

The Fellowship of Professional and Amateur Artists

Summer Art Exhibition, 2015

at Wellingborough Museum

by David Rafer BA (Hons), PhD

It was a pleasure to view the FPAA's Summer exhibition and to make the awards. Preview night gave me the opportunity to meet some of the artists whose diverse, eclectic works offer a broad mix of styles, techniques and creative talent. The exhibits showed highly skilled art production across a range of media.

Exhibitions are a great way for artists to review their work. It's an opportunity to consider artworks as pieces that will hopefully be objectively appreciated by a wide audience, not necessarily as interested in the technicalities of art production but who arrive to view the fully formed work as an object of contemplation.

Landscape, Nature and Seascapes

Both John Black's exhibition entries, No 14 'Summer Moon' (oil on canvas), and No 13, 'In Summertime on Bredon' (oil on wood) are fabulous landscape paintings by an expert artist at the height of his powers. I had the opportunity to visit John's studio on the exhibition's Preview day, to view a range of intense works of art many inspired by landscape, nature and the words of A E Housman. These works are an extraordinary outpouring of creative energy demonstrating the passion and feelings John realises through art. John's exhibition entry, 'In Summertime on Bredon' is a large-scale, powerful oil painting of a hill-top vista, with a path dropping away into curiously shaped foreground trees in the lower third of the painting. In the middle-distance rises a great sweep of pasture land stretching to a thin purple horizon line. Horizontal violet bands cut across the painting's pale yellow sky which rises to a pale disc of summer sunlight top left. The magnificent vista John realises is inspired by Bredon, a hill extending into many parishes. The path that takes the audience into that powerful vista is charged with surreal, psychological possibility as numinous light falls from above, penetrating the foreground trees to illuminate the path as it curves away from us into shadows. This painting dominated the exhibition hall, being equally effective for close-up detail or when admired from a distance in order to appreciate the work's holistic power. An immense perspective is evoked. The title of the painting gives us the clue to its extraordinary creative vision, coming from the first line of poem 21 in Housman's anthology *A Shropshire Lad*, and it's clear from the way the paint is applied that the colour scheme draws on a particular set of Housman's verses in which the narrator recalls Bredon,

*In summertime on Bredon
The bells they sound so clear,*

...
*Here of a Sunday morning
My love and I would lie,
And see the coloured counties,*

the same vision beautifully realised in oil by John. Housman's narrator hears lark song and the chimes of church bells calling for attendance, to be answered at their wedding. However, when snow covers Bredon in winter his love answers the call of 'one bell only', not waiting for him and 'The mourners followed after' thus a poignant sense of death and separation haunts the distant vista and waiting path. In John's oil, the path plunges into dense tree trunks and darkness beneath a rolling green canopy beyond which we see those longed for 'coloured counties' stretching up and away into futurity, as one life continues alone.

In Barbara Jones's exhibit, No 52 'Remembering Banborough {sic.}' (acrylic), tough looking swathes of foreground grasses give way to a beach and the spectacle of Bamburgh Castle in Northumberland, possibly viewed from the North East by Jones and set beneath dark brooding clouds. The sense of isolation, mood and atmosphere are all evoked.

Peter Phelps's No 92 'Bluebell Wood' (acrylic), gives us rising tree trunks and boughs emerging from drifts of blue flower heads amid the green grass of a woodland floor, the artist picking up some of these tones and colours for the sky relegated to the top left of the painting.

Nancy Bently's No 9 'Sunset Over Moulton' (acrylic), gives us a startling sweep of red sky above a yellow horizon glow with trees lining the distance all making for a striking work. In No 10, 'Time to Reflect' (acrylic), Bently paints a river meandering between rising trees stretching into the middle distance, the artist catching the reflected colour of clouds and tree shadows in the surface of the water, as it flows and is broken by ripples.

Carol Booker's No 15 'Silver Sands, Arisaig' (oil), realises a beautiful, though lonely-looking, isolated stretch of sandy Scottish beach with suggested foreground foliage and broken colour, beyond which the curve of the sands takes our gaze to an undulating horizon.

Jill Smith entered No 107 'Seven Sisters', an acrylic painting of an East Sussex coastal view, the foreground land with its white cottages drops away to a line of marching white chalk cliffs. Eroded by the sea, the chalk cliffs present a series of verticals stretching up to the contour line of the cliff-edge that rolls away in perspective.

In No 128 'Seascape' (acrylic), Linda Walton studies weather at sea with suffused yellow and red light breaking beyond dark brooding clouds above a black horizon line out at sea.

Marion Smart's No 105 'Spurn Head' (acrylic), depicts a winding cliff path transporting our gaze up to this striking Yorkshire lighthouse, providing her painting with a strident vertical positioned in the top right of her painting. The lighthouse dominates the scene, looming above the perspective sweep of beach whilst below left there are ships on the blue sea horizon. This latter blue wedge forms a triangle that points our gaze back towards the lighthouse thus creating a neat composition with beautifully realised details of beach detritus, cliff-top foliage and the shapes of distant container ships.

April Booth exhibited No 17 'Sea, Salt and Sails, Mousehole' (oil), painting a boat moored in Mousehole harbour, using the angle of the wall to divide the painting vertically with the boat on the right pointing towards the viewer and a figure suggested above to the left. Booth catches light falling on the steps and trailing flags and sails.

