



The Easel

Newsletter of Rugby & District Art Society

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The President writes:

Hello Everyone

I trust that you are all well. Here is another triple-page edition to help you feel a little less deprived.

The June and July meetings are definitely cancelled, and beyond is still uncertain, so please send in more bits and pieces for another newsletter, to help us keep in touch and show that things are still happening despite all the difficulties. When we're able to resume our meetings we'll let you know.

Artfully yours, Paul

Best Wishes

Sheila Lucas, a long and enthusiastic supporter and artist member of our Society, well-known to many of you, had a mild stroke a few weeks ago. She is now out of hospital and much better, and is living temporarily with her son and his wife. We wish her and her family well and look forward to a speedy and full recovery.



From Jenny Clark

Having watched week one of Grayson Perry's Art Club where he covered portraits, I challenged some painting friends to paint a self portrait. Not having a free standing mirror, I had to do my initial sketch in the downstairs loo, which was not easy. As the sketch was really not good, I decided to paint a rough sketch and then work from that, but the inspiration just was not there. So, after a while of pondering, I got out the glue and a couple of magazines and started ripping and sticking, ending up with this collage of me. It took less than two hours to do and I really enjoyed it. Still haven't found the will to attempt it with paint but will go onto painting or perhaps collaging an animal this week. If you haven't watched it, have a look at Art Club on Ch4 catch up. It's really interesting and uplifting. I've never been a Grayson fan but now he's my best friend and inspiration.

Sarais Crawshaw keeps busy in lockdown

Faced with the unusual situation of lockdown, I'm sure I can't be the only one to have found it quite a challenge.

All the usual exhibitions and appointments were cancelled, and faced with no structure to the days, and no access to the places, people and resources I'm accustomed to, it took a while to come to terms with the new situation. Many things have gone online, exhibitions included, and I'm just thankful that we have the digital resources to keep us all in touch and both educated and entertained.

Luckily the reasonably good weather has meant that my garden has benefited from a good tidy, and I've taken my daily exercise by walking around our village, and making a photo diary of the emerging signs of spring and summer,

Detail of the creative process and the finished artwork



This magnificent craft is one of David Newell's projects completed during lockdown. It is a radio controlled tug about 16 inches long. The model is scratch built, not a kit, and constructed mainly of balsa wood. To strengthen the hull, it is covered in material from a pair of lady's tights. The model does float and has had sea trials in a paddling pool.

Sadly, the trial was cut short when the pool began to leak.



looking at plants, animals, people, gardens and allotments. All of this has given me great pleasure, and I now have a considerable fund of ideas which I hope to use in future artwork.

I've completed two papercuts in the time, one of which is based on red squirrels, which I watched last year in Cumbria. I wanted to make some interesting textures for the squirrel background and found that laying baking parchment over a wet wash gave the effect I was after. I've used layers of watercolour and acrylic paint with some metallic paints for accents.

I also wanted to make tiny paper sculptures of larch cones as part of the picture and, after several experiments, managed to form them. The whole papercut combines a frieze of squirrels climbing round a tree, a squirrel portrait and larch cones circling around it.

My next idea is to paint the view from my bedroom window, which combines some lovely old red brick walls with a distant view of the village church tower plus a horse chestnut tree in full flower.

I'm generally not a *plein air* painter but, who knows, I may be converted yet!

John Lines chases lockdown blues...

It all seemed very strange and still does. 'You have to stay at home' we were told. Wow! No pressing gallery dates to keep, nobody wanting a picture next week. It all seemed unreal, which of course it was. But I now had that wonderful thing called 'time on my hands'! Crikey, all those pictures I've been wanting to do just for the sheer love of it – they can now be done!

Right, let's get started! Could I? No, I could not! The umff had gone, inspiration too. Oh heck, spent a day staring at the wall, then in the end went out to the garden and ruined some nice daffs. The next day was spent working my way through thirty-year-old sketch books and the day after that answering art enquiries, which did me some good as well.

Finally, after a couple of weeks wondering what was going to happen to us all, I picked up a brush and did a small landscape from my imagination.

Yes, how I had missed it! The smell of oily hands, paint on the fridge door! I was back in the groove! Lovely! Of course we still can't travel far to paint, but it does seem to be getting closer. A short ride out convinced me that the countryside was still green, cow parsley shoulder high, campion as pink as ever, and fields full of golden buttercups. England at it's wonderful best. We've missed a lot these past two months but painting and it's restorative effect will pull us all back together!!



'JL Monet' painting in his garden

From the editor...



The response to my appeal for material has been excellent. So much so that some items have had to be held over until the next edition. Many thanks to you all for your contributions.

My latest appeal is that all of you access Youtube to watch The Starlets performing their isolation Abba medley 'Quarantina'. It's a brilliant example of creativity blossoming from adversity. It's also funny, oddly moving and tremendously uplifting. You might even manage a bit of a bop around the kitchen!

A tribute to John from his daughter, Christine Healey...

