

The Fellowship of Professional and Amateur Artists

Wellingborough Museum Summer Exhibition

10th August to 17th August 2019

Review by David Rafer BA(Hons), PhD

This year the FPAA opened their exhibition to all comers, making for fascinating and wide ranging choices for the new judge's awards. I was able to attend preview night to see the high calibre of submissions.

I was immediately struck by John Black's canvases, in particular the landscape, No.11 in the catalogue, 'Im Abendrot', inspired by No. IV of the four last songs by Richard Strauss – which, in turn, was based on the poem by Joseph von Eichendorff (1788 - 1857). John's oil again finds the artist's motif of silhouetted figures, this time two adults and a child against a fiery landscape as the sky bursts with light, possibly recalling the titular Im Abendrot (At Sunset). In his poem, Eichendorff contemplates wanderers amid the sun's dying light as it suffuses the land and they seek solace and final peace from wandering, passing from the world, transcending. The imagery John creates is poignant, beautiful and is a compelling interpretation, the figures facing a fiery conflagration, and the land itself burning like embers. An extraordinarily powerful, evocative work.

Also, among the many accomplished works on show, the new judge made the following awards:

Best in show

Best in Show was won by Margaret Finch for No.42, 'Old Door', mixed media. Finch's suitably rustically framed door is an extraordinary creation. Viewed from above, we can see that the surface is actually largely flat with only slight textured relief. However, from the front etc., a startlingly convincing three-dimensional effect is achieved. The old door itself is created to appear as a typically deep grained series of planks with 'T' hinges fixing the longer part to the door, the smaller to the door jamb. The door is also fitted with a circular iron handle, sliding bolt and open padlock. The creation gives us everything we expect to fool our senses. There's possibly a Mediterranean influence in the way that the walls around the doorway have crumbling render exposing blocky-looking irregular stonework. Above the door there's detailed work on a suitably gnarled wooden lintel. The fact that none of these objects are genuine but actually the product of the artist simply serves to make the overall effect all the more surprising. However, the real triumph of the piece, for me, lies in the sense of trompe l'oeil illusion – a 3 dimensional space achieved with such touches as the shadowing within the doorway, fooling our senses.

Runner-up Best in Show was won by Sarah F Janavicius for No.79, 'Vase of Summer Spectrum', watercolour. A blue vase of flowers dominates Janavicius's composition. The vase is positioned on a windowsill and framed between orange and red curtains and there's a partly lowered venetian blind behind. Beyond the window, broken colour suggests a park or field of some kind that rises to meet a deep blue sky. Janavicius uses intense colour throughout. The blooms are generally divided into blue at the top, yellow for the middle and red and orange below. The brown slats of the blind help to differentiate the blue and mauve iris blooms from the sky colour whilst the complementaries of the green background beyond the window help the large red bloom pop nicely.

Best in category

Best Mixed Media was awarded to Stuart Cooper for No.28, 'Abstract Landscape II'. Cooper uses strips and divisions of colour for his abstract painting, carrying our gaze

through line and pattern with a strikingly free abstract amalgamation. A Mondrianesque geometric work results. The effect is rather like a stained glass window, with a host of colourful fragments scattered across the piece, divided with weaving dark lines that might offer viewers straight or curved shapes but that always keep our gaze roving over the work as we seek to impose order on a work that, although in some ways full of structure, contrarily, remains enigmatically random.

Best Watercolour was awarded to Richard Chapman for No.29, 'Fotheringhay'. Chapman's Fotheringhay tower rises beyond wildly flowing tree branches and leaf forms. There's detailed work realised in the tower's architecture, and the tower is just offset to the left of his painting allowing the right half to be dominated by the bright colours and shapes of a weeping willow. The entire scene is undercut by the dark suggestion of the river below. It's not a clean, 'chocolate-box' view that results, with the artist favouring strong brushstrokes. Chapman draws on the striking contrasts between the dark tree-mass beneath the tower and the light willow form to the right with its wildly coiling and curving trunk and branches. The tower takes a backseat amongst this wildly impressionistic, dramatic nature study.

