, Higham Ferrers' (watercolour) No 40, painting a view from behind the medieval College's surviving Tudor door, which is visible here through the ruined window to the picture's centre left.

Brian Munton displayed 'Finchingfield' (watercolour) No 85, a picturesque view of the Essex village from across water, with the road transporting our gaze up to the church tower with its intriguing cupola housing the angelus bell that replaced the church's spire after storm damage in the 17th century.

## Portraiture

Jill Smith exhibited 'Who's Who?' (pastel) No 115, a picture in the style of the BBC's own profile artwork showing the television Doctor Who actors. Smith makes the addition of newly cast Doctor, Peter Capaldi turning towards the viewer, however, aficionados and viewers of the recent 50th anniversary special may question whether John Hurt's profile should be included between the profiles of Paul McGann and Christopher Eccleston.

Michael Peachey showed the intriguing work, 'A Twist of Kate' (oil) No 94, a surrealist picture of a naked woman with sections of her anatomy reversed. She's posed before a picture of water lilies that mirror her face towards us whilst water spills from the lily-mirror, cascading onto a plant.

Brenda Hargreaves exhibited two portraits painted in oils, No 33 and No 34.

April Booth exhibited 'Lydia' (oil) No 12, painting a standing nude against drapes.

Dawne Harpin showed her portrait of the Queen Mother, entitled 'Her Majesty the Queen' (oil) No 36 this work being accompanied by a framed letter from Buckingham Palace.

Freyja Montali's 'Feel It' (oil) No 84, shows an ominous face leaking dark paint from eyes, nose and mouth like drips of dried blood. The artist gives this mask-like creation a kind of inner frame of long, stylised, straggly hair and the whole image is painted on to strips of cloth, suggesting the work might once have served as bandages that were removed from a patient who possibly suffered extensive cosmetic surgery, after which they were mounted through the conventions and 'packaging' of art for our consumption. The title invites our sensual response but we're not shown a pleasant thing to respond to, merely reminded that underneath we're all, as Francis Bacon observed, 'meat' and that the pressures of modern expectations for beautiful body image have a dark side. All this raises questions of the purposes of representation, the uses of beauty for artistic consumption and societal expectations. Montali's artwork lacks the key identifying features of the eyes which here have become dark, gouged-out blanks and thus cannot impart any true sense of identity, self and soul that would normally reassure observers. Instead, we come away thinking of a kind of Turin shroud merged with an Edgar Allen Poe story.

## Awarded Works

The award of Commended was given to Juliet Illsley for 'Teasles' {sic.} No 50, a study of teasel heads against a vague background with brown stems and spines realised through the medium of watercolours. The flower petals have dropped from Illsley's teasels and we're left with the spiky seed heads that will probably survive through to Spring. Illsley lays a variety of suitably muted colours to create her overall background wash, setting off the stems and bulbous heads. The background wash is composed of yellow ochre rising to the left with green hues and 'warm' browns in the centre and lower half of the picture whilst there's the suggestion of vague ultramarine hues for the 'cooler' top right-hand corner of the picture, offering a vague sense of indistinct sky beyond. The sweeping vertical lines of teasel stems cut through her washes, climbing and rising to dominate the picture with silvery white areas on the stems suggesting reflected light. Crowning these stems we have six teasel seed heads bobbing and dancing in Illsley's grouping whilst thin, dry, tapering leaves curl in decorative patterning to the sides of the arrangement, offering a balancing effect. Our gaze wanders from each teasel, roving on a tour through the patterns and colour mixes and abstract forms of this botanic illustration, finished with a wood frame that echoes the colour of Illsley's teasel stems.

Commended was also given to Louise Thomas for 'Mount Orgueil, Jersey' (watercolour and ink) No 125. Thomas takes for her subject the 600 year old Mount Orgueil Castle on Jersey's east coast, viewed from the south. Her chosen perspective shows some boats in the harbour of Gorey below whilst above a line of colourful cottages divide the picture horizontally and are, in turn, surmounted by the blocky walls, ramparts and curious artillery platforms of a section of the castle. The picture has an illustrative, organised quality with light washes taking our gaze up from the reflective colours of the sea through Thomas's layering of harbour stonework, with details of ropes, steps and railings, through the blocky angular shapes of houses to the castle dominating the upper right-hand side of the picture. This all works to relegate her sky, with granulation effect, mostly to the upper right quarter of the picture. The reflections and light treatment of colour serves the picture well as we rise from the darker hues along the base of the harbour walls to the liberal greens between houses and castle. A timeless piece of art results.