Marion Whittle's No 135 'Climate Change' (acrylic), shows a flooded area of land, possibly a field, with the struts of a gate and fence that now form a perch for birds, becoming virtual silhouettes against the reflection of bright yellow light, leaving this viewer with a sense of aridity despite the deluge.

Robert Pearce's oil on canvas, No 87 'Above Lyme Regis' focuses on a rolling bank of foreground poppies and daisies with hedges and fields beyond capped by a narrow band of sea towards the top of the painting. Closely executed leaves and stems dwindle over the curve of Pearce's bank making up the bulk of the lower half of the painting and creating a perennially popular timeless vista.

For Shirley Smith's 'Late Evening in the High Lands' (acrylic), No 111, the absence of people, houses or trees makes for a feeling of bleak isolation possibly taking for inspiration the wild scene across a windswept loch with spare blades of grass and weed given foreground prominence.

Mary Morris's No 141 'Cornish Creek' (acrylic), uses the wild, gnarled, curling shapes of branches and ivy-clad tree trunks on a mud bank to fill, and thus pattern, her painting, filtering our view of the water and banks beyond and creating an imposing artwork.

Fiona Hagger's No 29 'Enchanted Garden (February Fairy)' (line and wash) draws a collection of flowers, leaves and stalks from which gazes a fairy. Line and wash allows for a suggestive character to the fairy's hair and wings and the brightness of the blooms that Hagger illustrates, including snow drops and other spring flowers.

Architecture, Miscellaneous

Hazel Britton's No 19, 'The Bishop's Palace, Bath' (watercolour) depicts the crenellations and ramparts of this ancient building, ancient home of Bishops of Bath and Wells located in Wells. Britton paints a section of the palace walls with a tree shown in the centre of the picture. The artist then reflects all the forms, shapes and dark windows in the moat surrounding the palace.

Margaret Watts's No 131 'Herstmonceux Castle' (pencil) depicts the magnificent East Sussex castle viewed from the South-West with drawbridge, crenellations, towers, moat and reflections of arches etc. beneath the drawbridge. Watts's finely packed drawing creates a press of detail making our gaze scan across her picture closely.

Eileen Whitmore's No 134 'Turbo 205' (mixed media) shows a rally car skidding in mud through a misty wood, the conditions presenting a hazardous but exciting challenge to the helmeted driver.

Noel Horrell's No 40 'First 125 at Bury Bolton' (watercolour) shows a train pulled into what looks like platform 4 of this train station, remodelled by the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway. Horrell uses watercolour to realise the wooden canopy and panelling and contrasts this structure with a modern train on the tracks.

Portraiture, Figures

David C Hunt's No 43 'Homage to Rembrandt' takes for its inspiration, 'Man in a Golden Helmet', a famous piece of portraiture with ongoing attribution questions. However, David C Hunt's 'Homage...' beautifully re-creates the play of dark and light on a similarly imposing face, with lips and gaze set determinedly. For me, there's a great stillness and timelessness to 'Man in a Golden Helmet', as though the figure stares out through the centuries, the trappings of armour making us wonder at the life he must have lead.

Brenda Hargreaves's No 31 Julie Walters' (oil) and No 32 'Nick Howard-Brown in Richard III' (oil) capture the likeness of her subjects, projecting, for the former, the emotion of pleasure through Walters's smile, laughter lines and the gleam of her eyes. This portrait is set against a plain orange background with simple frame and edged border. In contrast to this relaxed pose, for her latter work, we view an actor in costume with neat coiffure, angular face and shadow cast across his left side. He stares from his portrait with some intensity, lips pursed and ready to act.

John Taylor showed two exhibits, No 117 'Selfie with Breton Beret' (pastel) and No 118 (misprinted as 18 in catalogue) 'Selfie with Trilby' (acrylic). In the Breton beret picture, the subject / model is drawn in a loose style, the shaping and shading being sharper in the latter, painted work in which the light white background helps light to bounce from the surfaces of his face, describing character and form. Taylor's self-portrait with beret is looser, the pastel shading and lines more sketchily done, with less precision to the cheeks and features but still effortlessly imparting emotion through soulful eyes. For me, art of this kind can achieve power and qualities it is hard for photography to attain, all through simple pastel line and colour. 'Selfie with Breton Beret' evokes a sense, for this viewer, that the artist might even be troubled by what he finds to depict in eyes that are 'windows to the soul'.

Heather Evans exhibited No 25 'A Glamorous Day Out' (oil on canvas) showing a grouping of decoratively dressed women with pink champagne filled flutes, and also No 26 'Ballet Rehearsal' (oil on canvas), a subject for which Degas defined the genre. Here too, Evans paints

the line made by stretched limbs and ballet shoes, as dancers wearing colourful red bows worn over white dresses go through exercise routines at the bar. Their gazes are directed to the angle of their pointing ballet shoes, thus directing viewers too, all making for an interesting, colourful painting.

Animal Pictures

There's an art to capturing a great animal picture. Sue Tomlin's No 124 'Barney' (pastel) invests character through the terrier's cocked ear and big eyes whilst No 125 'Man's Best Friend' (pastel) shows fine detail such as fur and whiskers on the muzzle, even a little dog saliva, all adding verisimilitude.

