Dan Llywelyn Hall writes on the enduring power of exhibiting art.

Art that permeates through time always speaks straight to the human condition. Art is the residue of lives lived, and the challenges of living in our vulnerable frames have remained the same since our earliest incarnations on earth. If art can, first and foremost, remind us of this, through harmony of aesthetics, balancing forms, colour and scale and then allowing the sparkle of life force to seep through, you may have found the elusive recipe worthy of a ‘masterpiece’!

Art at its best is closely woven with life and encounters; people, places and causes. If an artist thinks that this can be bypassed through a learned intellect alone, the art will lack soul and simply be ornamentation. In an age where we are bombarded with imagery from every direction, it becomes (ironically) harder to absorb images into our senses, as concentration and the inate appetite for novelty has conditioned the modern eye to absorb and assess instantly to avoid overload.

Never has the humble painting in the face of a willing audience offered us so much. If we are to create ‘great’ art we must learn to be a great audience, and the simple action of observation will equip us with more and more revelations changing with us and our sensibilities.

In the past year I was invited to visit Sheffield to make drawings of some trees planted in 1919 to commemorate the Great War. I had no idea what to expect and couldn’t imagine how drawing could in any way intervene with an overzealous council wishing to remove the ‘inconvenient’ trees and their roots from the pavements. Sat with these trees one on one, drawing them as individuals, I realised that I was probably looking more closely than anybody had done in the hundred years since they’d been planted.

Soon all the community started drawing them and we’d eventually drawn every single one of the 53 trees that shaped an exhibition. Their beauty had been celebrated through the simple act of drawing and observation and a whole community has become galvanised and united. The campaign to save these trees has still not reached a conclusion and the trees – the silent witnesses – certainly remain entirely indifferent. It made me realise quite profoundly that art can arrest time and encapsulate a moment much better than any technology, still or moving picture. The images that were made from days spent drawing those trees are a testament to human will in adversity, hope and above all exploring beauty in the ever-present here and now.

Dan lives and works in London. He has painted portraits of sitters as diverse as Amy Winehouse and the Queen. He taught a painting masterclass at Sevenoaks School in 2017.

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Growing up in Saudi Arabia, I became aware early on of the paradoxes that coexisted in close proximity. Everywhere I looked I saw paradoxes, in my region, faith community and even my family. As I grew, many of the cultural narratives we’d learned seemed less and less credible, and I also became wary of simple answers to complicated questions. These questions, prompted by the paradoxes in my environment, have formed the base theme of my exhibition.

I have consequently chosen to explore contrast in colour and theme through the depiction of people and scenes from my home city of Jeddah. Oil paint was the primary medium and allowed me to express raw emotion and the sensation of depth in colour and tone. More recently, I have adopted a layered technique combining paint and materials such as tissue paper or card to create more dynamic and textured pieces. My interest in contrasts has also translated further thematically as I have used etchings to create layered works highlighting prominent paradoxes in the Kingdom such as old versus new and decay versus growth.

Hannah Anderson

The strokes on a canvas make the painting what it is and similarly, every little experience in my life shapes my perception of the world and Art. The world is my canvas, my studio and my inspiration. In India, I lived amongst a chaotic jumble of social moralities, yet astounding aesthetics. I have seen Manhattan’s brightest lights, named the Avenue Winston Churchill, walked the same ground that Puente de Diablo was built on and seen Shanghai at the peak of its procession. Recontextualising cultures and juxtaposing the world is essentially my art. I developed an obsession for eclecticism of extremities in eras and cultures. Whilst my etching and drawings focus majorly on presenting modern elements in a gothic style with ink, my prints and sculptures aim at presenting old paintings, Renaissance elements in a modernist style. My work ultimately aims at presenting the appeal and diversity of the world.
I began by questioning how an artist reflects their experiences through their work, resulting in an exploration of autobiography. I developed an interest in layering, and using film photography as my starting point I captured ghostly images giving insight into a past event. This allowed me to explore memory. Often we see photography as an accurate portrayal of a moment which will never be recreated, but double exposures subtly undermine this idea through their multiple layers. I used photographs from a trip to India to explore the role layering has in creating a different narrative.

Artists such as Dan Eldon and Garry Winogrand have been fundamental in my exploration into autobiography due to their deeply personal work. The way they capture their subjects’ emotions is something I attempted to achieve through my photography, film and sculpture. Ultimately I learned that autobiography is not a linear journey and along the way I began to understand the nuances present in my interaction with my subjects, alongside the materials I used to turn my thoughts into a reality.