Commended was awarded to John Walton for 'Green is the Prime Colour of the Wood' (watercolour) No 132. This miniature wood scene with delicate, luminous greens, presents a light brightness beyond overhanging tree boughs, with wide white border and frame serving to physically and psychologically clear our mind and eyes, drawing us to concentrate and focus intently upon Walton's magical picture. We have little choice but to find ourselves on the tiny path that he depicts, moving mentally and visually into the suggested space where the tree trunks are bathed in pale white and golden yellow. It's an intriguing use of perspective that delights the eye.

Commended was given to Diana Swain for 'Free Spirit' (acrylic) No 122. Acrylic colours add to the vibrancy of Swain's painting of a white horse, mane flaring and fore-hoof raised, framed between the dark tree branches on the left and shrub-like vegetation below and to the right, all set against a background of rising blue. The background is composed of bands of blue waves that are cut by an orange horizon and blue sky. Swain delineates her pony with light to the right and darker shadowing along its flanks. The result is a striking work that projects a mythological quality to this observer. Her horse has its ears pricked, its attention fully upon what stands before it, making us, the audience its subject. We therefore become the observed and that quality makes for an arresting picture.

Commended was awarded to Joy Barry for 'Looking Out' (acrylic) No 4. Barry paints a cat and a girl looking out of a window, the window's central division reminding me vaguely of attempts to project aspects of personality through cubism. Whilst Joy's picture isn't cubist, there's certainly a strongly projected relationship, both physical and psychological, between girl and cat, with both having curiously curving eyes, their gazes fixed upon the outside world that is suggested through the reflection of bare tree branches upon the lacy whiteness of what is probably a voile behind them. The tree branches have no leaves, suggesting winter and are only dark fingers raised like lines of energy rising from cat to girl. The green of the cat's eyes is picked up in the pot plant beside the girl and both cat and girl are comfortably posed, resting and ready to wait out the chill beyond their window. They are in that in-between space, between voile and window panes and are also sandwiched within the months between autumn and spring.

Commended was awarded to John Avery Taylor for 'Spanish Dancers' (acrylic) No 124. A seated lady with fan, used by Spanish dancers to accentuate hand gestures, dominates Taylor's painting, whilst two figures strike poses behind her. The seated lady wears a felt flamenco hat ornamented with a red rose. She may be about to sing. The background is sparingly suggested. Despite being done in acrylic, there's an oil painting quality of suggestion and expressiveness to Taylor's art.

Commended was awarded to Ann Smith for 'Storm Brewing' (Watercolour) No 113. The drama in this painting is projected in Smith's brooding black clouds beneath which are pebbles and sand that offer calmness and a sense of isolation. The picture hangs heavy, pregnant with the power of a storm about to be unleashed and yet, for me, Smith finds a sense of solidity in the face of nature's power.

Commended was awarded to Ian Kellie 'The Bluebells Beckon' (pastel) No 61. Kellie uses pastels, drawing attention to his medium with vivid exuberant strokes, for his scene of a bluebell-strewn woodland. The effect achieved is loose and fluid with sweeping curving down strokes for tree trunks and energetically applied bright blue pastel for flowers. Light becomes white squiggles dancing in the air whilst greens, violet and dark red are liberally applied throughout to create a sketchy quality, enticing the audience to mentally make the journey, to wander along the path into these wildly colourful regions and experience for themselves the raw immediacy.

Commended was awarded to Richard D. Jones for 'Sunlit Field, Dodford Manor, Weedon' (oil) No 60. Sometimes simplicity or stripping back of composition elements complements theme. Jones paints a confident, pleasant rural scene of country buildings nestling amid trees beyond which is a church tower. The foreground focus rests upon the field bathed in sunlight whilst hedgerows roll into the distant horizon, contributing a sense of perspective

Commended was awarded to Annabelle Paramour for 'Beaconsthorpe Castle' {sic.} (watercolour) No 89. Paramour chooses the fortified wall beside the mere of 15th century Baconsthorpe castle for her watercolour painting, particularly the narrower water reed bed area that leads around, in the distance, to the wider lake/mere section beside the castle's Inner Court. I can recommend picnicking beside the castle ruins on a sultry summer's day. Flowering cow parsley foregrounds the painting whilst an ivy encrusted dead tree on the left provides balance to the ruined towers and walls on the right. Blue sky is reflected in the mere whilst woods stretch into the background in ever lighter shades of green. The effect Paramour achieves evokes our nostalgia for romantic ruins. Once the scene of a great family, the Heydons, who survived the War of the Roses by switching sides, their wealth and ambition have long since fallen into terminal decline and these ruins are all that remain. In Paramour's painting we can see vaguely depicted, dark patches suggesting window openings in the decayed, mainly flint walls and the eroded towers that doggedly cling to the earth banks against all nature's arguments to the contrary, neatly highlighting the sense that castle and nature are nearly one in this scene, the ruin only surviving thanks to the support of English Heritage.