Monica Storey's No 116 'Frog on Lily Pad' (watercolour) presents the curving lines of lily pads and the curve of the frog's back and crouched legs, setting the picture off with that all important gleam of light in the frog's eye.

Sometimes, it's not even the whole animal that needs to be shown, for example in Fiona Hagger's No 30 'Waiting' (watercolour), a sheep dog rests its head although maintaining a watchful gaze whilst the rest of the animal's body is merely a vague half-suggestion somewhere to the left of the picture. An enjoyable picture results.

In contrast, Diana Priscott's No 98 'Charlie Rescues the Tennis Ball' (watercolour), captures a moment of action as Charlie, clutching titular ball, swims towards the audience. Priscott works to capture a sense of the wash and wake of the water rippling around Charlie, whose fur is clapped to his head and body as he swims determinedly.

Margaret Watts's No 132 'Looking Good' (pencil), depicts two cows standing in a field, gazing at the viewer, knee deep in grass. There's a nice working of the line, with broken lines suggesting grass whilst a strong horizontal for a top fence rail divides the field from the press of trees beyond. There's soulfulness in the eyes of the cattle and Watts works to capture the folds of flesh and volume of the animals.

Jean Daker's No 22 'Hare in Wildflower Meadow' (watercolour), captures a hare in a state of alertness, one foot raised, set in a patch of wildflowers. Loose blue brush strokes evoke cornflowers, and Daker pays careful attention to details such as poppy heads, daisy petals and the finely wrought fur and whiskers of her animal. The artist captures the shape of the hare's raised ears as they scan like giant radar antenna, using shadow to suggest volume and form. The picture draws the eye into roaming from the patchy foreground grass into the dense middle area of wildflowers and on to the colours suggesting more meadow flowers beyond, thus capturing the viewer and drawing us mentally into the realm of the hare.

Louise Thomas's No 119 'F S H H... ' (acrylic on board), is a striking painting of a shoal of mackerel with gleaming light and colours shining from their scales and backs. The densely packed shoal sweep horizontally through blue water, so closely arranged between the frame of the painting that it feels we're gazing into the side of a fish tank.

The Awarded Works

Joy Barry was awarded Commended for No 5 'Frosty Morning' (oil), a work that draws the eye from the foreground via the lines of ploughing to the hedgerow in the distance and thence sweeping right. A simple sky also draws the eye to the right and there's use of perspective with enlarged hedgerow detail to the front left foreground that tapers and narrows to the hedgerow cutting the horizon. Barry intersperses a variety of trees and foliage to break up the regularity, with light gleaming from the painting via the white frost on the darker soil colours. She thus achieves an effective, commanding painting that, for me, projects a sombre sense of still morning light and hard cold earth.

Brenda McKetty was awarded Commended for No 70 'What Shall We Do This afternoon?' (acrylic / mixed media), in which two figures are depicted down on a harbour shore at low tide in a delightfully stylised coastal scene. The inn, shops and houses are freely painted, crowded into the composition and the scene is realised in bright, striking colours, McKetty adhering to a palette that allows pink and violets to dominate, sandwiched between the blue of sea and sky. Both of the artist's entries this year add a dash of jollity and raise the spirit, capturing that holiday joy of being beside the sea.

Maureen Parnell won a Commended for No 83 'Autumn Mists' (watercolour). Intriguingly, Parnell reverses the standard landscape window for her scene of a misty flowing stream or river, utilising a portrait view to good effect with a strong dominant vertical formed by the tree on the right whilst various other, long straight tree trunks are relegated to the background and carried down through their reflections in the water. The water flows towards the viewer and the foreground rocks and foliage that decorate the banks as crossing lateral branches weave over the stream. The muted colour scheme is given a yellow background horizon glow, with some ochre leaves and warming sienna on the banks.

Maureen Parnell also won Commended for her second exhibition entry, No 84 'Bradbourne Winter Sunrise' (watercolour). This painting of a winter scene with meandering stream, grazing horses, stylised bare trees, rolling hills and snow-covered ground all recall elements we might find in many of the artist Rowland Hilder's works, possibly simply because the snow strips back the scene letting the trees join sky to land with their wavy branches and fine twig work. Parnell restricts her palette for this painting with the sky's hues reflected in the stream and picked up here and there in her snow shading. The bisecting line of a wall or road in the middle-distance draws our eye to the farm buildings, and the horses' tracks and stream also draw us into Parnell's landscape.

Barbara Jones won Commended for No 51 'Canadian Idyll' (acrylic) in which foreground rocks are passed by a flowing river that draws our gaze up to the pines along the banks and the mountains and sky beyond. There's a rough wildness to the tangled weeds and foliage emerging from the rocks and the dark, threatening clouds trying to close about a small window of blue sky. Rock and sky colours are then picked up in Jones's rapidly flowing water to complete the sense of a nature-formed environment unencumbered by people.