Best Pastel was awarded to Jean Daker for No.31, 'Breaking Wave'. Daker creates a dramatic pastel work depicting waves crashing on stark rock forms and breaking around them to descend into soft foam as the water meets the beach. It's a work that belies the softer associations normally created with the pastel medium with sharp, dark rocks cutting into the water. Formally the work is divided across the centre by the deep blue band of the sea above which wispy cloud forms meander lazily in contrast to the stark action of elemental tidal forces attacking the rocks below. No figures intrude into this stark isolation as tons of water relentlessly send up spray and foam.

Best Drawing was awarded to Paul Hill for No.64, 'Studio', pencil. Hill's model is arranged over cushions and drapes, looking away to her left. The left side of her form is revealed to viewers. Hill uses subtle tone to indicate highlighted and shadowed areas not just on the model's body but also for the folds of drapes and in the general arrangement of the scene. A cat is placed by the model's feet recalling the often symbolic use of such animals in classic works of nudes.

Best FPAA Newcomer was awarded to Mike Juhasz for No.83, 'Haflinger Tyrolean Pony', oil. Juhasz's oil portrait of a pony shows the chestnut colour and flaxen mane characteristic of the Haflinger Tyrolean breed. Originally from the village of Haflinger in South Tyrol, Austria, this special breed has been endangered several times. During the second world war, smaller Tyrolean ponies were favoured for pulling munitions carts etc. However, beginning in 1946, the Haflinger association began a breeding log and have striven to raise the breed's height above 13 hands. The artist captures this magnificent pony with ears cocked. Chiaroscuro helps to emphasise the light on the head. Most importantly for portraiture, Juhasz achieves a sombre subtlety to the pony's eye, helping to impart emotion. An accomplished work results deserving the newcomer award.

Best Print was awarded to Margaret Mallows for No.93, 'Filigree', linoprint. Mallows gives us a beautiful, intricate and delicate study in tone as leaf-less winter trees stretch away from the viewer into dense woodland and a vague yellow glow in the distance. To create this work linoleum was cut into to achieve the design. Tree trunks and branches are layered in tone with each subsequent set having darker tone to suggest the sense of 'coming' forward. Our gaze tracks over the intricate tracery of branches. The plain frame and mount enhances the picture.

Best Textile was won by Dorothy McGuire for No.97, 'Flamingos', embroidery and goldwork. McGuire creates a delightful embroidery and goldwork textile design of two flamingos exquisitely realised with pinks and reds bounded by gold embroidery whilst branches and leaves twinkle with fruit overhead and one of the flamingos feeds. They're shown standing in water and there's a lily blooming between them creating a pleasing focal point. The deep blue background and gold frame all serve to enhance the richness of this work, kindly loaned for the exhibition.

Best Oil was awarded to Robert Pearce for No.115, 'River Ise at Burton Latimer'. A curving river transports us into this oil painting by Pearce who fully exploits the power of the oil medium. Blue-grey trees cut across the horizon in the distance as bulrushes and reeds line the riverbank, whilst trees and bushes spill leaf and blossom over this waterway which is, itself, dancing with light and colour. Pearce gives us detailed foreground flowers and stems. The treatment of speckles of light falling on the water help the sense of recession as our gaze tracks along the river towards the middle-distance where colour become less saturated and broken. A strong painting entices our gaze.

Best Portrait was awarded to Graham Plant for No.121, 'Showgirl', pastel. Plant exploits various techniques of pastel work to create this shimmering image of a girl on a red chair. He captures the form of the girl's legs, for example, with hatching and broken colour strokes whilst her pink, mauve and violet feather boa with its variety of strokes suggests feathering. There's some loose cross-hatching worked into the background and yellow highlights gleam from the model's sculptural form. An electric effect results from Plant's use of the medium and the showgirl accoutrements of cane and tassels all contribute to a vibrant, sensuous image.

Best Acrylic was awarded to E B Whitmore for No.162, 'Water Music', acrylic on cotton. The spectacle of an explosion of light sweeping up from a low horizon dominates Whitmore's vibrant painting. Light is picked up with yellow and orange glows on the undersides of radiating cirrus cloud forms. The sun is partially obscured, with only an arc visible along with its reflected light dappling the water with highlights of broken colour. The title may recall Handel's orchestral movements composed for King George the first and played whilst on his royal barge on the Thames in 1717, a suitable accompaniment to such a magnificent vista.