Commended was awarded to Fiona Hagger for 'Kayleigh' (Watercolour) No 32, a picture of a German Shepherd dog with characteristic attentive gaze and ears pricked. The detail of head and muzzle become Hagger's subject, with attention to whiskers, fur and reflected light in the eyes. Light falls across the dog with bright areas on the left with browns and ochre giving way to blues and darker hues to the right. The picture ably captures and emphasizes the dog's character.

Commended goes to Marlene Snee for 'Cottages in Mousehole' (pen and wash) No 119. A beautiful ink and wash picture results as Snee takes for her subject some cottage fronts along the side of Mousehole harbour. Boats are pulled up above the harbour wall. There's attention to detail in the patterning of stonework, making for an interesting contrast with the way she's shown the stone walls of her cottages. More cottages crowd behind the front row and we can see a steep narrow road rising away to the right. I was drawn to the picture's warm colour scheme, charming subject and the artist's love of details such as resting seagulls and boats.

Highly Commended was awarded to Laurence Jones for 'Squall over Beachy Head' (acrylic) No 57. Beneath Jones's stormy black sky a strip of darkness suggests a spit of land stretching from the right towards the horizon illuminated on the left. Turbulent waves reflect the orange glow of light whilst in the darker area to the painting's right two small white triangles suggest sail boats. There's also the suggestion of rain falling in sweeping brush strokes from the clouds on the right. It all makes for the drama of a headland beset by changeable sea and weather, and the need for the famous lighthouse.

Highly Commended was awarded to Helen Olden for 'Affection' (acrylic) No 87. Olden uses acrylic to paint this classic image of an African lion nuzzling a lioness for her picture, filling the painting with white muzzles and the lion's flaring brown mane. The image seems familiar but using acrylics raises the scene into an art form. Olden blocks out the large shapes of these lions, their manes and fur becoming sweeping swirls, the overall effect one of stylising these shapes and lines whilst retaining and capturing the moment of both nobility and intimacy.

Highly Commended was awarded to Jill Smith for 'English Long Horn Bull' (acrylic) No 116. Smith's acrylic of a brown and white English Long Horn shows the classic white patch on its belly and white running the length of its spine, whilst horns curve down with an incurve to the mouth. This animal stands on grass and is shown with a rising green background. Primarily beef cattle, they were also used for pulling or draught work on farms. Smith's Long Horn bull regards us from her painting, projecting a timeless demeanour with docile eyes. The straight legs and level back are all desirable Long Horn breed qualities, contributing to a carefully wrought, unusual animal painting in which the artist captures the details of fur texture, hide and inner bone structures.

Highly Commended was awarded to Veronica Dopson for 'On Reflection' (oil on canvas) No 25. Dopson's oil painting captures a relaxed moment in which her two subjects gaze towards us, one squinting against the light whilst the man wears sunglasses reflecting two miniature scenes that duplicate what is before him, a child playing on the shore. They are possibly holidaymakers on a beach and are posed as if for a holiday snap but are here rendered in oil on canvas, the colours suggesting dry heat and bright sunlight that, inevitably, is beginning to cause sunburn. As with Dopson's other entry for this exhibition, the treatment of such apparently everyday subjects with canvas and oils makes for unusual, thought provoking, art. In this case, two middle aged people on the beach take a break although the cares etched on their faces show that it will only be brief. They're relaxing in this moment that will all too quickly disappear as the tide of time rolls across the beach.

Highly Commended was awarded to Jacqui Tomlin for 'Canada in the Fall' (acrylic) No 129. Red and orange dominate the foreground leaves for Tomlin's painting creating an image that is redolent of the light and views of autumnal Canada. Our viewpoint is taken from the banks of a lake stretching to a far bank that is encircled by trees. The season is bringing about that magical time when leaves turn and the trees and bushes change from green to red and golden hues. Thus a vivid, striking work results with these same hues suggested through reflection in the water. Tomlin arranges her work with the bright red focal point placed into foreground, making viewers look through these stems/branches to appreciate the vista beyond and the wider context of the lake, its reflections and expanse, which is delineated through tonal variation into the distance. The water is cut into with a rocky outcrop whose trees are reflected and similarly, on the far side of the lake we see the suggestion of another outcrop and shadow, all building the sense of three dimensions, perspective and distance.