Allan McIntosh won Commended for No 67 'Tiger Abstraction' (acrylic). From a distance, McIntosh's painting appears to be simply wavy black lines, bright yellows, reds and greens, the shapes of lurking tigers cleverly form and take shape as we draw closer across the viewing space of the exhibition hall until the animal's fully appear with big round eyes, jowls, teeth and paws. The way McIntosh describes his tigers through paint, recalls William Blake in both poetic symmetry and for their curiously illustrative quality, whilst the tiger with open jaws in the top centre reminds me of the snarling tiger in Rousseau's 'Tiger in a Storm' painting. McIntosh takes those dark, camouflage lines on his tigers' bodies and in many cases simply extends them down into his painting, thus making viewers see their forms largely only through the shaping of red, yellow and white acrylic colours, eyes and heads.

Jill Smith won Commended for No 106 'Clyde Steamer' (acrylic), a painting of the titular steamer cutting a wave across the picture from the left with blue sky above and water below, whilst purple mountains form the background horizon. Choppy water is suggested through dark strokes that are larger in the foreground. The simplicity of this composition enhances its power. Smith's steamer is painted with angular details such as the two chimney stacks and the small squares of its many windows forming a patterning along the steamer's side. Also, the various struts and paraphernalia serve to draw the eye into studying this central subject, remarkable for the clarity and restraint of its execution.

John Walton won Commended for No 126 'Vista I' (watercolour). The artist emphasizes the miniature scale of both his exhibition entries this year by framing them in wide white borders and

white frames. We are thus exposed to the scaled-down beauty of his works and view simple compositions painted beautifully that nevertheless engage our imaginations and intellect, fully exercising our appreciation as much as any larger painting might. Both pictures attract our attention, like gleaming nuggets across the exhibition hall. We have to mentally move into Walton's artistic space, to cross the arid white desert of his border hinterland in order to reach the beauty of branches, trunks, leaves and colours occupying the aesthetic oasis of these miniature inner watercoloured regions.

June Heath won Commended for No 33 'Tranquil Norfolk' (acrylic). This is such an evocative Norfolk scene, with traditional windmill perhaps on the banks of a Norfolk river or broad with ever smaller trees falling away as the eye follows the water to the left of the painting. Heath offers us reflections and details such as small foliage and the larger lines of the windmill's sails cutting into a clear blue sky. The strength and intensity of the acrylic medium, so ably used in this painting, capture this serene traditional scene.

Jasper Stinchcombe won Commended for No 114 'Man Walking off a Ship' (oil on canvas). This tonal work takes for its subject the lean-looking figure of a man disembarking from a sizeable vessel only part of which is depicted filling the background of Stinchcombe's painting. The work depends on grey shadow and contrasting areas of dark and light. The man carries a heavy luggage bag in his right hand that pulls his arm down with its weight whilst in his left is a much lighter small package. He has an intent expression and is wearing an unbuttoned duffle coat, his hair, the use of black and white and his clothing seem reminiscent of an earlier era when people sailed rather than flew to their destinations. There's a painterly quality to the sharp angularity of the ship and gangway and the loose folds of the man's coat, scarf and tie. His gaze travels past the painting's viewer, looking forever over our left shoulder, caught in the moment before he will set foot on land whilst diminutive background figures appear on an upper deck behind him.

Marlene Snee won Commended for No 112 'Make a Wish' (watercolour). Snee chooses a wooden frame and wide mount for her watercolour of dandelion seed heads and accompanying background foliage, possibly realising some of these vaguer shapes and forms through techniques such as pressing on watercolour with texturing surfaces. The result is a beautifully dense area of leaves and stems beyond the white round heads. Each seed head is shot with white pinpoints representing seeds, some of which are drifting from the heads to swim out into Snee's sea of colour. This all makes for a delightful painting that the eye wants to linger over, to unravel its inner meshing forms within this maelstrom of washes.

Mary Morris was awarded Commended for No 140 'Summer Lane' (watercolour & gouache). A curving path through woodland takes our gaze into Morris's areas of dappled shadow whilst foliage encroaches from either side. The horizontals made by shadows cutting across the path help to tell us something of the path's uneven roughness whilst the artist locates deeper, darker areas to either side beneath the rising verticals of tree trunks that congregate in the middle distance. These trunks act rather like a grid wall through which we glimpse the brilliant areas of light beyond. The use of perspective and angle play upon our senses and we feel we're moving into a green realm broken with rising yellow leaves that imparts a tranquil effect. {See comment on Morris's 'Cornish Creek' above.}

Ros Smith won Commended for No 108 'Forest Floor' (Watercolour). Smith takes for her inspiration the everyday detritus found on a forest floor, including autumnal brown, dehydrated leaves, moss on what might be an old stump, a briar stem and various round objects that could be seed heads in various stages of decomposition. This all makes a fascinating arrangement for a close study. Even the smallest subject can make fascinating art, such as moss and leaves that might easily be overlooked. Smith captures the form of these varied elements, the curling spiky edges of leaves, stems, stump and moss, against a white background. A simple frame and mount set off the artwork.

Linda Jackson won Commended for No 47 'Summer's Day in Abington Park' (oil) showing people lining up for an ice cream. Ducks waddle over foreground green grass whilst trees rise into the background minimising the blue sky. Use of shadows 'ground' the work. Jackson captures the ice cream van's shape and form and makes it her main subject, although there's quite a lot of interest too among the poses of the various queuing figures in this often overlooked summer scene.

