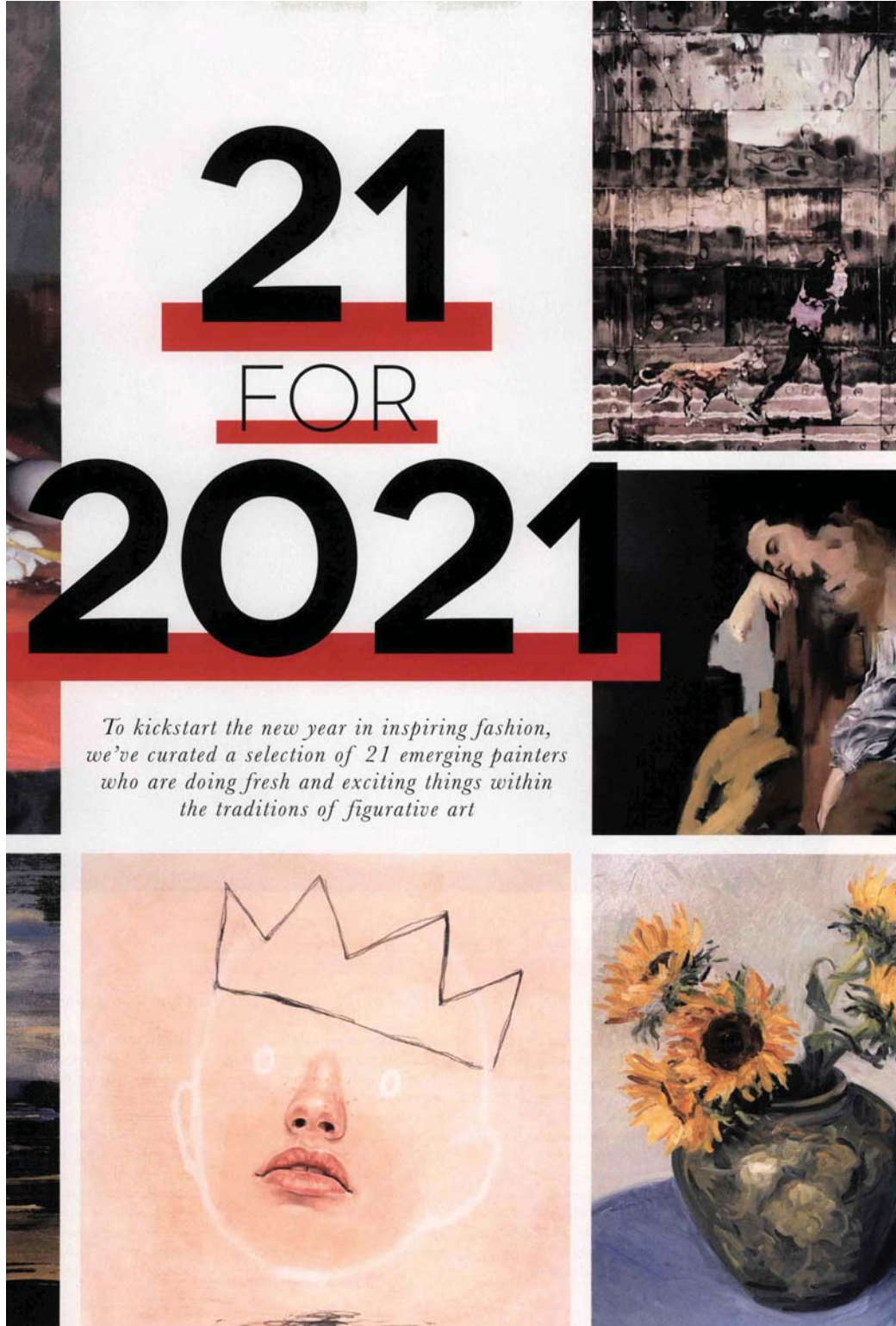
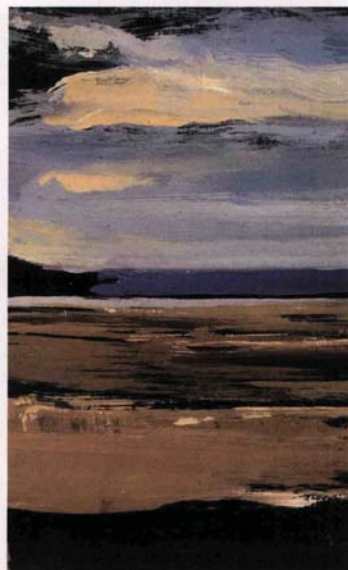


21 FOR 2021

*To kickstart the new year in inspiring fashion,
we've curated a selection of 21 emerging painters
who are doing fresh and exciting things within
the traditions of figurative art*







1 VALERIA DUCA

This globe-trotting 25-year-old painter is set to build on her first London solo show

ABOVE Valeria Duca, *A Hundred Days of Happiness*, oil on canvas, 89x81cm

OPPOSITE Valeria Duca, *Blueberries*, oil on panel, 56x51cm

There are countless artistic responses to the global pandemic being crafted as we enter, at time of writing, a second national lockdown in England. Yet there are perhaps none that tread the delicate line between the personal and the universal as imaginatively or humorously as Valeria Duca's latest body of work. In a series of figurative oil-on-canvas works, the 25-year-old painter positions herself in various scenarios that veer between comedy

and tragedy, dreamy and direct, sensuality and resignation. In doing so, she captures something of the restless energy felt by many during the extended lockdown. We see Valeria's painted alter-ego gorging on confectionery, throwing shapes in front of a mirror or curled up in a ball in a doorway as she is surrounded, rather surreally, by flowers. In *Friday Evening*, she appears simply overwhelmed, lying on the floor with a pillow over her face and surrounded

by new clothes with the tags still on them, as a cat looks on, more intent on finishing dinner than curing her owner's woes.

The works were compiled in Valeria's recent solo exhibition at London's Panter & Hall, *It's the End of the World*, which followed on from a successful turn in the gallery's 2019 group exhibition *Nine New Painters*. The artist had begun the works last spring, while she was living in Oslo with her husband Martin and the