Highly Commended was awarded to Stella Benford for 'Electrifying' (mixed) No 5. Stella Benford is always a delight to find in any exhibition. I've enjoyed so many of her works over the years it has never been anything but a joy to write about her art. She is always wildly inventive, imaginative and extraordinarily talented in a wide range of media. Her expressive ability can turn the most unlikely of scenes into fascinating subjects for art. Here we have more of her talent on display. She takes a scene that many would find ugly or intrusive, a landscape blighted by modern technological intrusions, engineered structures that harness nature to create electricity through giant wind turbines. We are also shown the ugly black pylons that transport this power, the wires and switching boxes and paraphernalia that bestride the land in a scene reminiscent of H.G. Wells's infernal martian invaders. The resulting effect breaks up the landscape and Benford further draws our attention to this fact by breaking up her work into a triptych of panels whilst carrying the line of a fence cutting across the bottom right and hedgerows in the distance. There are wild poppies, undergrowth and trees struggling beneath spiky metal structures, even what might be a microwave tower in the left-hand panel. All nature is dwarfed by these structures. The sky is filtered with a rust that seems to be a subtle comment on proceedings below. In the sky, as below and throughout, Benford makes her colours vibrant and electric. We realise from this scene that we are paying more than a monetary price for our wired world, there's a great loss to the environment, a great chaining and harnessing of Nature at work. We want that energy and suffer this afflicted landscape to get it, although it's unclear whether such turbine generation really delivers. Psychologically, the hard lines cutting our field of vision in Benford's work reinforce the misery we all have to suffer in this curse of our times.

Highly Commended was awarded to Jenny Patel for 'Lily' (acrylic) No 92. Patel zooms into her subject's face for her larger than life portrait, positioning her subject slightly off-centre and crowding a large picture for full facial expression. The subject's presence then dominates, viewing the audience from the painting with a clear, uninterrupted gaze projecting at once a sense of innocent marvel, hints of wonder and the freshness of youth. The lack of a frame avoids any sense of a barrier between picture and audience. There's attention to proportion, tone and light falling on the face from the left suggesting darker areas around the eyes and the right-hand side. There's a sense of avoiding hard lines in

the face, the artist using instead light and softness to achieve form. There's also a nice balance to Patel's rendering of the eyes, with dark irises and pupils merging whilst reflecting bright white light. The picture is generally painted with a limited palette in a range of red and brown hues exuding warmth as the artist captures a transitory moment when her subject realises she's being observed.

Highly Commended was awarded to Brian Munton for 'River Alde, Snape' (watercolour) No. 86. Munton paints a view of Snape Maltings in Suffolk with the meandering river and mudflats drawing our gaze along a perspective line with a vanishing point to the left whilst foregrounding boats moored on the mud banks and the buildings of Snape Maltings concert hall and arts complex, originally used for malting barley for beer, forming another perspective view leading off to the right and a hypothetical vanishing point somewhere outside the picture frame. Sail masts provide vertical divisions through a pale blue sky given just a hint of airy, light clouds. Munton maintains light tones generally throughout this work for his buildings whilst using a sinuous, curving, darker line for his mooring posts and quay, stretching from either side of the painting. The angular curves of boat hulls point the eye to the lower right corner, and whilst the blocky shaped buildings congregate in this section of the work, there's plenty of space and distance suggested in Munton's river, mudflats and sky so that our gaze is free to keep roaming imaginatively.

Highly Commended was awarded to Ray Carter for 'Cherry Hall, Finedon' (acrylic) No 15. Carter paints a sweeping sky driving towards an either morning or evening sunlight glow. Our viewpoint is raised to this landscape scene and we can see that Carter's linear horizon line is broken by trees and is composed of a horizontal hedge to a field beyond the foreground pasture. Just beneath the far field, another hedge and fence dip and roll on our eye level and are broken by a house to the left and a figure in blue that is the work's focal point. Sheep are painted in a variety of poses as they graze the pasture. The grass colours look like a mix of ultramarine and yellow evoking 'summer' grass, and the woolly coats of Carter's sheep add to the feel of late spring or early summer, looking as though they might soon need shearing. Carter arranges his clouds so that the glow of sunlight bathes the solitary figure and the painting's rectangular sweeping view elongates the vista.

Highly Commended was awarded to David A. Hunt for 'Elton' (felt pen) No 44. Hunt uses felt pen for this illustrative picture of Elton Hall, near Peterborough, drawing a roofline filled with high chimneys and crenellated towers, one being a round tower. Many details such as gothic windows on the left and the focal point portico are sketchily suggested whilst smudging and working the ink creates the effect of trees, grass and the hall roof. The sweep of the road draws in our gaze whilst the large trees on the right balance the composition. There's an expressive fluidity to Hunt's use of dark felt pen that projects a timeless quality.