Michael Oakes won Commended for No 79 'Dappled Rocks, Devon' (watercolour). Water swirls and eddies about rocks of various sizes in this painting. We view a stream or river bank to the left that diagonally divides the work. Above, in the upper left side, we have overhanging branches and thus the light falling on the rocks is broken. Oakes explores these forms and shapes, capturing the grey scabbiness of the rocks and the movement of water and the play of light.

Michael McGuire won Highly Commended for No 66 'The Dreamers' (mixed media). McGuire's work presents two silvery-grey forms, abstract shapes that might be sections of rock. There's texturing of the surface in which these male and female torsos are positioned, making it hard to define the space in which these forms appear. They're smooth and yet there are folds or surface texture moving across them. The artwork is given a pink mount and black frame. McGuire offers the kind of smooth forms that interested sculptor Henry Moore whose observational drawings and studies became the inspiration for sculpture. McGuire's Dreamers engage and invite interpretation, remaining pregnant with possibility and may have been influenced by natural phenomena as the artist mentioned looking for flint stones on Norfolk beaches. Interestingly, Henry Moore's process generally was to model in soapstone or alabaster before enlarging, casting and making bronze sculptures. McGuire attached some T S Eliot poetry on the back of his 'Dreamers', particularly from 'Prufrock', 'Let us go then, you and I...' the poet inviting us to journey into a fragmented and indeterminate world. McGuire has achieved, using an experimental mixed media technique, surface qualities which in part are reminiscent of fine etching to create an enigmatic work of high quality.

Elsie Merris-Osborne was awarded Highly Commended for No 72 'Blue' (oil). This oil painting picks out the form of the cow with black background whilst the head, neck and body are given definition with tonal blue and dark patches, helping define musculature and heavy hide. There's character and charm worked into the realisation of the animal's eyes that directly connect with the viewer and fine detail in Merris-Osborne's working of fur on the ears.

Linda Jackson was given a Highly Commended for No 48 'Eve of 2nd World War Mother's Wedding Day' (charcoal and pastel). Jackson's pastel and charcoal study of this wedding couple includes details of gown, veil, suit, pink carnation and the bride's magnificent bouquet of white stargazer lilies. The cut of the groom's suit and fashion of the bride's dress recall the 1940s but otherwise this pose on a happy day seems a million miles from the imminent World War revealed through the work's title. Thus a curious mixed response emerges with a sense of foreboding imparted through the set of the couples' eyes and smiles and realisation of the eve of war but also momentousness at the triumphal power of love.

Veronica Dopson was awarded Highly Commended for No 23 'Sisters' (oil on canvas). There's a natural ease to the pose of the two sisters that Dopson commits to oils. The familial sisterly joy, security and comfort in each other's company are all conveyed through their smiles and gazes. The sister on the left looks down to her sibling. The girl on the right smiles and looks out to engage the audience whilst clutching her sister's arm. There's a chair back visible to the left whilst a curtain with muted pattern and some horizontals formed from an open window create divisions of colour and the suggestion of patterning for Dopson's background. Light falls on the sisters from above and slightly to the left, allowing for Dopson to bring out the folds in their clothes and hair, all serving to convey a contented moment.

Shirley Smith was awarded Highly Commended for No 110 'A Favourite Walk, Ashridge' (Acrylic). High straight tree trunks dominate Smith's painting of a woodland walk, the bright blue sky in the top half cut by treetops, branches and trunks whilst falling light reveals slivers of the ground in bright relief. Smith uses light effectively to highlight sections of tree trunk, offering the viewer a way out of the foreground shade and through the painting towards the lighter areas ahead. A very enjoyable painting results.

David Miles was awarded Highly Commended for No 74 'I Like It' (watercolour). Broad landscape washes sweep across Miles's sky to an horizon suggested with dark land beneath. A mist has settled over fields broken by the line of a fence. Looking lower, the artist transports us across more atmospheric mist to a foreground composed of reeds and a lone tree all darkly painted. Miles achieves a striking effect through maintaining simplicity of composition elements, and the play of light and dark.

David C Hunt was awarded Highly Commended for No 44 'Ann's Cottage Garden' (pastel). This picture is challenging to pull off effectively, since we have a range of elements to consider, including a blocky, angular set of steps cutting up from the bottom left foreground, past tiered border beds of flowers to the verticals of background evergreens and trees and bushes. The colour scheme takes its cue from the stonework with white sprays forming the main bursts and red and pink tulips and hydrangea heads dotting the composition. The viewer is invited to follow the perspective progression to a vanishing point somewhere out of the painting to our right, thus leading us through the work of art and bringing us mentally into a closer relationship to the horticultural display.

Lin Hunt was awarded Highly Commended for No 45 'Elephant' (acrylic). Sometimes you don't need the entire subject to convey quite a lot all at once. This is a case in point with simply a side view of an elephant's head. Scale is suggested since the head alone crowds out the rest of this enormous creature. There's a sense of the animal's form, the leathery sun-bleached hide with its hardened folds from which peers a curious, though rather tired and old looking red eye. The artist conveys a sense of animal wisdom, timelessness and magnificence. She doesn't allow her perfunctory deep blue slab of sky and stylised green foliage and leaves to intrude or detract from the central power of her subject.

