

newsletter



28

January 2014

website: www.thepastelsociety.org.uk

sponsored by Caran d'Ache

THE PASTEL SOCIETY UK

Fleeting, Black Cuillin (detail)

Matthew Draper



Featured Artist Matthew Draper PS



For the second time in three years, Matthew Draper has won the Scottish regional prize in the National Open Art Competition organised by the Chichester Art Trust. Short-listed and winning entries were exhibited at the Minerva Theatre and Pallant House Gallery in Chichester before Christmas, and some will be on show at the Works on Paper Fair in London in February.

This is a major achievement for the English-born artist, now settled in Edinburgh, who was elected to Membership of the Pastel Society in 2011. It reflects the fact he has developed his own way of working with the medium, making his large-scale landscape paintings immediately recognisable. At the same time, his work continues to develop as he explores new subjects and new ways of expressing his vision.

Matthew first began to use pastel while a student at Falmouth College of Art, as a means of adding colour to his charcoal landscapes. Initially, his outdoor studies were of the local harbour, but he later became fascinated by the stormy conditions encountered on the Cornish coast.

The weather has continued to be a major feature of his paintings since his move to Scotland. It was his interpretation of a misty night in Edinburgh, *Electric Light* (above) – one of an extended series – that led to his recent success in the National Open Art Competition. But lashing rain, fast-moving clouds, and elusive sunshine have figured regularly in his portrayals of the Bass Rock and, more recently, the Highlands and Islands.

He sees his work as being in a direct, historical line from the paintings of classical romantic landscape painters such as J.M.W. Turner, the German Casper David Frederick, and Americans such as Sanford Robinson Gifford and Frederic Edwin Church. He shares their awe at the grandeur of the scenery, and the importance they gave to light and atmosphere.

At the same time, he emphasises that his is a 21st century interpretation of the genre. He wants viewers to recognize landmarks in his paintings, but is not making illustrations of the locations he selects. He also seeks to avoid the 'tweeness' associated with some of the historic romantic schools.

Electric light 2, Matthew's successful entry in the National Open Art Competition



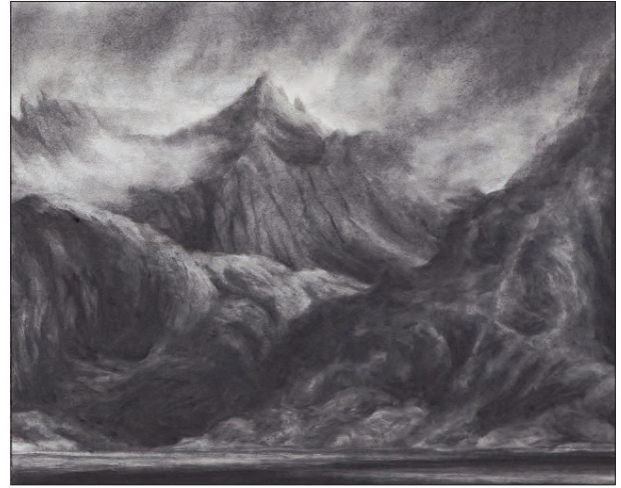
In fact, Matthew's key aim is to convey what it felt like to stand on that particular spot at that moment on that day. He wants the people who view his paintings to feel the wind and spray.

This ambition underpins the way he works, from identifying his subjects right through to framing the finished paintings – he's one of a small but growing number of pastel artists using anti-reflective glass because he wants the viewer's experience to be as close as possible to his own, looking at the painting on his studio wall.

To capture the atmospheric conditions he portrays calls for a lot of soft edges in his paintings. As he builds the pastel layers, he smudges a lot, using his thumb, the heel of his hand, even his forearm. It's a very active process: after making a mark he retreats several paces to view the effect, then rushes forward to make an adjustment.

Researching a theme, he pays repeated visits to a location, absorbing the different effects of the weather, sketching what he sees and feeding his visual memory. In turn, this often leads to a series of paintings, reflecting the different conditions he has encountered.

For example, he has an ambition to identify some of the views painted by his artistic heroes, aiming to portray his own reaction experiencing



the same locations. So far, he has made several visits to the remote Loch Courisk among the Black Cuillin mountains on the Isle of Skye, which was the inspiration for several of Turner's paintings. Although he has made a number of paintings in the area, Matthew admits he has been distracted so far from his aim of identifying Turner's viewpoint by the vista presented in nearby Loch Scavaig.

"I realised I had a few different challenges to overcome," he says. "Firstly, I would be making images in a different proportion to my usual panoramic style, because I wanted to make the work descriptive of the height of the mountains and would therefore only use a section of the ridge before me. Secondly, I knew I would have to use my materials differently, with more hard edges than I am accustomed to.