Highly Commended was awarded to Brenda Lett for 'Home Time 2' (oil) No 68. On the face of it, it's probably generally better to see a face or two in close figures, to get the emotion of the moment across to the audience and yet, in the group Lett paints, three adults and a couple of children are walking away from us, heading down the perspective line of a road beside a high hedge. They thus take on an anonymous 'everyman' quality as they carry various items, a teddy, possibly a balloon, but mostly they've been somewhere and bought plants. So, whilst the children have their teddy for comfort, the adults clutch plants for similar re-assurance. Now, as the title suggests, it's time to go home, so everyone's walking away. The artist paints shadow behind them and works to capture the sense of motion to their walk with raised feet and the light suggesting that a long day's outing has come to a close. It's that time we've all experienced when you have to go back, find the car, beat the queue from the car park and drive or walk home to put the plants in water. This work confirms that art can capture any moment, frame even such unlikely, everyday experiences as this for contemplation.

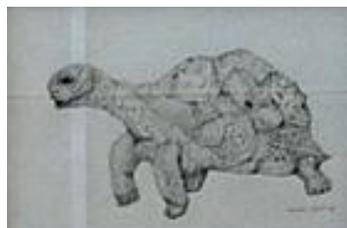
Highly Commended goes to Noel Horrell for 'Newcastle Tyne Bridge' (watercolour) No 42. Horrell paints the arched bridge constructed in 1928 over the river Tyne from the viewpoint of the Quayside, specifically the corner between Sandhill (towards the river) and Queen Street (heading left under the train line). This is a well executed picture demonstrating the

artist's skills with the medium of water colour, using the wet in wet technique to create a colourful sky. There's detailed draughtsmanship involved in the creation of a double perspective from the prominent corner building between Sandhill and Queen Street so that our gaze can either look towards the vanishing point of the bridge over the Tyne or track left along Queen Street under the train line. The wetness on the road is suggested through reflected colours of people, buildings and sky, giving the road a glassy appearance and tying in Horrell's overall colour scheme.

Highly Commended was awarded to Marion Smart for 'Coverack, Cornwall' (acrylic) No 111. Smart's acrylic evokes the bright colours of a sunny day at Coverack harbour on the Lizard Peninsula in Cornwall, showing the sea and the fishermen's slipway and moored boats. Our gaze is drawn around the harbour wall to the right, helped by the perspective line of diminishing Cornish cottages along the bay that merge into the green undulation of land to the right across the bay.

## Best in category

**Best Embroidery** was awarded to Dorothy McGuire for her work entitled, 'Contemporary Goldwork' (goldwork) No 77. Sequins, bugle beads and metal thread are worked into McGuire's Contemporary Goldwork pattern, suggesting a bird with beak and wing on a cloth having a rich blue hue, the lighter shimmering blues shining like lapis lazuli. The pattern vaguely echoes Celtic designs with curling motifs within the gold bordered edging whilst speckles of gold mottle the larger expanse of cloth, like stars in a night sky.



**Best Drawing** was awarded to Freda Giddings for 'Pleasure from Shells – Turtle' (pencil) No 29. Like Giddings's other exhibit this year, 'Emperor of the Sea', this drawing of a turtle, particularly Giddings's treatment of its shell, echoes the 16th century painter Giuseppe Arcimboldo's technique of creating portraits by painting various objects such as fruit and vegetables to make up the larger image. Strange, surrealist-

looking portraits emerged with faces composed of vegetables, flowers and objects, all realised with the kind of precision normally devoted to still life. The shell of Giddings's turtle lends itself to such treatment, turtle shells already having an ordered patterning dividing their surfaces. Giddings's turtle pips her 'Emperor' portrait for me, taking forms from other shell creatures to build up the larger object of the turtle shell through highly detailed drawing that includes defining and texturing the turtle's stretching neck and limbs.

**Best Collage** was awarded to Stella Benford for 'Jet Stream meets Dawlish' (mixed, collage) No 6. Benford's art starkly captures a certain zeitgeist through exploring this Dawlish disaster. This moment of our times is magnificently worked into a mixed media collage that sees a row of houses precariously lodged above a collapsed sea wall and shattered train track after severe storm damage. People had to abandon their homes when this catastrophe occurred as the ground dropped from under them. It was shocking to see the news reports at the time of waves breaking over houses and to realise that the people on a train due to cross this line had to climb from their carriages to escape. Was that sea wall under maintained or simply subjected to extreme conditions that would have taxed any structure? Either way, it is extraordinary to consider that Isambard Kingdom Brunel's construction had endured since the 1840s. Brunel might well have appreciated Benford's mixed media approach with metal waves curling over the scene. This is a great example of how sea foam can be captured as it ravages through rust coloured soil and grey sea wall.