Peter Phelps was awarded Highly Commended for No 91 'The Ceramic Mirror' (acrylic). This work contained within the bounds of a simple frame shows a white wall and ornately bordered, stylised, pseudo-medieval mirror with crenellations, lions and men in armour within which we see the reflection of a modern dining room with table, window, flowers in vases and two works of art on the far opposite wall. A decorative painting results.

David A Hunt was given a Highly Commended for No 42 'Twilight' (pastel). This highly atmospheric picture has loose line work with diminishing telegraph poles beside an overgrown lane and hedgerow to the right. Hunt creates a murky blended pastel sky with details of grass and foliage loosely suggested through the technique of broken colour. The character of the hand drawn line emerges as our gaze moves down the lane into twilight gloom.

Marion Smart was awarded a Highly Commended for No 104 'Kilchurn Castle and Loch Awe' (acrylic). This delightful, well executed acrylic positions its castle subject in the middle distance, foregrounding weeds and an expanse of loch water in which we see the suggestion of the castle's reflection. Misty clouds are descending over the mountain tops, all building the atmospheric handling of Smart's Scottish landscape. The castle itself is a suitably romantic ruin. A classic landscape painting results.

Brian Munton was awarded Highly Commended for No 77 'Hadrian's Wall' (oil on board). Set in a deep box frame, Munton's picture is built up using raised flats to create a three-dimensional projection. The audience thus follow the line of Hadrian's Wall over rolling cliffs capped with grass, towards an obscured vanishing point. Munton's brushwork is broad and at points heavy but loose, making the foreground sections darker and thus lightening the middle and far

sections thus achieving a sense of distance. There's the suggestion of sand to the left and a great sweep where cliff has been eroded. The work is set in portrait view, with the sky relegated to a narrow strip at the top. A fascinating creation results that, for me, changes as you view the work either from straight on or from the side, revealing the 'steps' of the various sections. Thus a more sculptural work emerges.

Best in category

The award for **Best Exhibit by an Under 18 Year Old Member** was won by Arun Kowcun for his artwork, No 58 entitled, 'Ed' (oil on canvas). This is an extraordinary work for a young artist to achieve, showing skill, insight and technical expertise. This large canvas portrait is depicted full on with an arresting stare gazing out. The sitter's blue eyes project intensity whilst hair and clothing are loose and freely painted. Kowcun gives close attention to shadowing that reveals musculature and the tautness of the skin letting harsh light fall on his subject from the left and using this to help define features and character.

Stella Benford won the award of **Best Ceramic** for her sculpted piece, No 8, 'The Hare' (Ceramic). This piece of fascinating modelling work is done as a relief on a tile of clay that has been kiln hardened allowing glaze to run into the lines and textured indented areas of the hare and the background areas of tile. The piece has then been set in a frame that has the same hue as the darkened areas of glaze. Stella captures the arch of the back, the spring of the hare's back legs and raised, alert ears, capturing a fleeting moment before it bounds away across a field.

Clifford Knight won **Best Mixed Media** for No 57 'St Mary's, Clophill' (acrylic). There's a tombstone in the right foreground, brackish grasses and an ominous, atmospheric sky above this striking acrylic painting of a ruined church. The tower has partially crumbled, the roof of the nave has gone and we can see through two mighty arches to background trees and foliage. A full moon looks palely down through scudding clouds. Knight exploits dark reds, browns and blues for the walls. Viewers see the church projected with shadow side towards us with slivers of bright light falling on the left hand face of the tower, through the arches and across listing gravestones. It's a brooding, mesmerising work, having a textured chalky quality. The artist ably captures a sense mood, atmosphere and grim abandoned desolation, getting beneath surface values to create a highly individual response to his subject.

Helen Olden won **Best Sculpture** for No 81 'Sweet Dreams' (Bronzed white clay). Marked 'Joseph 1995', this sculpture shows a sleeping baby, swaddled, with left side of head revealed, eyes closed with a peaceful expression. There's close attention to details of hair, ear and cushion. The effect is like viewing a church ceiling boss. The child projects a sense of calm, slumbering escape. Sheets and pillow folds form a curious extended shell-like set of boundary folds, echoing, perhaps unconsciously, the folds of baby's ear. A striking sculpture results.

Sarah Janavicius was awarded **Best Collage** for No 50 'Through the Textural Woodland' (Mixed Media textural collage). Janavicius creates a fascinating, intricate collage using a variety of elements and materials. Tree trunk shapes with splaying lateral branches result in a criss-cross effect and within these inner areas, a kind of stained-glass patterning emerges, by filling in areas of blue materials for sky and textured oranges and browns for foliage. The collage's power to pick up light and bounce it back to the audience make it appear to glisten and gleam as though back-lit. An unusual artwork is thus formed through this method of patterning each smaller section.

David Jones won **Best Portrait** for No 53 'The Dalai Lama' (Pastel). Both of David Jones's portraits this year show extraordinarily fine pastel work. Indeed, the fine detailing of the 14th Dalai Lama's eyebrows and facial features for example have a photographic quality. Tenzin Gyatso wears a red and yellow Buddhist robe and his eyes hold our attention, staring from the portrait to engage the viewer. He sports his characteristic smile, despite his exile, his expression capturing something of the guru's wisdom and patience.