"To start the process, I made some small charcoal drawings to explore both the composition and the mark-making process. Through drawing, I learned a lot about the subject. I also felt they were successful pieces in their own right. I decided to make a series of large charcoal drawings, which I will exhibit as finished works (see cover and diptych above).

"These large charcoal drawings are a departure for me, but have led on to new works in pastel."

President's Letter

A very Happy New Year to all Members and Friends.

I would like to begin this letter by thanking Caran d'Ache for agreeing to sponsor the Pastel Society for the second year running. They have been very supportive of the Society and we will continue to give them our support in the coming year. The Pastel Society greatly values the Sponsorship of Caran d'Ache and, indeed, the support of all the Award donors. We promise to work hard and give our best value in return.

Behind the scenes the Council has already started to plan for 2014 – and the big event, of course, is the annual exhibition at the Mall Galleries. It opens with the Private View on Monday, 9 June, and closes on Saturday, 21 June.

The Caran d'Ache Workshop tutored by Roger Dellar, winner of last year's Sponsor's Award, will run on Thursday, 19 June. Ann Wilkinson, Felicity House, John Tookey, Sue Relph, Victor Ambrus, Glenys Ambrus, and Jenny Halstead will also run workshops during the exhibition. A special extra is a Master Class with Jason Bowyer. Jason will give a short talk about his experiences as a War Artist in Afghanistan before running his workshop 'Pastel Alchemy'. Jason will also be displaying some of his sketch books from Afghanistan in one of the glass topped cabinets in the North Gallery.

All Workshops during the exhibition will take place in the Mall Galleries' new Learning Centre. This exciting venue is inspiring both visually and practically. It will add greatly to each of the Pastel Society workshops. The Workshop schedule for June 2014 is complete and can be viewed on our website, www.thepastelsociety.org.uk, from which application forms can be down-loaded.

The Art Event Evening will take place on Thursday, 19 June, from 6pm until 9pm. We will be publishing a list of Members who will be there during the evening, working with Friends and Non Members. Exhibiting Non-Members will be invited for the first time in 2014, and it is hoped that this will be a vibrant and attractive evening. Drinks and snacks will be available from the Mall Galleries café and there will be live music to help you relax and cre-

ate. We hope both Friends and Members will support the Art Event - just come along and watch and enjoy a glass of wine, you don't have to get all dirty working at an easel. This event is intended to be fun for everyone.

It is always hard to think of the warmth of summer when it is winter cold, but the Council has done just that. For the 2014 exhibition, it has been decided to fill the furthestmost North Gallery with flowers. This part of the Mall Galleries will display small paintings all themed on 'Plants and Flowers'. The Sealed Bid paintings which were previously hung in the end North Gallery will now be displayed on the wall opposite the café, leading towards the cloakroom. Sealed Bid works by Members are an ideal opportunity to purchase a small painting at a greatly reduced price. This initiative also raises valuable funds for the Society. We rely on your support. There are also plans this year to show the Sealed Bids paintings on the website to attract as much interest as possible.

Which brings me to the Pastel Society website and the individual Members' Pages. The support for these is growing, and I wish to thank all of you who have taken the time to send images and a CV to me and the necessary cheque to Colin, our new Treasurer. The more Members' Pages we can display on the website, the more interest we generate in the Society and of course in the work of every individual Member. We are living in a digital world: for some of us this has been a difficult journey, but the world won't wait for us, it will just leave us behind.

Also new for the Society will be a 2015 Pastel Society calendar. This will be on sale during the 2014 exhibition and will be available for the rest of the year. Although this calendar will begin life a little early for 2015, please take the opportunity to purchase one during the exhibition. This is a fund raising project for the Society. It will also solve a Christmas present or two before December comes round once again.

On that note I wish you all a Happy New Year, and a very successful one.

Cheryl Culver

Entering works for the 2014 Pastel Society exhibition

With the aim of encouraging artists living in more distant parts of the UK, and abroad, and also young artists, the societies based at the Mall Galleries, including the Pastel Society, now operate a two-stage submission process for their open exhibitions. It is now possible to enter works online in a pre-submission stage.

Just how successful this innovation has been can be judged from the fact that the total number of entries to last year's pastel exhibition was up by 70% on 2012, with three-quarters of submissions received digitally.