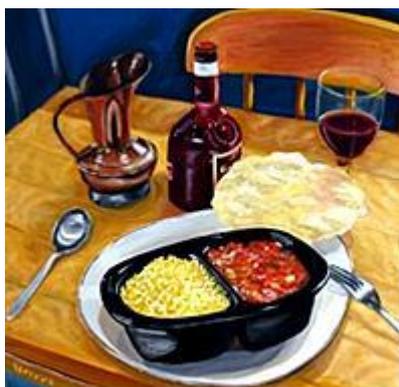


Benford ironically leaves steel reinforcing rods jutting through and outside the picture's metalwork frame, stark and exposed. There's a great sense of design to Benford's work, a near symmetry to the vaguely Celtic wave spirals curling up either side, breaching the grey uniformity of bricks in the wall and exposing the rusty, coppery torn ground beneath with its rough textures. Benford works all these elements of her collage into a cohesive whole that serves as a metaphor for the state of the country, we're on an island beset by forces that are attacking our foundations and breaking the very underpinnings forged by Brunel and Victorian Industry that have been our bedrock.



**Best 3D** was awarded to Stella Benford for 'When Water Fills the Hungry Land' (ceramic). Of course, if water did submerge land, we might all have to live in structures such as these. Benford's sculpture is composed of four houses on stilts with ladders of varying rung span to tiny arched doorways. There's interesting detailing on walls and sharply angled roofs and the group may have been inspired by the stilt houses of the Vietnamese although the tiny chimneys and elongated storeys of Benford's houses feel more Western, echoing Bavarian styles. Benford's miniature houses have pylons to reinforce them for diluvian conditions, their vaguely metal-worked look suggesting blackened ceramic, as though having suffered pit-smoked firing. I hasten to add that I may be entirely wrong in my assumptions; they are, after all, just thoughts that occur to me on observing this artwork.

**Best Mixed Media** was awarded to Mary Waudby for 'Crucible' (acrylic) No 138, an aptly named work that radiates a sense of heat and immense forces at work, as though exploding from inner whiteness to radiate outward in shattered shards of red and yellow from a surrounding blackness. The explosion isn't entirely uniform, having bursts of flame extending to top left and bottom right from the main ball of force. Crucibles can be found in furnaces in which molten metal has its nature or shape changed, however the word can also describe ordeals and trials that similarly shape people. The surface of Waudby's vibrant work is cut with white and black lines and has a textured, fragmented surface that appears interestingly tactile.



**Best Still Life** was awarded to Veronica Dopson for 'Dining in' (oil on canvas) No 26. A meal is set; a bottle and glass of wine, a microwavable dish of curry and rice along with one poppadom, a spoon and a fork resting on a plain wooden table. All the ingredients become deftly blended into an oil painting by Dopson. At first glance, we might think these are curious elements for Best Still Life, and yet how often it is that food particularly has this easy ability to make great ingredients for art simply by such arrangement of elements on a surface and serving them up with meticulous care as an oil painting. The traditional still life bowl of fruit and drape are eschewed by Dopson in

favour of the modern 'fast food' revolution. There's a certain sadness to any meal to be taken alone, however, and we have a very contained affair here, to be consumed by a solitary diner. It may be on a plate but it is also still in its plastic packaging, courtesy of the supermarket. Yet the ingredients are inviting to our eye. There's surely tomato in that Jalfrezi and spicy herbs, the wine must be a dry red that will stimulate the palette. The only curious addition to the objects in this composition might be the copper ewer, possibly for water, its design and style having a vintage quality at odds with the contemporary, throwaway reductions imposed on modern living by the fast food ready meal mentality. Its curves recall antique sensibilities, a time when meals were shared. Dopson arranges her composition with meal to the foreground, spoon and fork handy to pick up, as though the viewer to this scene will take them up and begin consuming the food. However, the chair opposite is firmly pushed in to the table. No one will be joining this sad comment on modern existence.

**Best Life Study** was awarded to Graham Plant for 'Reclining Model' (pastel) No 103. With this classic nude pose, we're obviously reminded of the white model in Manet's Olympia which shows a black servant bringing flowers behind the reclining figure of Manet's seminal work of art. In Plant's study, a black model reclines, fingers interlocked but not covering genitals as she rests on white sheets with a red area behind her. Her gaze is directed to our left and doesn't engage directly with ours but has the effect of turning her head slightly from us and yet she still exudes a sense of confrontation. Plant's pastel sketching admirably captures the curves of his subject, using light blue to show through, mottling his surfaces and adding texture. There's a great sense of voluptuous undulation and of imparting three-dimensional form to the paper's flat surface.