*My dad paints pictures, he's done it all my life,
He got paint on the ceiling and paint on his wife,
Paint on our uniforms, paint in our hair,
It's true to say there was paint everywhere.*

*He's been far and wide, always with a brush by his side,
From country to country, his skill he has plied
He'll stand in a gate and paint what he sees,
never mind the strength of any oncoming breeze.
With his tongue sticking out, concentrating on life,
mum sits in the car – who'd be an artist's wife?*

*Exhibitions he's had, we've always been there,
seeing all the visitors, with wide eyes they stare.
Exclamations they make at what he's achieved,
with a brush and some paint, as that's all he needs.*

*I have many a picture adorning my wall,
my kids have grown up with them and think that he's cool.
I think him a genius, I've always believed,
but mostly I'm so proud of all that he's achieved.*

Jan Watts rides the Snake River experience ...

When Leslie and I were visiting some U.S.A. National Parks, we booked a trip on the Snake River in Grand Teton Park. Arriving at the starting point, we discovered our vessel was a large rubber raft. I briefly wondered where the seats were, then discovered we were to sit on the edge of the raft! After handing out life jackets, the park ranger gave us a brief talk, which ended with, 'If you should fall off, make sure your head points towards the front of the raft and we shall endeavour to catch you up.'

I was terrified. At that point the the Snake River was quite shallow but fast flowing and rocky too! The scenery was wonderful but as we snaked down the river I was too busy hanging to the edge of the raft to get many camera shots. I did see a bald eagle and otters catching fish, but the photos were rubbish!



Ever smiling (through gritted teeth), Jan takes on the rapids

The Wildlife Art Society International Online Gallery is available at www.twasi.com

**More than 80 TWASI members are exhibiting their
wildlife art, including R&DAS members
Sarais Crawshaw, Jan Watts & Leslie Read
All paintings, drawings, photographs, sculpture, textiles &
digital works are for sale.**

From Roy Foster...



From Audrey Endall ...

When one of my daughters asked if I could make a simple face mask for her and my granddaughter to use when shopping etc, I little realised that 22 masks later I would still be making two or three a day.

Another daughter in Scotland asked me for 12, for her and fellow volunteer shoppers. As the masks can be washed she felt they would be better than the single use ones they had been given. Even though my masks are not of PPE standard, people who wear them feel they are better than nothing.

I tried several patterns before settling on this design. It's easy to make and the size can be adjusted with the side elastic. Another advantage is when the art project is not going well, I can relax for a while at the sewing machine

If anyone knows people who could use them I can make them (until the material runs out!)

Contact audreyendall6@gmail.com or on 07974001257



From Gisèle Pellegrini...

I have been one of the lucky ones during the lockdown, being able to go for long walks from my doorstep in a village by the Grand Union canal. Equipped with my camera and a long lens, I set myself the task of keeping records of birds not normally seen in my (very small) garden.

I have been rewarded with goldfinches, bullfinches, swallows, warblers, a pair of swans with five cygnets, buzzards, a tern (definitely and very unexpectedly!), a grey heron and red kites. The highlight so far has been this magnificent red kite thermalling over a hay field in late afternoon. What a sight!

(What a photo! Ed)

From Heather Lyons ...

I enjoyed the Live Sketching programme on BBC TV but have been wondering what our Society sketch experts do first at the start of a pose. Eyes? Fit it on the page? Have eraser handy? How do you get the highlights to show up vividly?

John Lines & Paul Torr discuss Heather's queries:

JL: Painting highlights depends on several variables; medium used, surface texture, preparatory work – a lot of artists, including old masters, prepared a medium tone ground first which worked with both dark and light accents.

PT: Don't forget the light source; strong or weak, and which direction it comes from. Unnecessary highlights can simply confuse. Choose them carefully.

JL: And the brightness can vary across the image. Medieval altar pieces, for instance, often ranged from sharp light on the central action fading to softer tones at each side. With oils a warm mid-tone gives depth and richness – Turner often used a red underpainting, with highlights and low darks – the rest paints itself!

PT: The use of colour also comes into the equation; for instance if you have white against a lemon yellow the boundaries are blurred and that can denote a light source, but I suppose the most general advice is to darken the tone of what is around the highlight.

JL: Yes, light against dark, that is the general rule, whatever means you employ to achieve it. With oils you can wipe to reveal ground or resort to a dab of white; whereas with watercolour you can plan ahead or dab white or use a scalpel to scrape! Top quality paint (ie: expensive)

makes a difference and gives best results, in both oils or watercolour; opaque whites in particular.

PT: A sharpened eraser can help with pencil work. Life drawing is normally a more subtle discipline, without needing the strong highlights that work well with still-life or landscape – surely the tones should blend in?

JL: Yes. Few sharp edges. All about form and moulding the figure. Proportion and measurement are fundamental – I recommend the traditional steady arm and pencil technique.

PT: There's no quick and easy fix, whatever TV pundits tell you. It's difficult and needs practice. The body all too easily looks wrong, especially if bits stick out towards you. Just keep trying – and measuring!

JL: It's even more difficult with paint. Start with a jam jar and pop bottle to study form and surfaces, and progress to vegetables and flowerpots – it will help your life drawing.

PT: Different surfaces give different highlights. Smooth and shiny, textured and diffused. Always look carefully and learn.

JL: Where to start a life drawing? It's useful to make sure it will fit your page!

PT: I say listen first to the tutor (they all have different ideas), and then see what you also can find in the pose yourself. What is of interest to you will show up positively in your drawing. I don't mind if it runs off the paper (it can add a new design element!), but it should keep in proportion.

JL: Don't worry about being Michelangelo. He's dead! Just keep practising and you will be surprised at how much progress you can make. And enjoy it of course!