FPA Award-winners

The **Peter Jenkyns Memorial Prize** was won by John Walton for No.153, 'Scottish Stream', watercolour. In Walton's watercolour, pale green washes rise up to a hazy sky whilst light bounces back to viewers lower down where a waterfall cascades into the depths of the green and grey water below that stretches into the foreground. We're given the suggestion of soaring tree trunks rising up the banks whilst nearer boughs tumble over to just touch the water. It's a poetic realisation of the scene that the artist creates with extremely light wet in wet work and deeper darks all of which combine into a highly atmospheric, hauntingly impressionist, painting.

The **Vivien Schofield Memorial Prize** was awarded to Gill Denbigh for No.35, 'Glorious Summer', watercolour. Denbigh takes for her subject the ravaged, ripened effect of summer upon three sunflower heads. She ably exploits the qualities of the watercolour medium, beautifully evoking a sense of the fragmenting and decay of these magnificent flower heads, using water to spatter, flick and run paint whilst lifting it from some areas in order to contrive a free, expressive, striking and highly creative work. She encapsulates the feeling of that moment in high summer when the heat and light wreaks its power upon plants and turns them from pristine glory to shattered, disintegrating husks. The use of watercolour to interpret this theme sees the artist embrace the serendipitous qualities of the medium, with its capricious, random, luminous beauty.

The **Maureen Lynn Memorial Award** was won by Diana Swain for No.146, 'French Chateau', watercolour. Swain exhibited this atmospheric painting of part of a French Chateau showing a tower with conical roof set against brooding cloud forms. The building is partially obscured by branches adding to the gothic mood. Such chateaus with their towers and heavy stonework were built to have both a defensive purpose and an aesthetic quality all of which makes for an interesting subject. Swain exploits the possibilities for capturing the strong contrast of light and shadow and also creates suitable texturing on the various stone surfaces with light also bouncing from fish scale shingles on the roof.

The **Celia Hanbury Memorial Prize** was awarded to Ric Kirk for No.86, 'Marmalade', mixed media. Kirk's marmalade cat is caught in a moment whilst gazing intently outside and to the right. There's fine detail in the cat's whiskers, cocked ears and green eyes that help to give

viewers a sense of the cat's intent as it sits on a windowsill but is alert and would be ready to spring away at any moment. There's also intricate work in the animal's fur and paws and a very good realisation of the lace that decorates the window behind the cat. There's a sense of possible rain mottling the glass of the window and a flat darkness outside, for the moment this feline gives us no sense that it wants to leave.

The **Patricia Glenn Memorial Prize** was won by Tim Hagan for No.49, 'A Dartmoor Theatre', oil and acrylic. Hagan's painting is suitably titled since he employs dramatic lighting to pick out some Dartmoor crags whilst leaving much of the foreground and surround in gloom. There's a literal aerial perspective employed to suggest the rolling distant moorland as seen from an elevated viewpoint modulating the colour to grey-blue with hints of green to evoke distance. Use of contrasting light and shade gives the scene a startling impact instantly commanding our attention towards the illuminated, brightly shown focal area. We are left to ponder the foreground and surrounding darker areas where hints of crags and paths help lead our gaze back to the focal area of the brightly illuminated high crags. Considering light and shadow or use of chiaroscuro enhances the quality of Hagan's painting, lending the natural theatre of this stark landscape some great box office magic!

The **Clifford Knight Memorial Prize** was awarded to Stella Benford for No.10, 'Shanty Town', mixed media. Benford's sculptural mixed media evokes the spectacle of high-rise shanty shacks piled on top of each other without the foundational, structural support necessary for such a delightfully improbably design. Benford's humorous, implausible form has a shimmering patina on her dwellings and they are dotted here and there with small, dark doorways and windows, central steps and angled lines jutting out from roofs like a kind of shanty scaffold. We can take from her work a sense of the precariousness of all our own attempts at stronger home building!