**Best Portrait** was awarded to Dawne Harpin for 'Dr. Rowan Williams' (oil) No 35. Of course there are various photos of the ex-arch bishop in prayer but Harpin captures a certain melancholy in Dr. Williams's gaze, which is cast down to our left. His trademark bushy eyebrows flare wildly and his full, grey beard conjures associations with great Biblical figures. For Williams, the act of prayer is 'giving time to God', the physical position expressing a sense of listening. The truncated vertical of Harpin's picture crops Dr. Williams's shoulders and her background is ambiguously dark and mottled, forming a stark contrast with the bright whiteness of her subject's hair and the light on his face and hands. It is as if we're glimpsing something through a small window that doesn't quite let us see the cross hanging from his neck.

**Best Pastel** was awarded to Jean Daker for 'Surfers' Wave' (pastel) No 22. Daker achieves a remarkably smooth effect for her picture of the wave, especially given the powdery nature of pastels. The subject is timeless. A powerful wave is breaking with high cresting foam. Beyond the wave we have blue sea stretching to the horizon line and seagulls wheeling through clear sky. The drama and power of the water is able captured by Jean Daker who concentrates on the great rising surge that is just tipping over whilst before the wave already we can see dissipating foam of another wave that has already broken. It's a clearly executed art work and Daker's title is apt, this wave having the kind of surge that could carry a rider forward on its glassy surface and there's spray coming from the lip although there is a little 'fold-over' along the length (surfers generally like to ride an unbroken face).



**Best Watercolour** was awarded to Christine Fitch for No 27, 'Hogweed' (watercolour). Some hogweed genus can grow with stems higher than people, however mostly we walk past the diminutive, common variety that grows quite unnoticed on the roadside. It's hard to judge scale in Fitch's painting, the plant taking prominence as the artist explores the realm in which its alien structure is revealed. The painting may well have been achieved using such watercolour techniques as wet-in-wet whilst masking out stalks for painting after. Fitch chooses a murky, ambiguous background behind the umbrella arrangement of flowers, softly merging colours and hues in her backdrop whilst the hard lines of stems are crowned with white dots for flowers.

Leaves, in contrast, are larger, splashy affairs. The overall effect is one of a soporific, soft abstract, inviting our gaze into dim, subliminal regions.

**Best Acrylic** was awarded to Barbara Jones for No 55, 'Rip Tide' (acrylic). Rip tide's are generally thought of as strong, narrow currents near the surface surging from the shore that break through lines of waves. Jones adopts a portrait frame for her seascape of such a swell with cresting spray in the foreground area. Our gaze tracks out across the lines of waves to where a distant horizon of dark blue meets lighter coloured violet striations of sky and more striations above for cloud. There's a single bird in flight and a sense of emptiness and distance and space is projected. It's interesting to note how much of a sense of volume and force can be imparted through painting an effective sea swell. The colour includes yellow ochre amongst the cresting spray, and greens and blues in the various wave troughs whilst an ominous, brooding black layer high overhead suggests the weather is changeable.



**Best Oil** goes to Robert Pearce for No 97, 'Isham from the River Ise' (oil on canvas). Careful spatial organisation and striking attention to detail were my first impressions on viewing Pearce's pastoral landscape. The artist arranges his canvas to focus upon a meandering section of the River Ise stretching from the bottom left foreground which, along with a line of houses on a camber at eye level on the left, converges on a vanishing point centre right. Trees and overgrowth cast broken shadows reflected in the river whilst

a large tree with splayed branches in the painting's centre forms a useful focal point. A tangle of wild flowers and reeds are just below us in the bottom right hand corner and field hedgerows rise to the horizon line in the distance. These classic, formal, compositional elements are arranged to draw our gaze along the river with its colours mostly mirroring a pale, cloudy-blue, sky. We imaginatively wander around the central tree on the far river bank and up the camber past brightly painted village houses with the suggestion of a medieval church tower, the eye then being transported to a vague hinterland somewhere amongst the horizon's pale, cooler areas where sky meets vaguely suggested tree-tops. The use of oils and minute attention to detail create a near photographic quality. Paintings are nothing if they're not a visual feast for the eyes and Pearce intends we should take the journey through his work, exploring and admiring such details as the occasional fence posts dotting the river banks or the close rendering of weeds and wild flowers on the mud banks across the river that cast shadows in the water and contribute to the painting's sense of scale as they diminish into the distance. It's to the artist's credit that the mental space created is not somewhere the viewer wants to leave.

The award for **Best Textile** went to Freyja Montali 'Woven Hummingbird' (mixed media) No 83. Varying horizontal strips form the weft of this mixed media textile with lace, ribbon, cord and thread forming a variety of textures. Both warp and weft are over-painted to create the effect of the bright colours of the hummingbird's plumage. (For more discussion of Montali's art, see Portraiture section above.)