Jean Daker won **Best Pastel** for No 21 'Moonlight at Marloes Beach' (Pastel). Soft tones are broken by a line of grim jagged rocks like shark teeth in this Pembrokeshire seascape. These dark forms contrast with the soft smoothly realised tonal work in Daker's sky and sea surfaces. She vaguely indicates rock and moonlight reflections in the water along with the sky's varying though tranquil and smoothly blended colour hues. At the horizon, a thin blue band indicates the limit of our vision. Waves and white foam break up the area in a band about the rocks thus suggesting the sand of the beach lying just beneath the foreground water. The lone, pale circle of moonlight sets off this stylishly executed pastel. {See comments on Daker's No 22 above.}

Graham Plant won **Best Life Study** for No 93 'Shed on Sunday' (Pastel). Plant's picture incorporates aspects of the studio depicted through various types of hatching, giving us some of the sitter's surroundings. There's an artist prominent in the background on the far side of the model. The media of pastel shading done in this fashion introduces a sense of vitality around the static, seated pose. Instead of the studied atmosphere that might be suggested when depicting a formally posed life model in the studio, Plant shows a joyous looking artist in contrast to the rather serious expression on the sitter, head dead upright, hair straight down. Her body projects stillness and is realised by Plant with carefully blended skin tones in contrast to the more fluid, sketchy hatching and line work used for the studio's drapes and background surfaces.

Dorothy McGuire won **Best Embroidery** for No 63 'Hoopoe' (silk embroidery / goldwork). This colourful Afro-Eurasia bird with distinctive crown is realised with sequins, bugle beads and metal thread in-filled with satin stitch, all worked onto McGuire's goldwork pattern to create the hoopoe, with its beak, wing and crest on a cloth with a rich blue hue. The stylised pattern is decorated with embroidered leaves about the bird. The Hoopoe is set off within a fine border of gold on the mount and simply framed.

Marjorie Phelps won **Best Textile** for No 89 'The Bride' (Embroidery), embroidering the pattern of a bride wearing a cloche hat, popular in the 1920s, with a flower on one side. The bride holds a bouquet and the embroidery creates a delicate impression with the bride's brown eyes engaging the viewer on her special day. The work is mounted in suitably white border and frame.

David A Hunt won **Best Pen and Wash** for No 41 'Holdenby' (felt pen). The artist draws us into this delightful pen and wash picture by taking us along the sweep of a drive or path from the right-hand foreground right up to the gates of an imposing, ornamental arch beyond which lies Holdenby. Freehand penmanship is employed to draft the architecture of this magnificent building. Hunt evokes a phalanx of rising chimneys and black windows. However he ensures he leaves gleams of light shining from each pane to maintain their idiosyncratic character in keeping with the building. The drawing's quality also imparts character through Hunt's line work but it is the tonal work through water mixed with black felt pen ink that really invests the picture with an illustrative quality, the ink allowed sometimes to run over the lines and brickwork or burgeoning foliage and either darkened or lightened to achieve the desired effect. Hunt's drawing has both technical precision and a delightful loose artistry that invests the artwork with charm and character.

Christine Fitch won **Best Watercolour** for No 27 'Anemones' (watercolour) and it's great to see an artist putting the emphasis on 'water' in a watercolour. Here Fitch gives us beautiful, delicate washes of colour transporting the eye through light pink in the upper half of her painting, down to green shadowy regions. Whilst some of her flower petals are blushed with pink, most are left white whilst rising stems cut through the washes beneath the flower heads with their intricate dark centres. Fitch textures her painting creating an impression of leaves and the tangled shapes of foliage. The edges of petals remain crisp, an achievement through the various washes and texturing, suggesting a good deal of skill and pre-planning in order to achieve what appears, to the casual onlooker, as simply a spontaneous natural floral profusion.

John Bailey won **Best Pencil Drawing** for No 4 'Lost Signal Box' (pencil). It is amazing what can be produced with apparently one of the most basic mediums of all, pencil. Here the artist gives us incredible attention to details of brickwork texture, reflected light in small window panes, a broken overgrown guttering and lines of foliage indicating the abandoned nature of a disused rail line. We are drawn into the composition via a line of fence posts, some of which list at odd angles connoting their disrepair. There's foliage and a magnificent tree behind these posts and to the right. To the left, we have the signal box building with its single chimney, ornately carved gable eaves or bargeboards and a lone light fitting hanging from a decoratively patterned piece of wrought iron work. Above all this, Bailey possibly uses smudging for tonal work to achieve brooding clouds. It is the fine detail that draws our attention, making our gaze rove over this picture to alight upon such things as weeds sprouting from the chimney that at first glance might be missed. The drawing thus rewards greater study.