The online submission process has already started for the Pastel Society's 2014 annual exhibition, and continues until midday on Thursday, 20 March. Acceptance at this stage does not guarantee final

selection – it will still be necessary to produce the physical paintings for the jurors. Rejection at the pre-submission stage, however, saves on expensive transport costs. Notification of the results of this stage will be posted on the Mall Galleries website on Thursday, 27 March.

The receiving days for final selection are Friday and Saturday, 11-12 April. Again, the results will be notified on the Mall Galleries' website.

The Pastel Society takes pride in championing all dry media. Acceptable materials include pastels, oil pastels, charcoal, pencil, Conté, and sanguine.

Full details of the entry process, including entry fees, and commission on sales can be found at www.mallgalleries.org.uk.

Officers and Council

President	Cheryl Culver RBA
Vice President	Jeannette Hayes
Honorary Treasurer	Colin Murfet
Honorary Secretary	Jenny Halstead FMAA
Exhibition Secretary	Peter Vincent
Membership Secretary	Roger Dellar RI ROI
Publicity Secretary	Jeannette Hayes
Friends' Secretary	Ann Wilkinson
Trustee	Moira Huntly
	RWA RI RSMA PPPS

The Council Members are: Glenys Ambrus, Victor Ambrus RE ARCA, Matthew Draper, Bob Last, Brian Gallagher, Brian Plummer, Susan Relph ASGFA, John Ivor Stewart ADAE FSBA, Antony Williams RP NEAC, Roy Wright

Key Contacts

The Friends Secretary is Ann Wilkinson (tel. 01737 764271)

Contributions to the Newsletter should be sent to the editor, Ken Gofton, 30 St Bernards Road, Tonbridge, Kent TN10 3NL, telephone 01732 364272.

Email: ken.gofton@dsl.pipex.com

Bookings for all Pastel Society workshops are handled by Norma Stephenson, Jack Beck House, Keasden, Clapham via Lancaster LA2 8EY (tel 01524 251670, email norma.stephenson@btinternet.com)

Friends of the Pastel Society

The Pastel Society is delighted to welcome the following new Friends: Colin and Betty Murfit, Elizabeth Carey, Pam Stevens, Ruth Weeden, Norman Robertson.

Plans are in hand for visits to the studios of Sue Relph and Roger Dellar during 2014. Also, there will be a Painting Day in the new and spacious education rooms at the Mall Galleries, which will also be used for the workshops programme during the annual exhibition.

Alchemy!

Jason Bowyer, the well-known Member of the Pastel Society, and Past President of the New English Art Club, has produced a DVD, *Pastel Alchemy*, about his approach to painting with pastels. The title is well-chosen, as Jason has developed some unusual techniques, often rubbing pastel into wet Indian ink.

Editing of the DVD was being completed as the Newsletter was going to press. It will be on sale in the Mall Galleries shop soon. For further information, keep an eye on the Pastel Society website.

Artists' General Benevolent Institution

John Tookey is the Pastel Society steward for the Artists' General Benevolent Institution. He can be contacted at 46 Ross Close, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 4AY.

Pastels as a modern medium

By Angela A'Court PS

As a contemporary artist who paints in soft pastel, I often find myself having to validate my choice of medium - or at least explain that my work IS contemporary.

Last October I was in Budapest at the invitation of Unison Pastels to give a talk about Pastels as a Modern Medium and help judge a competition held at Brody House Studios. A month before the exhibition, the artists were each given a box of Unison Pastels, and the theme of 'The Dance of Colour' to work with as inspiration.

The most interesting work was produced by artists from different disciplines who had not used pastel before. This seemed to give them a lateral approach and edge. Originally we were to choose one winner, but couldn't decide between two artists:

- Peter Matyasi, who had crushed pigment onto tracing paper and then used a sharpened eraser to 'draw' an architectural abstract. This was framed between Perspex and lit from behind. I liked that he'd used the unusual surface of tracing paper to work on, and that he'd worked in a subtractive way.
- Tets Ohnari, who is a sculptor. His innovative piece was more about celebrating pastel for pastel's sake. It was both powerful and playful and resonated with me, as well as being a reminder of why pastels are so relevant to today.

Fundamentally, both winners were about the aesthetics and properties of pastel, namely colour, physicality and immediacy.

Colour: Pastel enables us to work with colour in its purest, original, organic form. Colour is spiritual - it is emotional intensity. It influences how we feel, lifts, calms and seduces us.

Physicality: With pastel, we are holding a stick of pure pigment in our hand - there is no intermediating catalyst of a paintbrush or pen - just colour that is applied directly to the work surface. There is an energy required to paint with pastel - it's physically hard work - but there is also an alchemy, an instinctive physical and emotional science of adding, layering, scratching and pausing to observe...a process of transformation.