Texture is something that engages all of us; it is universally appealing. Whether it be luscious, or broken and sharp, it is an element of my work that is integral to the message I wish to convey. Taking scenes from the real world and translating them into something more emotive, more emblematic of the experience than the appearance of the setting itself. Significantly, my time in Venice and New York has led me to engage with urban environments in a conceptual manner, leading to patterned projection and large-scale installation work becoming my primary focus. Artists such as Lucio Fontana and Chen Zhen have been my most prominent influences, and are in part responsible for the choice of technique and material employed in each and every one of my pieces. My work ultimately aims to communicate the unseen beauty in material and pattern, which one would normally miss in passing.
The development of my work has come through focusing on themes of structure and volume. By using multiple media such as sketching, painting and many types of printmaking I have been able to create many outcomes in both my refined pieces and works that have acted as stepping stones. By using photographs and life drawing sessions to replicate human form, I have been able to achieve realism whilst balancing structure and volume. Generally I have explored two ways to achieve these themes, these being the removal of material in order to achieve a sense of depth, and the addition of marks and layers to gain the same overall outcome. The sense of built-up layers in both styles lends itself to my overall theme of structure and volume. It also creates a sense of development, as I have moved from focusing on only the contrast of light and dark, to looking to include tonal changes within both small and large areas, whether it is in the human form or inanimate objects.

The main aim of my work is to explore and depict the tension and balance between multiple faces. I initially explored this through the medium of portraiture, focusing on the innate sensation of dispute between conflicting minds in one head. This relationship, between two thoughts in one head, became my central theme which then developed to the balance between the many emotions that one mind can undertake. I began to create works representing this tension and balance, through the use of expressive brushstrokes on smooth surfaces or controlled painting on coarser and irregular ones. As my theme broadened to the relationships between more and more faces and a sensation of togetherness between them, I worked on a larger scale and experimented with printing and clay sculpture, allowing me to deepen my exploration. I aim to create within my art a sense of the unattainable resolution of opposed states of mind, yet the cruel irony of their undeniable togetherness, as they are fixed together in one body.
There was no question that the source of my inspiration should be Asia. I grew up there and spent my formative years travelling to outlying corners of the continent. I am particularly fascinated by the people and how culture influences the way they present themselves. I have recreated the head of a Turkmen tribal chief with his virile hat of raw goat’s fleece, keeping it untamed and wild, finding a way to bring the exhilaration and exoticism of Asia to life in Kent.

I find that in travelling, it is the discovery of the unexpected that is so exhilarating. I have hence attempted to knit something of that into my work and present an irrepressible interplay of elements, creating unlikely partnerships: mosaics from paint samples, embroidery on paper, photography with collage, and weaving metalwork. In fact, embroidery became a connecting theme through my work. I don’t possess the skills and traditions that have lasted generations in Asia, so I explored my own interpretations, embellishing snippets of rainy Shanghai at night, offsetting (and inventing) propaganda sculpture in North Korea and fleshing out a painting of a Red Zhao woman in Vietnam. I have also had my eyes opened and imagination fired by the work of contemporary artists, reinterpreting the art of embroidery.

Gavriil Kochevri

In my work I have looked at how the way of demonstrating affects the perception of the piece, and how an image can develop in the process of the reworking. The experimentation started during my holiday in the Alps, where I was in awe of the sheer grandeur of the mountains and their noble form. The impression this had on me was so great that I decided to base my works on this imagery. From the beginning with prints, I have searched for new ways which I could implement in my works, producing new visual impressions. From my research came new techniques and the exploration culminated in a series of pieces that combined all of the processes with which I experimented. This was an interesting and engaging process which allowed me to broaden my artistic horizons and understand the ways in which the visual part of art affects the perceptive part.

Scarlet Jenne
The theme behind my artwork is autobiography. I've always been inspired by the world around me, documenting and sketching every country I've lived in and visited. My art is a combination of pastel, ink, Sharpies, oil paint and dried flowers, and has a strong resonance with nature and movement. In some ways it also seems to encompass the elements of earth and water into multiple mixed media pieces. My pieces are centred around movement and sensation, whether that is the curve of a woman's neck, the dripping of an ink splotch, or the bend in a tree branch.

I've lived in India and Hong Kong, where you can see the natural world gradually being taken over by garbage and concrete, and to counteract these atrocities I've tried to create art that celebrates the natural world. My mixed media painting A portrait of my World is a combination of blue and green inks that represent the colour and vibrancy of nature, contrasted with the black and spidery ink stains of our consumer ideals.
My initial idea was to try to use mark-making as a way of conveying mood and visual drama. I have undertaken various abstracted styles and expressive marks in order to achieve various moods, and I have developed my longstanding interest in architecture and cityscapes within my work. Furthermore my layered architecture series has allowed me to experiment with colour, tones, marks and texture.

My intention behind the series is to show progression and development of architecture through the ages. Each of the buildings I focus on becomes more modern from my first to last piece. My final image is given a large scale to imply that cityscapes are expanding as we move towards the future. Nonetheless its brown basis creates a nostalgic feel, commending past architecture while striving for the future. I have tried to create a positive and celebratory mood surrounding architectural development through my use of energetic marks and luminous colours. I have also brought aspects of naturalism into my work to demonstrate the relationship between urban environments and nature.

My idea was exploring physical and emotional depth primarily in portraiture, pursuing the concept through different media such as oil paint, photography and charcoal.