## Prize winners



The **Patricia Glen Memorial Prize** was awarded to Elsie Merris-Osborne for 'Highland' (oil on canvas) No 79. This large canvas is filled with the profile view of the head and shoulders of a magnificent example of Highland cattle, probably a bull since the shape of the horns for a heifer is generally narrower at the base and longer towards their tip whilst bull highlands are usually wider at the base, as shown in this painting. The beast in Merris-Osborne's painting displays a wavy, long coat of shaggy hair of a yellow colour

rather than the more traditionally associated red. Such hair is a key attribute to these kinds of cattle and helps them survive harsh winters. The beast is displayed against a pink background with wary eye cast towards us. The inherent majestic quality of this animal is ably captured by Merris-Osborne.

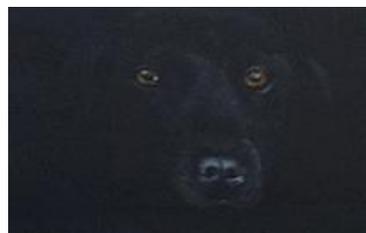
The **Peter Jenkyns Memorial Prize** was given to Clifford Knight for 'St. Peter's, Bucks' (oil on canvas) No 64. This large canvas of the ruined church in Stanton Low, Buckinghamshire, once the subject of artist John Piper for Kenneth Clark's 'Recording the Changing Face of Britain', lies in a worse state than ever today, so it is extraordinary to see Knight's oil painting of the ruin, recalling his visit years ago to this site. Knight picks up the colours and tones of his sky in the stonework of this shattered fragment, the walls to either side having mostly fallen. The combination of Clifford's style, choice of perspective, setting, brooding sky and light beyond the window make for a highly atmospheric work.



The **Vivien Schofield Memorial Prize** went to David Miles for 'Geese through the Reeds' (watercolour) No 81. Miles's painting has a curious displacing quality, with only suggestions as to what the land might be like. Our viewpoint feels low, due to the reeds looming in the foreground right corner as we gaze up to see a flock of geese flying in formation with outstretched wings. They're set against a brooding, inky sky that looks decidedly changeable and is threatening rain. The softness created by the wet-in-wet technique for Miles's sky is contrasted sharply with the hard, rigid lines of his looming reeds. Miles has sustained his running theme

of painting nature scenes, allowing his imagination the freedom to express such forms. The achievement of this work, for me, lies in simplifying his elements down to essentials. We're shown a seasonal-looking sky, the changeable weather suggests that it's time for the geese to migrate and we're shown that the reeds have flowered. From that point on our own imagination takes over, rushing in to virtually 'paint' the many possible lands beneath. For me this would probably be some marshy wilderness, or we might be looking up from a river bank. The point is that there's an engagement in this for anyone who has ever enjoyed walking out either alone or with dogs and who has looked up suddenly on hearing the cry of geese wheeling overhead to realise instantly that we're part of this cycle.

The **Celia Hanbury Memorial Prize** was awarded to June Heath for 'I Need a Home' (pastel) No 37. The face of Heath's black Labrador dog is almost lost amid a black background in this picture, even the frame is black and the picture plays with light contrasts reminding us of chiaroscuro. The eyes peer from her pastel with light largely only falling on the dog's wet nose and whispery grey muzzle. The doleful eyes that arrest the viewer, following us across the exhibition with that unspoken titular request, make a direct connection to the audience.



**Runner-up Best in Show** was awarded to Sarah Janavicius for 'Enchanted Woodland' (mixed media collage) No 54. With rising dark verticals for tree trunks criss-crossed with sweeping angled black branches, the effect is a remarkable, large, cobweb-like space. Janavicius fills each area between her cobweb-like strands with a coloured material that imparts a slightly differing shade of enchanted, suffused woodland light. It's like looking through stained glass run riot, allowing for a loose, natural effect instead of the kind of rigid ordering associated with medieval glasswork. Somehow the reflectiveness of each cobweb 'pane' radiates light to the viewer as though the whole thing is

illuminated from behind with dimly filtered light. It's a remarkable collage and great nature abstract. Some of the small reflective areas contain round sequins whilst others are patterned or have slightly differing shading and reflective properties making close study irresistible and adding to the shimmering magical intricacy.

**Best in Show** was awarded to Linda Jackson for 'Keith Richards' (pastel) No 51. Jackson achieves a photographic quality through her pastel of Richards singing at a microphone whilst playing a white electric guitar. He's beneath the glare of red lights that highlight his hair and the folds of his jacket against an all black background, the picture being finished with a white border and ornate silver frame. In this picture the moment is captured as he looks to his right, towards us with a smiling expression, hair tied with his trademark bandana. Jackson captures the interest and character of Richards's lined face and such details as wide ears and the twinkle in the eyes. Definitely a great 'satisfaction'!