The **Founders' Prize** was won by Felicity Brown for No.17, '6.35 - Burma', acrylic. This strong, powerful abstract image suggests the colours, atmosphere and cultural feeling of Burma – a good composition incorporating confident, assertive and expressive application of paint. The handling recalls the painterly approach used by Edvard Munch in his treatment of the background in 'The Scream'. A dominating white and yellow orb evokes harsh light in a deep red sky over blue and grey layered bands. Echoes from the top are picked up below with red light forming a vertical cutting through the foreground. The sense of height is enhanced by the 'portrait' format. For me, the dark masses on the black horizontal suggest mountains or hills and the blue and grey bands recall the way that distance greys things. A striking, enigmatic work.

One of the **Patrons' Prizes** was awarded to Belinda Collett for No.26, 'Bee's Paradise', acrylic. Collett's large painting captures a scene of crowded floral profusion being investigated by several large, stylised bees. The artist hones in on the flowers' vibrant colours to create impact with rich brushstrokes of broken colour highlighting not only the different varieties of flowers and petals but also the multiple range of greens necessary to delineate the various leaf tones. A field, hedge and sky are relegated to a small corner top left allowing viewers a larger than life close proximity to the intensely colourful floral display. Collett abandons restraint with this full-on design, optically mixing bright colour to create intense forms.

The other **Patrons' Prize was awarded to** Anna de la Mare for No.33, 'Shop Window Reflections', acrylic. De la Mare's acrylic gives us two stylised hares in boxing attitude observed through a shop window by a figure whose reflection is fragmented into the painting whilst, behind him in turn, a large lorry with 'Food' written on the side, is depicted passing by on the street outside. A complex image results, with the figure's enlarged right hand raised behind the left hare whilst his head lines up with the right-hand hare. There's a message at the top that might be saying 'please do not touch'. The whole composition with its play on reflections, and placement of the viewer into the position of the figure with his hand raised recalls, for me, themes of reflection and placement seminally explored by Manet in 'A Bar at the Folies-Bergère'.

Other prize winners

For this 20th celebratory year, a number of additional prizes were awarded as a result of kind donations by local sponsors:

A **Great Art Prize** was awarded to Catherine (Katy) Burdett for No.21, 'Boat with Rope', mixed media. Burdett depicts a view of a boat from above with the stern in the lower part of this portrait format. The mast provides a strong vertical and the various sections of the boat's interior become the focus of attention. The picture offers us a strong design of mostly angular shapes and the interior supporting architectural shapes are broken by the twisting coil of a thick, old rope. There's a strong sense of patterning and texture that emerges from this interior study with its planking, ribs and seating areas. Outside the boat, the sea is represented by a band of deep blue cutting across the top of the picture. Burdett partially angles her boat view imparting the craft's sense of volume. A pleasing graphic quality emerges.

Another **Great Art Prize** was awarded to Sharon L Ingram for No.76, 'Never Forget', pencil and charcoal. Ingram adds dramatic impact to her picture by dividing her elephant subject vertically down the centre as it gazes out at us, thus framing the animal in an asymmetrical composition. The right-hand of the picture falls away into blackness but the photographically realist depiction of the highlights of the animal's deeply creviced skin, hair and broken tusk stand out all the more as focal points. There's a dark sadness suggested by the elephant's eye. Meticulous detail and knowing how to light her subject make this a standout work of pencil and charcoal in which darkness helps to create form.

A third **Great Art Prize** was awarded to Julie Price for No.125, 'Ostrich Olympics', acrylic on canvas. Six comedic ostriches are depicted in a race in Price's acrylic, the front runners are neck and neck, whilst one at the rear is out of lane with its head in the sand. Each gangling bird is given an individual pose, one with legs akimbo. These flightless oddly shaped creatures with their long legs and necks make an obvious choice for comic invention. Price gives them anthropomorphic attributes, including socks and running boots and running numbers. There's a hint of surrealism in the way the race track doesn't quite conform to perspective but there's also verisimilitude in such details as feathers and forms and the way each bird projects character.

A **Coleman's Prize** was won by Alan Goodman for No.45, 'Golitha Falls', oil on canvas. Goodman's oil evokes a view of the Cornish falls with a green backdrop of trees with trunks, branches and roots liberally ranged beside water that races and cuts around boulders and banks. The perspective view into the green interior is framed by the trees and our gaze tracks along the water surface, over the foreground foam and rocks to rest on the mirror-like water surface at the heart of the painting. The artist differentiates his ubiquitous green haze with hundreds of small varying green dabs to evoke woodland leaves and there's detailed work done on shadowing the rocks to impart the illusion of solid, naturally hewn forms arbitrarily scattered along the falls and interspersed with ferns. A luminous work results, with the sense that the sky is obscured and any light falling on the scene has to penetrate a shrouding yellowy-green canopy. A harmonious and striking painting results.