Jacqui Tomlin won **Best Acrylic** for No 122 'Mystic Wood' (acrylic). This large painting weaves a spell upon the viewer, its magic most powerful when observing from some distance across the exhibition hall. It is there that it is best appreciated. Close up, it still retains all the enjoyable qualities of such a landscape scene but distance achieves the effect of making the magnificent foreground tree stand out whilst throwing all the other trees back in perspective. Tomlin's reddish foreground tree trunk, reminiscent of a giant redwood, has thick bark ridges that are peeling away. The stream flowing diagonally through the painting is strewn with golden stones and the colour scheme of mauves and vivid blues and greens generally also imparts a mystic quality, raising an everyday representational artwork to that more magical level to such an extent that we feel a Will O' the Wisp might not be out of place.

Ray Roadnight won **Best Oil** for No 102 'Megan' (oil). The sitter is posed for this life study reclining, resting the musculature, back and arms and thus able to maintain stillness for longer. She thus appears more relaxed than if maintaining a standing or rigidly upright seated pose. Added to this, Roadnight uses thick brushwork to impart a sense of vitality and texture to the skin surfaces and background drape and large plant leaves. A languid expression completes the sense, for me, of a relaxed session in which the artist captures her form, bringing out the sitter's personality through brushwork and the lines of hair and planes of her body, exploring areas of light and dark with shadow and varying tone. He captures light gleaming from her collar bone, left thigh and forehead, maintaining a good sense of proportion for what is a large painting. A sculptural aspect emerges.

Prize winners

Jason Black (no relation to the society founder) won the **Founder's Award** for No 11 'Butterfly Shoal' (silk painting). This type of painting is done on stretched silk using dyes and a resist, later setting the dye through steaming. The vibrant dyes and shimmering quality of the silk create an impressive, striking effect. Among the detailed patterns of green, red and mauve corals swim a variety of beautifully patterned Butterfly fish, including two prominently placed masked Bannerfish or black and white Heniochus.

The **Celia Hanbury Memorial Prize** for this year's exhibition was given to Helen Olden for her painting, No 80 'Autumn' (acrylic on canvas). A magnificent dog, probably the titular Autumn, stares from Olden's painting, locking our gaze with its big brown eyes. The fur is matted possibly having recently been wetted, and is curling and dishevelled, making for a great deal of delicate brushwork for the artist in order to effectively realise this canine on canvas. The pose is ostensibly relaxed but the eyes and set of the muzzle suggest a sense of readiness. One front paw is folded under the body whilst the other is extended. Olden places Autumn centrally in this pictorial arrangement, resting in a blue background that darkens above, setting off the subject with this tonal variation. Meticulous attention to details of fur and claw create a finely wrought representation.

The **Patricia Glen Memorial Prize** for 2015 was awarded to Michael Pollard for No 95 'Ximena's New Dress' (pencil mixed). This artwork has intricate detail for example in the background doorway, wall and the fine tracery of ivy stems and leaves. Pollard captures the beauty of the model posed with ginger cat by right ankle. Soft tonal work abounds and the shading is subtle. The work is set in a double mount that lets us straight into the lines of the work, the eye roving over the elaborate wrought iron hinges on the medieval plank door and across and down the titular figure to follow the curl of the cat's tale. The eyes of both Ximena and cat stare out, engaging the viewer.

Robert Pearce won **Runner-up Best in Show** for No 88 'Autumn Irchester Park' (oil on canvas). Pearce's oil leads our gaze down a woodland path with the tangled lines of rising tree trunks on either side and the weaving spines of branches overhead. This autumnal view through Irchester park is thus bestrewn with fallen golden leaves creating a shimmering cascade. The impressionist view reminded me of Monet's treatment of leaves as Pearce transports us mentally through the lighter foreground area of his painting into shadow-dappled regions in which tree branches and trunks are so densely packed that they form a natural tunnel, gently winding towards a brilliant blue focal point. Light breaks through the trees from above right whilst dark shadows collect behind trees along the left. Whilst grass breaks sporadically through the dense carpet of leaves at various points along this undulating path, intense yellow speckles shine from the canvas like golden dragon scales. The effect at times emulates pointillism, for example in the way Pearce describes the form of heaped mounds of leaves along the path simply through stippled points of yellows and browns. Beyond his palette of greens, yellows and browns lies the intense pale blue sky at the end of the close canopy. A beautiful density is thus created through meticulous painting and a suitably substantial moulded frame completes the artwork. {See comment on Pearce's No 87 above.}

Paul Hill won **Best in Show** for No 36 'Theatre' (pencil). For this life study, the model is in seated pose, Hill carefully maintaining proportion. There's the play of light and shadow on the model's shoulder and legs, the folds of material and her cascading hair. Tonal values add volume and form. Her hands are crossed and the background arrangement suggests, for me, a curious 1960s style, as though the model is waiting behind a screen or on a theatre stage with ceiling lights receding back in a perspective line, perhaps suggesting a setting created by the artist. She may thus be waiting to be revealed to an audience and ostensibly appears relaxed, eyelids closed, confident with perhaps the trace of a smile on her lips. However, although seated, there's an underlying tension in her legs which are raised up so that she's on tiptoe. The artist captures a moment within his study when the model could rise from her pose. There's a decorative flower in a vase beside the chair and a stylised angularity to her arched eyebrows, long eyelashes, sweeping, rolling hair falling and merging with the folds of a gown perhaps draped over the chair back. This pencil work thus shows great technique, composition and quality. Well done to Paul Hill for his achievement in winning the FPAA Best in Show 2015.