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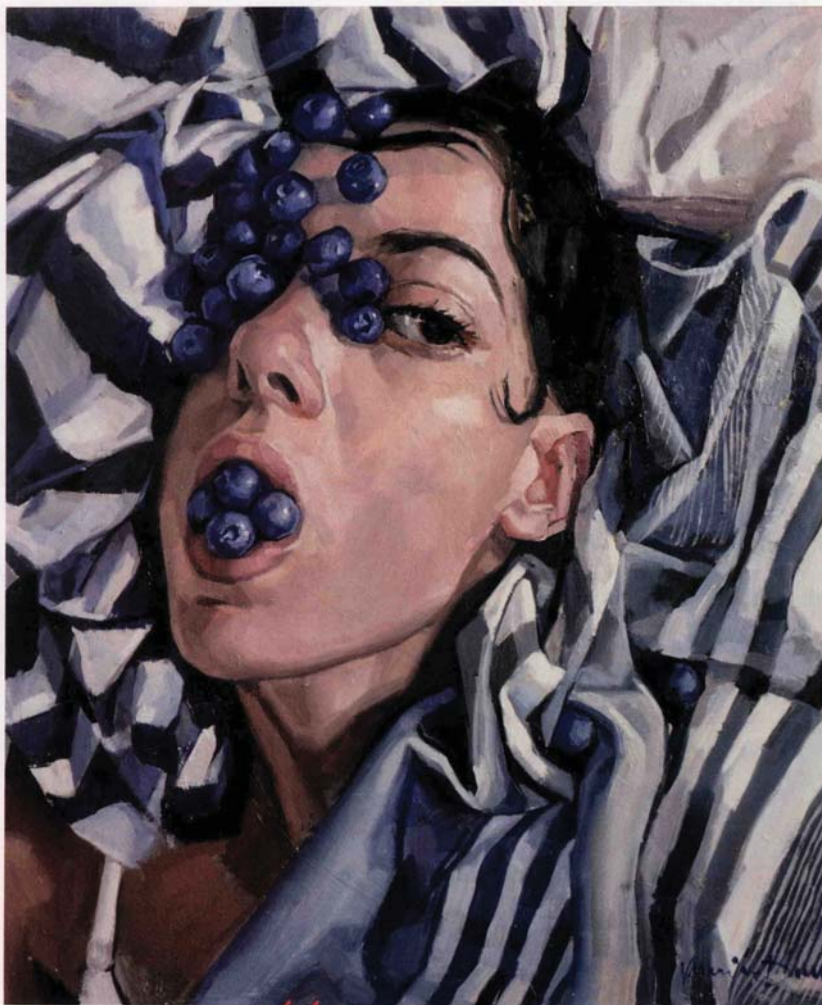
pandemic was beginning to take hold. "Early on I understood that I must use myself as the model, because we were reluctant to see any friends," she explains. "The most interaction we allowed ourselves in the first two months of the lockdown was waving to people from our balconies. In this setting, I was forced, like everyone else, to look inwards and reflect on my own feelings."

"I would say that the global lockdown exacerbated a feeling of loneliness, chaos and imminent catastrophe in everyone. I could relate to this feeling I previously knew as depression, and it gave me an impulse to talk about it. Although global lockdown did not mean a global diagnosis of depression, it made people more inclined to understand and relate to it."

One of the works in which this connection is most explicit is *A Hundred Days of Happiness* in which empty blister packs, perhaps once containing antidepressants, are arranged in a heart shape around the artist's face. "That was one of those few paintings where the process is very straightforward: an idea appears, I write it down; some time later an image appears in my head - I sketch it; once I have the sketch, I stage it and ask my husband to photograph it; finally, I choose the right composition and paint it. This happens very rarely, and I really love the simplicity of the process, because there is no room for doubt."

The majority of Valeria's works develop more organically, as a composition emerges from a combination of photographs and sketches, though she admits the outcome is often "less satisfying because randomness undermines, to some degree, the idea of intention".

Given her purposeful upbringing, it is perhaps no surprise that the artist shies away from leaving things to chance. Valeria was born in Moldova's second city, Balti, in 1995 and grew up in the capital, Chisinau. She was a determined child, becoming a black



“
DURING THE FIRST TWO MONTHS
OF THE LOCKDOWN, I WAS
FORCED TO LOOK INWARDS AND
REFLECT ON MY OWN FEELINGS
”

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CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE All Valeria Duca, *Friday Evening*, oil on canvas, 89x81cm; *Self-Portrait as a Vase*, oil on panel, 56x56cm; *Lethargic*, oil on canvas, 89x99cm

belt 3rd Dan in taekwondo, while also staging her first exhibition of paintings at the age of 12. Though not an artist himself, her father proved particularly supportive of his daughter's talents, so much so that he arranged for Valeria to exhibit at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011. It was also the first time Moldova had been represented at the prestigious international exhibition. "I was 15 at the time and I don't think that I truly grasped the magnitude of the event. My father, who applied with the help of a friend, told me that I got accepted. He then found sponsors and a gallery to rent

near San Marco, and managed the printing of the catalogue and promotional materials."

"At the time, my father was just completely obsessed with my art and it became his whole life," she continues. "I still cannot believe he did it, but it is due to him that I exhibited there. I was just a teenager who loved to paint and had this exciting exhibition to look forward to. I remember painting daily, even on New Year's Eve of that year."

The following September, Valeria moved to the UK to study at Cornwall's Truro School for a year.

An award from the Moldovan government followed and it seemed as if the world was at the young artist's feet. However, unable to afford to study in Florence and unwilling to live in Russia, she decided instead to put her practical training on hold and study art history at the University of St Andrews. "I wasn't fully convinced at 18 that I wanted to pursue a career as a painter," she reasons now. "Although I always loved art, my father's obsession with it was overwhelming; it made me question whether I wholeheartedly wanted to pursue this path. I needed distance

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to be able to decide on my own."

Such a single-minded decision perhaps proved the making of her. Valeria met her future husband during her time at St Andrews and, although she continued to paint, she also used the time to fully immerse herself in classical traditions. Dr Stephanie O'Rourke's module on Romanticism and Visuality in particular left an impression on the artist, while introducing her to the work of Caspar David Friedrich. "In the same image he would simultaneously evoke infinite possibility and an understanding of human limitation. His landscapes are instantly inspiring and apocalyptic, and although I do not paint landscapes, I try to adopt in my paintings this duality that he so beautifully depicted as a whole."

As she completed the works for *It's the End of the World*, Valeria briefly moved to Washington DC to follow her husband's diplomatic career before she returned to Oslo to complete a month-long residency at the Galleri Ramfjord. It is her third such residency here, this one with a view to developing work for a solo exhibition with the gallery next October.

For an artist who has moved on so regularly, coming back to a familiar setting acts as a rare means of marking the passage of time and the progress she has made.

"I always unlock something new," she says of the experience. "Right now, for example, I am working on the biggest canvas I have painted so far, a monster of 120x160cm. Gabriel [Schmitz, a fellow resident artist] is helping me keep it loose, at my request, and reminds me of the wholeness of the image. As someone who prefers smaller formats, it is a challenge to go big, to spend the entire day on my feet and not get lost in fragments of the painting."

Though many of the paintings are still taking shape, one thing that appears certain so far is that there will be less of an inward-looking focus to Valeria's next body of work. "There are 16 self-portraits in the exhibition and I think it's fair to acknowledge that it's a self-indulgent period that will hopefully stay in 2020," she says. Wherever her brush takes her, we can't wait to follow.

www.valeriaduca.com





2 TAEDONG LEE

This Camberwell graduate has developed a vivid emotional language to describe the world

Rather than simply painting the view, Korean artist Taedong Lee prefers to properly immerse himself in a landscape. He makes drawings, takes photos, records video footage or sounds, and even writes a diary. "All my works are based on real places and emotional experience," he explains. "I am affected by concept of Eastern painting which presents personal view of landscape and seek spiritual relaxation through inner essence."

Back in his studio, he revisits the source material, yet still prefers to draw real landscapes from a patchwork of memories. "For example, *Green Waterfall* is Jeongbang waterfall on Jeju Island in Korea," he says. "It describes a sense of

happiness but little bit nervousness at the same time."