Immediacy: With no waiting for paint to dry there is a direct connection - working in pastel is ongoing and

immediate - we make a mark and work into it straight away.

It's this last aesthetic of Immediacy that I believe is the key to moving pastels forward as a contemporary medium. Life today is immediate - we live in an instantaneous world of texts, Facebook, blogs and tweets. We take a photo and share it the next moment with our friends - it's direct and instant.

So here's a question for you. If you were to think of a pastel artist, who would it be? Many have sought a high level of technical skill and expertise in achieving photographic realism, which is no mean feat. In the 15th century we have Leonardo da Vinci and in the 18th century pastel portrait artists who were the height of fashion and artistic merit. Next up, the Impressionists - and this is where I feel pastels have tended to source their current comfort zone of traditional, representational imagery.

But looking back further over the sweep of pastel history, pigment was being used in cave paintings over 30,000 years ago. A red handprint in the Chauvet Caves in France encompassed our three primary aesthetics - colour, a physical presence and the sense of immediacy.

Back at the exhibition in Budapest, we were also privileged to have two pieces by the late John Hersey, co-founder of Unison pastels. John was a master of colour and texture and was concerned with exploration and fundamentals of pastel. Other artists working with a similar approach are Wolf Kahn, Mark Rothko, Sean Scully, and Cy Twombly.

At the Tate Britain, as reported in Newsletter 24, David Tremlett recently unveiled 'Drawing for Free Thinking' a magnificent pastel mural surrounding the stair well. The piece is obviously very physical in its architectural presence but also draws from the depth, texture and pure pigment of pastel.

In conclusion, although pastels are an ancient medium they are a very relevant for today. Perhaps we are on the brink of a new pastel renaissance. Next time you take up a pastel, I encourage you to pause for a moment, experiment, play a little, push boundaries, but ultimately think about the aesthetics of pastel - pure pigment, physicality and immediacy. Let's keep it contemporary!



Breaking new ground: winning constructions by Peter Matyasi (above) and Tets Ohnari (below), from the Budapest pastels competition. Angela A'Court (right) in her studio.



News round-up

Pastel Society President Cheryl Culver visited the home of pastel manufacturer Unison Colour, set in the Northumbria National Park, on Monday, 25 November. She was made very welcome by owner Kate Hersey and her son Dan. The British company was founded by the late John Hersey, a pastel artist, and produces its distinctively-shaped, hand-made pastels in a wide range of colours.

Patricia Cain PS, whose large-scale paintings of construction sites have made a big impact at recent Pastel Society exhibitions, has been elected to the Royal Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts.

A new, in-depth biography of veteran portrait artist Ken Paine, written by his partner, Penelope Lee and entitled *Ken Paine – Nowhere to Hide*, will be published early in the New Year, price £25 (ISBN 978-0-9928072-0-7). The Mall Galleries will be stocking the book from February. The hardback book, of 160 pages, will include 50 colour illustrations of his work and some 20 photographs. Ken's portraits, often on a large scale, are always dramatic, and he has been a popular tutor at Pastel Society workshops over the years.

The Rebecca Hossack Gallery will be showing work by Roy Wright at Art 14, Olympic Grand Hall, London, from 28 February to 2 March, as well as at the Hong Kong Affordable Art Fair, 21-23 March, the Affordable Art Fair New York, 3-6 April, and the 20/21 International Art Fair at the Royal College of Art, London, from 15-18 May. Roy's work will also feature in the gallery's spring show at its Mott Street, New York, branch in May and June.

Messum's Gallery, in Cork Street, London, held a retrospective exhibition from 27 November to 24 December, to celebrate the life of Zsuzsi Roboz PS, who died in 2012. Zsuzsi fled to the West from her native Hungary at the time of the 1956 uprising. Having trained with Pietro Annigoni, she was best known for her portraits of literary and theatrical figures, but she also enjoyed creating dream-like and surreal paintings.

Looking well ahead, John Tookey PS will be leading a pastel workshop at the Flatford Mill Field Centre (tel 0845 330 7368), 3-5 October, 2014.



Christmas lunch

The 2013 Christmas lunch was again held at the Chesterfield Hotel in London's West End. The meal was excellent and the service was good natured and professional. Sadly some Members were unable to attend due to illness, but it is hoped to see as many as possible next December.

Identifiable at the near table are (left side) Bob Last, Roy Wright, Ken Gofton and Cheryl Culver, and (right side) Moira Huntly, Jenny Halstead and Peter Vincent.



Don't forget to visit our website at www.thepastelsociety.org.uk