Another **Coleman's Prize** was won by Juliet Illsley for No.72, 'Yellow Roses', watercolour. There's a botanical, illustrative quality to Illsley's roses watercolour with blooms against a light background. The colour scheme draws on the yellow arc of the colour wheel, providing a sense of harmony. The five rose blooms are arranged across a pattern of green stems and leaves that allow our gaze to track along them to each crowning bundle of softly painted petals. Soft yellows and pinks delineate the petals and the work has a gently pleasing quality.

A third **Coleman's Prize** was won by Pat Matthews for No.96, 'Blue Tits', watercolour. This is a strong, striking watercolour of two parent blue tit birds feeding their chicks in a nesting box, possibly of the kind often monitored by ornithologists using nest cameras. There are ten fledgling birds and a parent is shown bringing a worm or caterpillar into the nest through the tiny circular aperture. There's a harmonious colour scheme with the blues of the adult birds'

tail feathers echoed in the planking of the nesting box interior and yellowy-greens from the chest feathers picked up in the detritus of the nest. Also, the dark frame helps with the sense that we're being given a window into the nest's interior. There's a sense of dramatic lighting at work as the birds are clearly picked out against the darks rising up the inside of the nest box. Fascinatingly, according to the British Trust for Ornithology, each chick can consume 100 caterpillars daily thus placing an incredible 1,000 a day tally upon the adults in order to supply the youngsters' demands, so it's no wonder the adult framed in the entrance sports a slightly depressed expression!

A fourth **Coleman's Prize** was awarded to Marion Smart for No.138, 'Vicars Close', Wells, acrylic. In Smart's acrylic of Vicars Close in Wells, Somerset, the sweeping lines of roofs form useful perspective lines towards the Cathedral. The high chimneys step out this perspectival view, ending at Vicars Hall and gateway and we can make out the Cathedral tower beyond. It is remarkable to realise that we're looking here at a 14th century street surviving to the present day. Smart takes the opportunity to do detailed justice to the scene, painting these ancient walls and architecture with light hitting the houses on the left and shadowing those on the right. A fascinating and absorbing work results, that holds viewers' attention.

The **Zan Art Gallery Prize** was awarded to Rosie Jarvis for No.81, 'The Gwaun Valley', acrylic. In Jarvis's acrylic, a grey sky meets distant hills as a road weaves towards the centre of the painting across green fields whilst rising trees line the slopes. A weaving, curving road is a useful compositional device for transporting viewers' into the work. A largely green colour scheme maintains harmony and a simple black frame completes the painting.

The **Pixie Gallery Prize** was won by David Miles for No.105, 'Last Light', watercolour. Miles' marshes in this painting are ranged with trees, with a particularly magnificent specimen rising up on the left into the splendour of the sunset with its colours of deep purple, yellows, oranges and blues and his clouds pick up on these colours. Luminous orange is reflected in the marsh water below as a flock of birds swoop down on the right hand side to the illimitable marshes below. Miles paints with a genuine, specific, bird feather and enjoys nothing more than walking such marshes and admiring first hand the beauty of such scenes. An admirable, subtle work results with a strong composition.

The **SAA Prize** was won by Jill Smith for No.139, 'Melton Livestock Market', acrylic. Smith paints the interior of the large enclosure shed of the livestock market at Melton in Leicestershire during a sheep auction, thus taking on the ambitious task of realising hundreds of sheep as well as the many buyers, stockmen and auctioneers ranged throughout this busy, bustling scene. There's a raised walkway and railings for auctioneers above the corralled flocks, and its angled perspective helps take our gaze into the painting. The detailed forms of sheep in the foreground gradually break up into suggestive white and black heads less distinctly arranged as they recede into the picture and the flocks become impressionist dabs. It's in the top section's horizontal area, where we can discern such details as livestock transportation lorries etc. There's a sense of a painting largely made up of a host of forms, both human and livestock.