He varies the colours and paint application to mirror his response to the location and create what he calls an "emotion-interpreted space" on the canvas. Paint drips suggest "a sense of depression" while colour harmonies describe emotions in an almost synaesthetic way, with deep blue, bright orange and red indicative of negative feelings. It's a vivid language of painting developed during a recent MA at Camberwell College of Arts, part of University Arts London (UAL). "In Korea, the results are more important, but at UAL it seems that the process is significant," he says.

Follow Taedong on Instagram
[@taedong_lee1028](https://www.instagram.com/taedong_lee1028)

3 JACOB LITTLEJOHN

A thoughtful investigation into human behaviour inspires this Edinburgh painter

Jacob Littlejohn's website claims that his practice "explores the realm of human behaviour", though that may not be immediately obvious from his colourful abstract paintings. Nevertheless, the writings of sociologist Erving Goffman and Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* are just two of the inspirations for this thoughtful Glasgow School of Art graduate to investigate the way people interact with the world around them. "This has in turn inspired me to create visual motifs that I feel best replicate these ideas and dramatise them within the physical act of painting, most commonly through the act of layering and developing work over periods of time," he says.

His untitled works are split between smaller gouache pieces and larger canvases that incorporate oil bars, charcoal and coloured pencil alongside student-grade oils. "I'm a firm believer great works of art can be achieved with an abundance of media with differing qualities. I also feel that at the stage of my career making the jump to relying on greater quality paint could hinder my levels of production and confidence to take risks while experimenting."

Having completed a graduate residency at Leith School of Art and staged an online-only exhibition at Edinburgh's [Arusha Gallery](https://www.arusha.com) last May, Jacob is unsure what the future holds aside from a possible MFA in San Francisco and a commitment to exhibiting more. "I really do miss showing work I've spent a lot of time upon in a gallery context."

www.jacoblittlejohn.format.com



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4 JAMES HAYES

Lockdown forced a genre shift for the Florence-schooled oil painter

James Hayes only intended to study at Italy's famous Charles H Cecil Studios for a couple of months but he eventually stayed for five years. Like many fellow graduates, James returned to England and plied his trade as portrait painter for hire. This all came to a halt during lockdown because, as the artist notes drily, "having one's portrait painted slipped right down the list of 'essential' activities."

Working out of the beautiful, grade II listed St Paul's Studios in West London, James wasn't about to stay idle for long: "I'm obsessive and I couldn't do nothing. Flowers, with their infinite beauty, seemed the ideal non-confrontational subject."

James hopes the steady stream of sitters will return but, in the meantime, we're excited to see what further still life delights emerge from his studio.

www.jameshayes.co.uk



5 JUNWEI DAI

Though a qualified architect, this Chinese artist is set to make a big splash in watercolour

As a qualified architect, it is no surprise that Junwei Dai is comfortable with shifting elements of the landscape around. When he sketches on location, often in watercolour, he will "reorganise" a building or view on his page to suit his composition. "This re-organising is based on how I understand and interpret the *qi* element of the scenery I am trying to depict," he explains, referring to the Chinese concept of an essential life force.

Capturing that *qi* is key to elevating his paintings above mere record. "To me every building, every landscape is full of vitality. I can sense their unique character: some may be solemn, others may be affectionate, and so on."

After completing his postgraduate studies in landscape architecture at the National University of Singapore in 2018, Junwei has been content to balance that career with his artistic ambitions. Having already become a signature member of America's National Watercolour Society, he hopes to be accepted into the UK's own Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colour in 2021. His latest paintings experiment with distortions caused by reflections and raindrops, while his key influences include Peter Doig, David Hockney and Chinese master Wu Guanzhong: "He inspired me to combine east and west culture."

Follow Junwei on Instagram
[@daijunwei_watercolor](https://www.instagram.com/daijunwei_watercolor)



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6 HANNAH MOONEY

Luscious warm oils convey the Northern Irish artist's emotional connection to the landscape

Born in Ramelton, County Donegal in 1995, Hannah Mooney initially struggled when she swapped life on the Northern Irish coast for Glasgow Art School and the buzz of a big city: "I often felt out of my depth and found it difficult to create in an environment alien to me." A breakthrough came in her third year when she returned to the familiar shores of Lough Swilly.

Identifying with this powerful expanse of water and its transient skies, Hannah began to paint *en plein air* for the first time. "From feeling directionless and without voice, I suddenly had so much to say," she recalls.

Hannah graduated in 2017, capturing a host of prizes along the way, before settling back in Northern Ireland. Her interest in the landscape harks back to a childhood playing in the surrounding fields, dreaming of being a vet, and saving birds from the clutches of her cat. "Children see the beauty in everything and everyday offers a new discovery," she says with a wisdom beyond her years. "Their untarnished view of the world allows them to express it fearlessly, confidently and clearly. They create for themselves, which is what most creative practitioners yearn to do. Living in the countryside is the closest I can get back to this open minded and independent way of thinking."

Hannah's oil-on-board paintings drip with emotion and she is



particularly skilled at finding a lovely warmth in the most unforgiving of skies. "Most days are overcast here," she explains. "But sometimes the most sullen and subdued days commence in rich displays of apricot light and fiery sunsets. Perhaps I paint the times of day which move me emotionally, when I have been outside and fallen in love with a dusky pink sky or a fluffy cumulus cloud. Blue skies are like special gifts."

Days in the studio often end with a walk, which keeps the artist in tune with the shifting seasons and the fact that "we have no control over these changes". Far from being defeatist, she says that knowledge instead inspires her to try and share that love of the landscape with the viewer.

Hannah will follow her solo debut at Messums Wiltshire this December with a second exhibition at The Scottish Gallery in Edinburgh next year. "I wish to treat painting as lightly as possible," she says of her ambitions for 2021. "I would like to see the act of creating as an opportunity to learn, stay curious and engaged with my surroundings in Ireland. I will remind myself daily to observe first and then draw."

This is surely good advice for us all.
www.hannahmooney.co.uk



“
I WILL REMIND
MYSELF DAILY
TO OBSERVE
FIRST AND
THEN DRAW
”

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7 KIERON WILLIAMSON

This young Norfolk landscape painter is steeped in the traditions of Seago and Clausen

If it seems odd to be naming Kieron Williamson as “one to watch” given that he staged his first sell-out exhibition back in 2009, has published two books, and has more than a decade’s worth of exemplary paintings under his belt, you need only consider one factor: his age. The Norfolk artist only turned 18 this summer and that first display of paintings came at the ripe old age of six.

Kieron was clearly a remarkable painting prodigy. In fact, it is a mark of his rapid rise in that he talks as if he were a late developer, first drawing independently during a summer

holiday when he was “only” five years old, as if those previous years of potential had been wasted on simply colouring-in dinosaurs and playing in a sandpit.

Adept at colour mixing, Kieron began his artistic studies aged five, initially spending an hour a week painting alongside the artist Carol Pennington. Regular sessions in watercolour with Brian Ryder and pastel with Tony Garner followed. Soon Kieron was advertising that he was available for pet portrait commissions in the local paper. His grandma Gill kept his art supply

cupboard stocked, while his parents Keith and Michelle have also been supportive throughout, the latter noting that “praise, encouragement and enthusiasm are free and the key in allowing children to know what their strengths are”.