My development was mainly inspired by breathtaking trips to Myanmar and Mumbai, where I focused on photography and film, aiming to capture spontaneous expressions of local people, the chaotic animality of marketplaces and serene scenery. In a particular response, I painted a Burmese man, layering vibrant colour to explore physical depth created from heavy brushstrokes and to respond to my emotional curiosity, which I tried to convey in the subject’s expression. Working from photographs, I began a series of detailed charcoal portraits which then inspired a study where I combined different media and juxtaposed colour and texture to experiment with various portrayals of character. My later works were large-scale expressionistic pieces intended to produce a dramatic emotional response. Ultimately, my works are intended to challenge the nature of traditional, realistic portraiture and to present the diversity of different cultures.
Sophie Shaw

My personal artistic journey began with the visual depiction of emotion through portraiture, using a gestural and expressive style. I was initially inspired by the vibrant and striking nature of Jenny Saville’s and Paul Wright’s work. I work on a large, imposing scale. The work remains immediate through fluency of broad, dynamic strokes and a rich palette. I aim to captivate the vitality of the sitter instead of producing an accurate portrayal, by amplifying the nuances and dimensions of the subject’s complexion. I have also experimented with the layering of media – for example using an etching as a base and then developing further by the application of oil paint.

Tarika Srivastava

When beginning this collection, I was inspired by busy urban environments and cityscapes and wanted to capture the movement, chaos and colour within them. Initially, I worked with photography and mixed media, focusing on the details of the cityscapes to add vibrancy and depth. This exploration of media in trying to convey the culture and behaviour of particular environments and spaces became the core of this project.

In my Portrait of Two Women I combined highly contrasting, expressive brushstrokes with photography and traditional fabrics to consider how these media would convey the richness of this culture and depict a sense of place. As this theme broadened to exploring the fragility of environments, I began to experiment with sculpture. In exploring colour and movement, the series exposed the tenuousness of certain environments. Within all my artwork, I aim to create a sense of connectedness between the medium used and the meaning expressed. The use of warm tones and vibrant brushstrokes should allow the viewer to feel an innate connection to the environment and people depicted.
George Wallinger

The world is always growing. The contrast between the biggest cities growing bigger and bigger every day and the untouched woodlands thousands of years old is what inspires me. It fascinates and frustrates me how something so natural and pure could be transformed or discarded for something new. Artists such as JJ Adams and Mr Brainwash have inspired me to focus my work on this contrast. Using a variety of natural materials as the backgrounds to my work, I find I can explore a further interest between natural and man-made objects and places. Exploring the cities of London and New York I found much material and inspiration, from graffiti and sticker walls to the amazing architecture of the city.

Isabelle Trickey

Through the diagnostic study that this course provided, I was exposed to multiple media from sculpture to photography, which I was then able to apply to my own ideas and intentions. After painting my self-portrait, I decided on an overall theme of distortion and disguise, using my paintings to portray anonymity through portraiture and distortion of the subject. My approach to the life drawings was to use a Sharpie pen, making bold, fluid lines to suggest the figure. In my etching series based on these drawings, I used layering to create a disguise for the bold shapes as well as the border, which is emphasised through contrast with the middle figure which I left in bold. My self-portrait is disguised by the physical action of distortion which was captured in the photograph, and my series of faceless portraits turn to colour and texture to replace their missing identities.
In my eyes, there is no landscape more dynamic than the urban landscape; each and every city is unique in its style, as it has been moulded by a different history. Take any snapshot of an urban scene, and you would be able to make out a thousand different shapes, lines and angles that amalgamate into an ornate work of architecture. This level of precision, evident in architecture, was what I wanted to challenge. By contrast, my paintings of brick buildings and street scenes are formed through a rougher brushstroke and less-calculated lines. In an effort of replicating the techniques of artists such as Matteo Massagrande and Adián Clarhed I pushed myself out of my comfort zone of fine details to broader, more expressive strokes. In doing so, I think I managed to capture the reality that every city is essentially ‘organised chaos’.

My artistic exploration began with an in-depth study of the female form. By developing my life drawings through a range of techniques and mediums, including oil paint, etchings and collagraph prints, I heightened my awareness of the complexities of the human figure. From my life drawings, I evolved an interest in portraiture in particular. This began with detailed studies of key features of the face maturing into several large-scale portraits. Throughout my portraits I developed and refined a painting style designed to contrast with the realistic nature of my portraits. I further emphasised this contrast through my use of exaggerated colour palettes. The interplay between simple line drawings and detailed oil paintings throughout my art, for me, has encapsulated my desire to explore in depth the human form as well as comment on the human body as a whole.
Mozna Alsulayman
Scarlet Jenne
Sophie Shaw
Hannah Anderson
Gavriil Kochevrin
Tarika Srivastava
Mercy Bannister
Genevieve Mallet
Isabelle Trickey
Matthew Caiger
Yeva Mitrofanszka
George Wallinger
Harry Carley
Oliver Nott
Carlotta Weitzel
Imogen Gibb
Hebe Reynolds
Kasinia Wetter Sanchez