That first exhibition in Holt, arranged with Carol’s help, was apparently a sell out within 14 minutes. As word spread online, Kieron was soon able to start a mailing list filled with interested buyers from around the world. Yet while the interest in his early work can perhaps be attributed to the

ABOVE Kieron Williamson, *Golden Daybreak*, oil on canvas, 28x35cm

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novelty value of such a young talent, it is his continued success and dedication to his craft that leads to his appearance on this list. "I don't have a clear vision in my head of what I'd like my painting to end up looking like, I work it out as I go along and that keeps me interested and inspired by the process," he explains.

Kieron's mum Michelle admits that her son has got "quite an old head on young shoulders" and that is reflected in his artistic influences. One name that occurs in discussions about several of his recent works is Sir George Clausen, a founding member of the New English Art Club and professor of painting at the Royal Academy of Art, who died in 1944. The young artist first came across Clausen's work at auction and since related to it when he tackled similar rural and farming subjects. "Clausen's style changed throughout his life, but his use of paint from any period is what I like," says Kieron. "It's put down so thickly and just looking at the textures he achieves makes me want to paint right away."

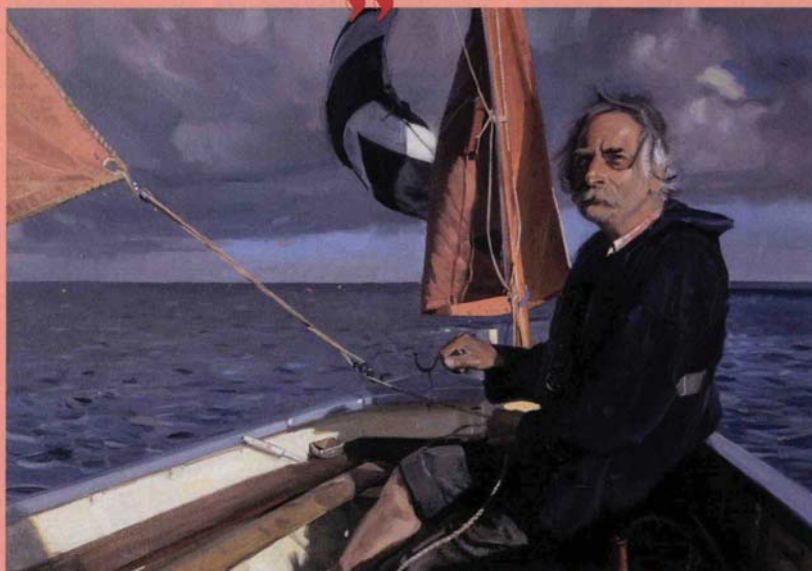
Another key inspiration is the 20th-century English landscape painter Edward Seago. In 2011, Kieron was introduced to Seago's former assistant, Van Zeller, who helped arrange a visit to the late painter's former studio at the Dutch House in Ludham.

"It meant so much to me to know that I was walking the same roads and field edges that Seago once did," he says today. "Seago's work has had a huge impact on me and I own several of his paintings." Not only that but during the same trip Kieron saw that the village's Old Post Office was for sale. He promptly bought his first house, aged nine, with the proceeds from his paintings.

Kieron's larger oil paintings regularly sell for five-figure sums and his latest body of work, available via The Gallery in Holt, includes a number of Cornish and Highland landscapes alongside plenty of depictions of rural life around his Norfolk home. "I'm always excited to see horses and cattle in the landscape, they appear to be the only constant thread at this moment in time when other aspects of life are so uncertain," he says. "I don't have any long-term goals or



IT MEANT SO MUCH TO ME TO KNOW THAT I WAS WALKING THE SAME ROADS AS SEAGO



things I want to do or achieve with my painting, only that I want to keep improving and evolving my style and see where it takes me."

Kieron is only just old enough to vote or drink alcohol, yet he has already achieved far more than many artists two or three times his age. Picasso once said that it took him

four years to paint like Raphael but a lifetime to paint like a child.

If Kieron can retain that youthful curiosity and simple unbridled love of making pictures as he embarks on adulthood, the sheer potential for where his brush will take him is quite staggering.

www.kieronwilliamson.com

ABOVE, FROM TOP
Kieron Williamson,
Hen Pecked, oil on
canvas, 35x51cm;
Kieron Williamson,
The Tobacco Tin,
oil on canvas,
30x46cm

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8 JACK FREEMAN

Academic training and intimate subject choices have led to award-winning portraits



“
I WANT TO MAKE MORE COLOURFUL WORK
TO REFLECT THE MOOD OF THE MOMENT
”

It is early in Jack Freeman's career to suggest he has already painted his masterpiece, but if he goes on to better *The Wheat-Thief* on a regular basis, he is likely to be at the forefront of British portraiture for many years to come. In the golden-hour light and rustic setting, there are shades of Andrew Wyeth to the artist's painting of his partner Patricia Ballesta Lara on Suffolk's Covehithe Beach.

Patricia is a neonatal nurse and Jack painted her in her scrubs for Tom Croft's Portraits for NHS Heroes project [see issue 419], yet there is added poignancy and intimacy to *The Wheat-Thief* [left], thanks to her love of the sea and the act of collecting grasses to decorate her room.

As well as being a deeply personal depiction, it was also a major step forward for the Cambridge-based artist in terms of the techniques employed too. "Having begun to develop my glazing methods, I wanted to try to make some more colourful work to reflect the mood of the moment, as the majority of my work before had been very grey and tonal. Painting an outdoor scene in this manner was also a particular challenge for me, because until then all of my landscape work has been made *alla prima*."

Jack graduated in fine art from Falmouth University, an experience he credits with introducing him to "a really diverse range of incredibly creative and engaging people" producing more conceptual work in contrast to his "more traditional and academic approach".

Nevertheless, it was a grounding in life drawing and atelier-style painting that saw him selected for the *BP Portrait Award 2018* and establish himself as a professional portrait painter for hire. Success at this year's Royal Society of Portrait Painters annual exhibition followed, an experience he hopes to repeat in 2021 on a larger canvas. "I am used to working small and I feel like going big is the next frontier for me," he says.

www.jackfreeman.co.uk



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9 GAYLE EBOSE

*Faith and storytelling
lend power to this
East London artist's
characterful portraits*

Despite her portraits being selected for Saatchi Gallery's *London Grads Now* exhibition back in September, it was the interactions Gayle Ebose had with her subjects – women from her central London church – that she counts as her highlight of 2020.

"I liked hearing their stories," she says. "The masters [in fine art painting] was a good opportunity for me to really research the best way of

storytelling through portraiture... And I was able to use the faith of these women to show they have their own individuality."

By portraying women with their own subjectivity, the Camberwell College of Arts graduate is deliberately making up for art history's failure to do so. Also key to Gayle's work is her ability to seek out "the mundane in the divine".

"It's when you see someone smile or laugh," she explains, "it's those glimmers of modern-day miracles, that we're able to survive and thrive through the suffering."

The result is a series of radiant, characterful portraits (Zanda, left) brought to life with bold, expressive acrylic marks interweaved with oil pastels, colour pencils and watercolour. Currently cooking up ideas for a new series of portraits, the East London-based artist is emerging as an important presence in contemporary portraiture.

Follow Gayle on Instagram @gayle.ebose

10 SALLY DUNNE

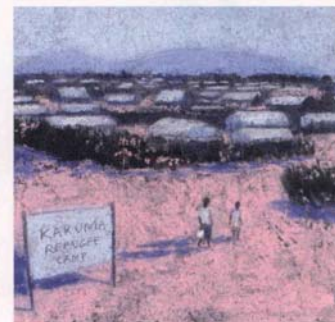
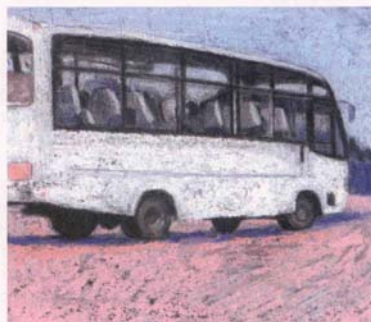
*The award-winning illustrator revels
in the textures of her chosen medium*

With Adobe Illustrator a commonplace tool for today's illustrators, one of the reasons Sally Dunne's portfolio stands out is her use of real materials. "Working with different textures is one of the most exciting aspects of creating an image," she says. "I really enjoy the unpredictable nature of the soft pastels I use, which are very sensitive to the slightest touch and lead to some exciting and unexpected results."

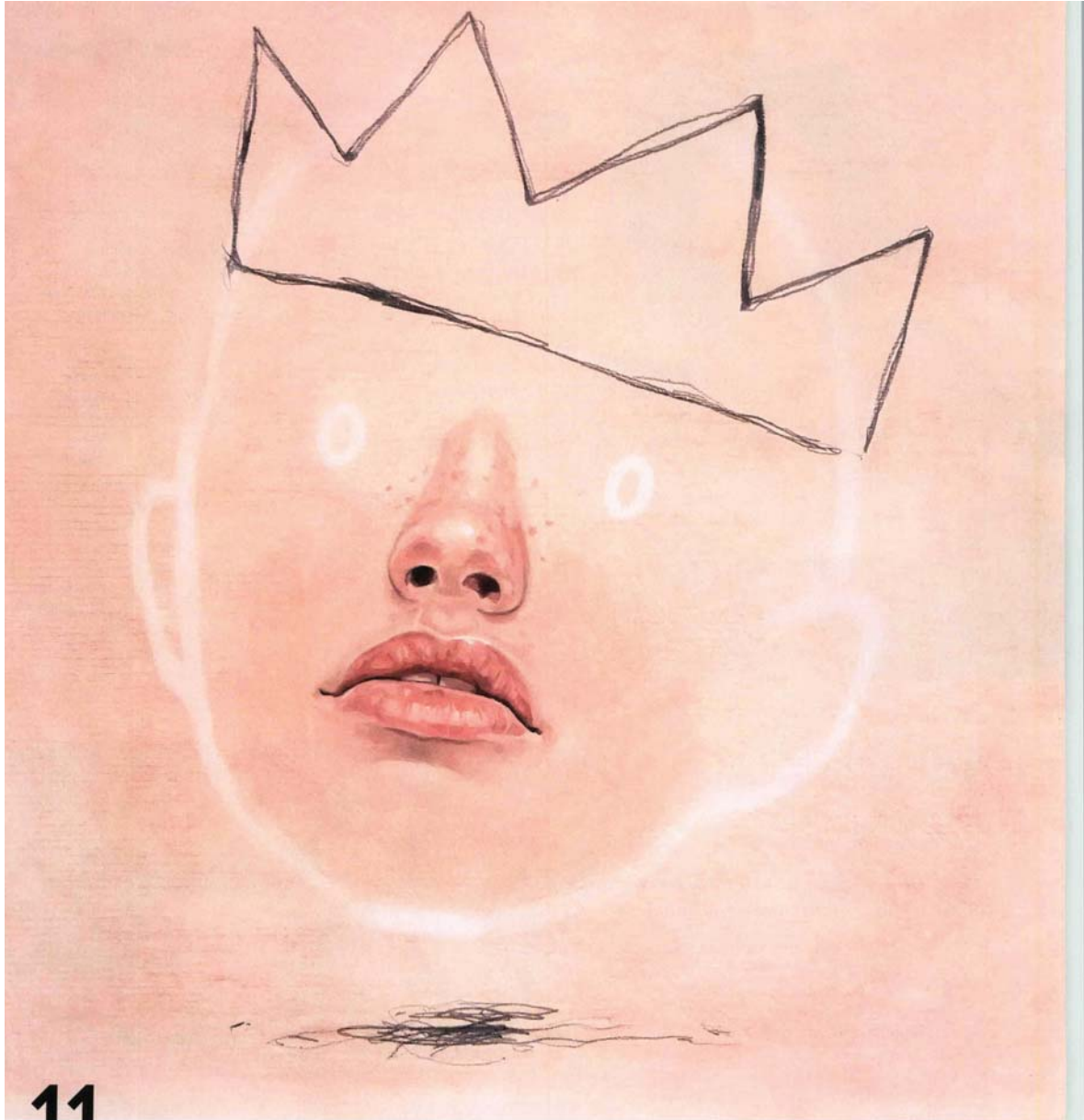
After graduating from the Cambridge School of Art with an MA in Children's Illustration this summer, Sally was named Student Illustrator of the Year at the *V&A Illustration Awards 2020* for her short graphic novel *Home in Kakuma Refugee Camp* [right]. "I am fascinated by stories and visual narratives that celebrate international cultures and explore universal themes that unite us all," she says.

Success at the awards led to Sally illustrating a novel due to be published in spring 2021. While details are still under wraps, we can't wait to see the results in all their textured glory.

www.sallyillustrates.com



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11 LUCY PASS

The Leamington Spa artist found new discipline in a huge portrait project

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If two heads are better than one, then the #100Heads projects that have been appearing on Instagram recently take that logic to an extreme. The hashtag reveals many portrait artists methodically posting 100 paintings as a way to encourage a little creative discipline while developing a social media following.

Back in February of this year, Lucy Pass had been impressed by other artists' efforts and so ordered herself

100 plywood panels, each measuring 23cm square. "I'd been feeling a bit stuck creatively so it seemed like a great excuse to play and free up my brain without thinking where it would fit into any particular body of work," she explains. "I was expecting to slowly work through the challenge over the course of a year or probably more, just as the mood took me."

That all changed with the unfortunate outbreak of Covid-19.

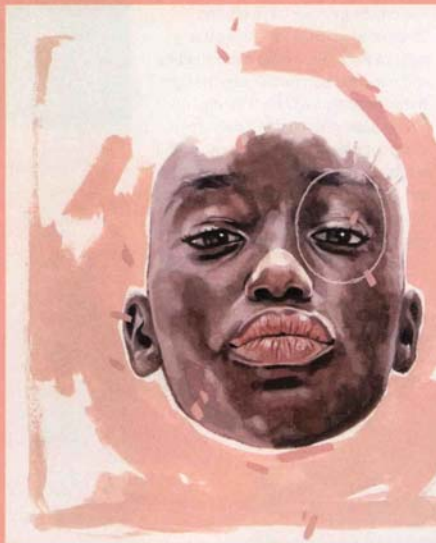


"When the UK went into lockdown in March, like so many others, any plans for the foreseeable went out of the window. Feeling a bit rudderless and in need of a big distraction I decided to throw myself into the *100 Heads*, painting a head daily with the intention of selling each one under the brilliant Artist Support Pledge. The enthusiasm and encouragement of my Instagram followers kept me feeling connected to the world and really spurred me on."

Although Lucy had already established a distinctive style that combines fragments of faces with simple graphic elements (her use of crowns, incidentally, was not inspired by Basquiat but rather Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*), *100 Heads* still proved challenging and somewhat experimental. For starters, she had only previously painted on canvas and so she initially found the texture of the panels rather unforgiving. "Once I'd found my feet, I realised that there was so much to explore in terms of mark making that just wouldn't work on canvas and the abstract side of my work started to develop quickly," she says. "The plywood surface allowed for frenzied pencil scribbles and scratches, razor sharp lines and edges."

The structure that the project provided during a difficult time had unexpected benefits too. "At the start, I had to push myself extremely hard to go into my studio each day and keep working," says Lucy. "I've always envied artists who paint every day, but always felt like that kind of intensive work wouldn't suit me and that I was more of a 'paint when inspiration strikes' kind of artist. It turns out I was completely wrong about that. This realisation and my new-found discipline have been huge upsides to lockdown."

Lucy's *100 Heads* project culminated on 17 September with a final painting that was auctioned off to raise money for the Choose Love: Help Refugees charity. It was a fitting end to a series that has been both an artistic and commercial success, as the full century of heads have now sold. She worked hard to ensure that the repetitive nature of the daily paintings didn't cause her to become formulaic in her approach too.



The decisions over which fragments of a face to include remains a very active part of a creative process that she prefers to feel her way through. "There's no clear formula for what to include and what to leave out, it's just a case of letting the painting speak back to me and waiting for the balance to feel right," she adds.

The Leamington Spa-based artist is currently expanding on ideas that emerged through her *100 Heads* experiments, including the Medusa-like effects produced by one long curling brushstroke. She hasn't ruled out attempting another similar project in 2021 either: "I get bored very easily, so there's always a chance..." www.lucy-pass.com

THIS PAGE,
CLOCKWISE FROM
TOP RIGHT Lucy
 Pass, *100 Heads*,
 numbers 50, 57,
 97, 95, 99 and
 94, oil on panel,
 23x23cm each

OPPOSITE PAGE Lucy
 Pass, *100 Heads*,
 number 37, oil on
 panel, 23x23cm

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12 ASHLEIGH TRIM *Glass houses have inspired this Cardiff painter's colourful semi-abstract work*

Falmouth graduate Ashleigh Trim's *Glass Houses* series of paintings is the perfect antidote for a cold winter. The oil and oil pastel works depict the sweltering heat and lush vegetation of conservatories and botanical gardens, via pulsing hues and unusual compositions. "I wanted to capture the vibrancy and warmth that visiting all of these places gave me and so the colour palettes of the work reflect that," she explains.

Though currently working as a chef and painting on her days off, the Cardiff-based artist is making the most of the many online opportunities and pop-up group exhibitions that the Welsh capital provides. "I do end up having gaps where I don't paint for a while but that's okay," she says. "I find in these times I'm gathering inspiration and ideas, and I am able to paint much more fluidly and subconsciously when I do get back into it."

www.ashleightrim.co.uk



Basking in Lemon yellow on canvas with 1 day for now

13 KATHERINE JACKSON

Soft, layered and intimate watercolours that have already scooped double awards

Shifting selection panels on the annual *Sunday Times Watercolour Competition* meant that none of this year's judges knew that they were awarding the Young Artist Prize to the recipient of last year's prize too. Katherine Jackson is only 22, yet this is quite the achievement for someone who began painting a decade ago after discovering a set of watercolours in the back of a cupboard.

Nevertheless, using dilute layers applied with a broad flat brush, she has already developed a distinctive style that is typified by the softness yet dynamic brushwork in *Martha Resting* (left), the portrait of her sister that scooped the 2020 Young Artist Prize. "I usually apply saturated

pigment when the painting is nearing completion and I can place the darkest tones with more accuracy," she explains. "It took me a while to become confident that I could use washes liberally to modify tone and colour without losing the information beneath; doing this has been useful in allowing me to deal with subtle gradations of tone and colour.

Katherine has just graduated with a BA in Drawing from Falmouth University, having particularly enjoyed the regular life classes there: "Each session was a challenge which helped me to develop."

For now, she is back home in the Quantock Hills and looking for her next award-winning subject.

www.kmjackson.uk



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14 JAYSON SINGH

Having built himself a studio, this portrait painter is taking his practice outdoors

There was a 13-year gap between Jayson Singh completing his BA at Central Saint Martins and beginning his portrait painting diploma at the Heatherley School of Fine Art in 2018. However, while he jokingly refers to the time as his "wilderness"

period, he still pursued his interest in painting throughout via a number of activities and projects.

"They've included an artist residency, community art projects and travel for research, all whilst working at my father's property maintenance and building company," he says.

That latter role has also given Jayson the training and knowledge he needed to help build himself a studio in Battersea, West London. Having his own space to paint has shifted the focus of his artistic practice, as the human figure has become more central to his work. Life classes were

“
ALTHOUGH I DON'T PRACTICE RELIGION,
I LIKE TO EXTRACT THE BEST OF MY SIKH
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”



ABOVE Jayson Singh, *The Fabric of the Man I am Today*, oil on canvas, 160x140cm

TOP LEFT Jayson Singh, *Extracting the Goodness of My Roots*, oil on canvas, 90x70cm

largely absent from his degree, so he decided to enrol on the diploma as a means of improving his skills and confidence. "Right now, I guess I feel more equipped to project my ideas onto the painted figure," he says.

Another of Jayson's side projects in recent years has included a number of workshops and murals based around traditional Rangoli patterns, which in turn has encouraged the artist to improvise with colour in his portraits. "Whenever I paint a portrait, I do aim to achieve a likeness, but I

also like another opportunity to reflect my personality that softens the edges of intense observation. A pattern in a background may also trigger a narrative that helps form the concept of a painting."

"In my self-portrait, *Extracting the Goodness of my Roots*, for example, the repeated patterned motif of the hummingbird extracting nectar, was very fitting for the ideas I was exploring," he adds. "On the surface, the motif is a visual pun, but it also references the roots of my inherited

Sikh heritage based in Malaysia, since the bunga-raya flower is the country's national emblem. In the portrait, I'm seen holding a brush just about to paint while wearing an unravelled turban. It's a way of visually describing that, although I don't practice the religion, I like to extract the best of my heritage through the medium of paint."

Extracting the Goodness of my Roots is a bold, daring and playful portrait. All corners of the colour palette are utilised, yet the clever symbolism means that the focus is never lost. The lines between the sitter and the backdrop are also blurred as the unravelling blue turban seemingly melds into the birds of the pattern. It is suggestive of Jayson's newfound confidence taking flight, something that is underlined by the gentle yet assured look on his face.

The self-portrait is proving a fantastic calling card for this second stage of Jayson's career. Not only was it selected for the recent Royal Society of Portrait Painters annual exhibition at London's Mall Galleries, rubbing painted shoulders with some of the UK's leading talents in this field, but it also appeared on our screens as Jayson was a contestant in the third episode of the recent *Sky Arts Portrait Artist of the Year* series. Though his chances of progressing weren't aided by the rather drab setting provided for his sitter, the *Chicago Fire* actor Eamonn Walker ("I guess I realised the large extent to which I rely on the environment in my portrait compositions to date," Jayson says diplomatically), it was a further indication that his talents are finally being recognised.

With his diploma completed, Jayson intends to continue working on self-portraits that rely heavily on personal stories and complex patterns, while also taking on more regular portrait commissions as much as the current Covid-19 restrictions will allow him. "With the challenge of the pandemic, my plans might need to be adapted in terms of finding ways to lessen the distance brought about by interface technology as a substitute towards painting from life," he says. "Perhaps *plein air* portraits might be the new artistic practice of 2021?"

Follow Jayson on Instagram @jayson Singh

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15 ELEANOR WATSON

Haunting watercolour interiors inspired by lockdown and childhood dollhouses

Eleanor Watson's fascination with interiors can be traced back to her childhood love of dollhouses. It is a subject that has dominated the 30-year-old's work since graduating from the Wimbledon College of Art in 2012, but what began as a desire to portray the domesticity of museum houses – cue rich oil paintings of grandiose settings – has shifted to cosier interiors in a more abstract style, as well as recent experiments with watercolour. "I've spent a lot of time thinking about home and the everyday domestic living space," Eleanor explains. "But also, it's my own personal loss... My work has become less analytic and more involved."

It's not the first time the London-based artist has proved her versatility. In 2019, she was awarded the Slaughterhaus Print Prize and the ACS Studio Prize for *Indoor Silences. Distance Noise.*, a monoprint she created for her masters, which will be replicated as a limited-edition wallpaper next year. After a group show in January, Eleanor is excited to see where her abstract work in watercolour takes her – as are we.

www.eleanormaywatson.co.uk



16 MARIAJO ILUSTRADO

The award-winning Spanish illustrator is poised to let her imagination go wild

A day at the office for Mariajo Ilustrado often begins at ZSL London Zoo's penguin pool for a few warm-up sketches, before she moves on to tackle the other inhabitants. The Spanish artist is currently studying for an MA in children's book illustration at Anglia Ruskin University, but has already caught the industry's eye after winning the New Talent prize at the 2020 World Illustration Awards for *Flooded* [right], an acrylic ink and graphite artwork taken from a picturebook she created as part of her studies.

Paying regular visits to the zoo has been crucial to Mariajo's masters, sketching from life to create cute characters that inhabit the city beyond the confines of the attraction. She has also enjoyed breaking free of the barriers that her previous life as a commercial illustrator imposed. "Until now my work has been more about meeting people's briefs, but with children's books you're able to do more of what is personal to you," she says. "The masters is a chance to play and find my own visual language."

Mariajo graduates in May and hopes to start work on her first book. Publishers take note.

www.mariajollustrado.com



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17 AMY BEAGER

The former fashion designer is giving classical figurative art a makeover

RIGHT Amy Beager, *Aphrodite*, oil and acrylic on canvas, 42x59cm

Behind much of Amy Beager's recent work is a classic case of mistaken identity. It happened last year at an art fair when one onlooker asked if the subject of her acrylic-and-ink artwork *Blue Woman* was Isadora Duncan – the pioneering dancer who died tragically in 1927. "It's not," says Amy, "but I looked up Isadora and read her autobiography and she had a really amazing life. In her dance, the movements she made were inspired by Greek mythology and sculptures, and it led me into looking into this area and all this year I've been using it as a starting point for my own inspiration."

With thick, expressive brushstrokes in vivid blue, bubblegum pink and electric aqua, Amy's canvases give the classical female figure a millennial makeover. One depicts the Greek goddess Aphrodite, others sprout the wings of Nike and some are joined by sinewy Zeus-like forms, but all exude romance, sensuality and drama.

"The figures are more of a vessel for exploring emotions," Amy explains. "But I think the paintings create their own narratives as well... I hope the viewer can relate to a feeling or emotion or read the image as a story."

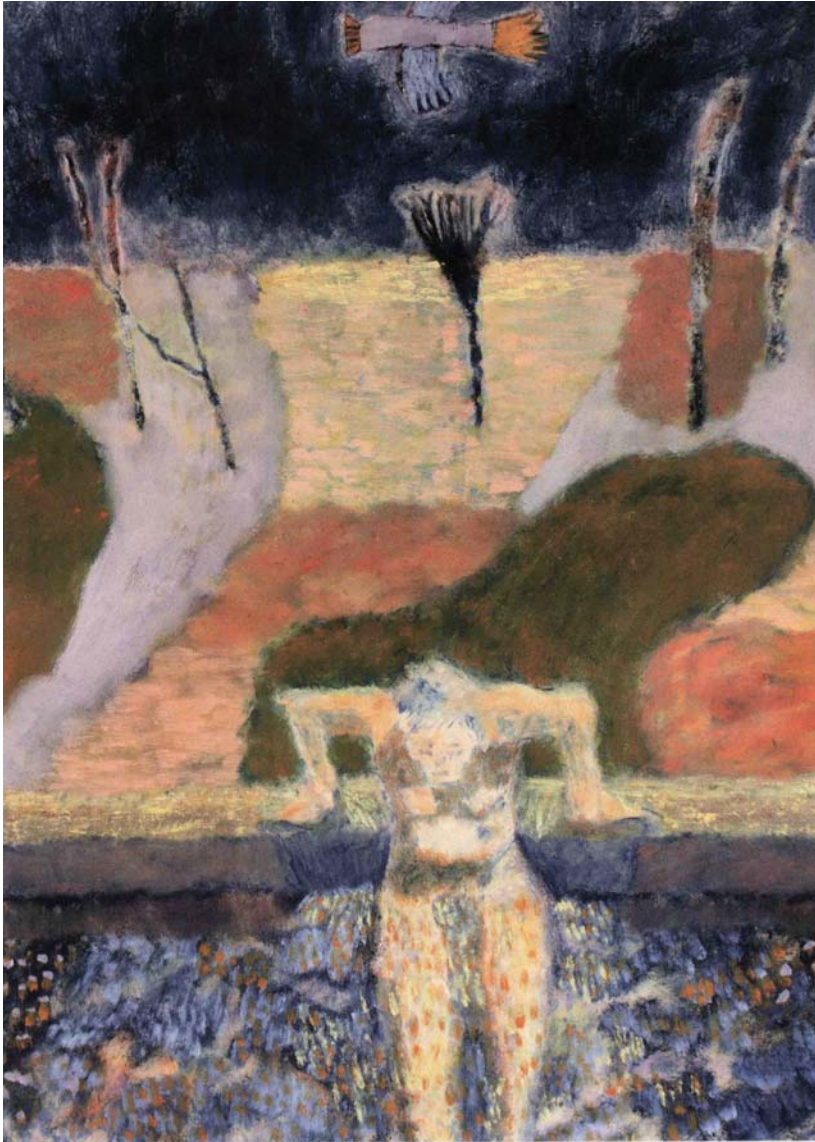
It's hard to believe the Chelmsford-based artist has only been painting full time for the past three years, following a seven-year career as a fashion designer for brands such as Topshop and Asos. Gaining momentum, she was selected as a winner for the Delphian Gallery Open Call 2020 and also had her work featured in a recent group exhibition at London's Saatchi Gallery.

Plans for 2021 include a two-week residency in the Netherlands but ultimately Amy sees her art practice as one continuous development. "It's like a journey," she says, "each idea evolves onto the next."

RIGHT Amy Beager, *Desire*, oil and acrylic on canvas, 150x100cm

www.amybeager.com





18 DANNY LEYLAND

Abstract paintings that fizz with ideas are this Edinburgh graduate's trademark

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Curtained ambitions are the story of 2020 for many artists, though Danny Leyland's story is particularly poignant. The 26-year-old artist's exhibition, *Debris Dance*, was set to open at Edinburgh's [Arusha Gallery](#) in March, yet the national lockdown was announced the day before his work was due to be picked up from storage. He is full of praise for how the gallery adapted to an online display, though it has left him questioning the validity of the experience too. "*Debris Dance*

“ DOES MY FIRST SOLO SHOW COUNT IF IT NEVER OPENED ITS DOORS?”

was supposed to be my first solo show, which is a big thing in any artist's career," he reasons. "Now I'm not even sure if I've had my first solo show. Does it count if it never opened its doors? I don't know. I don't feel like the show happened. Nor do I feel like it didn't. Perhaps it's a bit like losing your virginity, you either have or you haven't. But I'm still not sure."

It is a shame for the public at large too, as it deprived us of the chance to admire his vast canvases in the flesh. *Debris Dance* explored ideas about memory, history, interpretation, and how archaeology is really a study of human activity through objects left behind. "I think about all the human actions that left no trace at all; no materials left behind for us to study," he says. "All the actions of love and passion and human experience. I find this notion quite unbearably potent sometimes."

Danny is currently teaching a foundation year in Cambridge, alongside pursuing his own multi-disciplinary work which not only includes painting but also sculpture, needlework, installations and more. He recently gave a talk about his practice to his students for only the second time. "I do feel a little sheepish when talking about my own experiences to my students," he admits. "It even seems at odds with one of my guiding principles: which is the humanist creed of placing the student at the centre of their learning."

That desire to engage without impressing his ideas heavily on his audience is one of the keys to what makes Danny's semi-abstract paintings so rich and rewarding.

www.dannyleyland.com

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19 KATIE HARMAN

Contemporary meets classical in emotional oil paintings

Katie Harman's oil paintings are a fascinating collision of styles. There are bold graphic shapes alongside classical figurative elements, while large colour fields are broken up by collaged graph paper. When it comes to the more restless passages of brushwork, Cy Twombly is a key influence, along with other less obvious inspirations such as Mark Rothko and Christopher Lebrun RA. "Gazing at their artwork acts as a window into the souls of those mythological figures you can find in literature like Homer," she says. "Their paintings take on a form of therapeutic power through their use of pleasurable, sensuous colour. I wanted to create that same emotional link with the viewer and my artwork."

Katie's love of antiquity began while studying classical civilisation at college. She is now living in Athens, Greece, while she studies for an MA in Ancient Eastern and Mediterranean Archaeology. "This is a wonderful subject to be learning alongside my artistic practice," she says. "I hope that this year-long experience will drive my creativity and give me a better understanding of this culture and how it has impacted art throughout the centuries, and in turn make me a more accomplished artist."

Follow Katie on Instagram at [@k.harmart](https://www.instagram.com/k.harmart)

20 CLARE BUCHTA

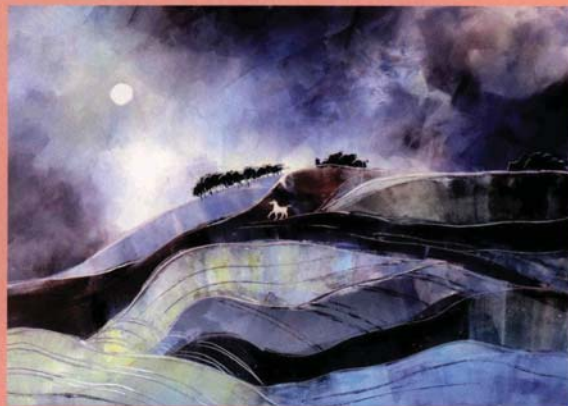
Iridescent landscapes have made this Berkshire artist a star of Portfolio Plus

Looking at a landscape painting by Portfolio Plus member Clare Buchta is like stepping into another world, one in which the English countryside is an ethereal vision of iridescent pastel hues. Think thick lilac clouds, chameleon-coloured rolling hills and silhouettes of skeletal-like trees reflected in glimmering, powder blue waters.

How does she do it? "I developed this way of painting using water-soluble oil paints, as I can't get on with solvents," Clare explains. "It started as a printmaking process and went from there. Normally people would build up the paint in fairly opaque layers, but I put it down in very thin layers, then the colours shine through."

While the Berkshire-based artist caught our eye on *Artists & Illustrators'* online community Portfolio Plus this year, she has spent much of the past 12 months experimenting in her new garden studio and already has plans in place for 2021. These include exhibiting in local art trails, such as the ones in Henley, Wokingham, and Cookham & Maidenhead, and running a few one-on-one tutorials and group art workshops.

www.artistsandillustrators.co.uk/clarebuchta



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21 SUSAN ROCKLIN

A love of narrative and memories of the sea created a promising online debut

With lockdown preventing physical access to galleries, artists and curators are having to respond in new and dynamic ways. Take Susan Rocklin's first solo exhibition, *Paeon*, for example. When the restrictions prevented a real-life launch at South London's 163 in May, gallery owner Julie Bentley moved quickly to create a "virtual" display.

"She hung the show in the gallery with painted feature walls and promoted it as one would a normal show via email and Instagram to her substantial contact base," explains Susan. "There was a viewing room, by which the audience could navigate the gallery remotely, and an online catalogue."

The response proved overwhelming as most of the work was sold. "It was a risk, but one that paid off," says the artist of the shift online.

What's more, she emerged with a waiting list of potential clients, "so the impetus for making some more work was right there".

Over the summer, that momentum led the Royal College of Art graduate to develop *Playlets*, a series of four large-scale canvases that she says were an imaginative antidote to physical confinement: "Opulent clothes, wistful protagonists, mysterious and remote locations... Pure theatrical abandon and escape from the reality of the pandemic."

They were born out of a period in which Susan "watched lots of films and some bad TV and fantasised incessantly about where I wanted to be". She counts the directors Ingmar Bergman and Andrei Tarkovsky as key inspirations alongside painters such as Munch, Morandi and Bonnard, while narrative is important to her practice, having studied literature before turning to painting.

RIGHT Susan Rocklin, *Last Trick in the Game of Longing*, oil on linen, 210x170cm

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The mystery and atmosphere of the sea is another key influence for Susan, having been brought up on the North Yorkshire coast near Staithes.

“All those years living by water have infiltrated my sensibilities,” she says. “I feel that applying thin layers of colour, drawing fragmented lines, with everything in motion, is my natural rhythmic way of thinking and painting.”

2021 will see Susan settle into her new Archway studio and return to 163 during the Dulwich Festival in May. Whether virtual or real, it promises to be a fantastical delight.

www.susanrocklinartist.com



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