

Fresh Paint

Inspiring new artworks, straight off the easel

Emmie van Biervliet

A ruler, bits of a map, shells, lichen and a fishing net are just some of the materials put to work in this mixed-media artist's depiction of a fishing vessel, which forms part of her latest exhibition *A Journey in Pictures to 68 Degrees North*. The work on show was inspired by Emmie's extensive travels through the Norwegian Arctic aboard a 43-foot sailing boat called Shadowfax.

"Travelling so slowly meant I was often able to paint and sketch while sailing," she says, "but being careful to listen for changing weather, which would make your whole world suddenly tip sideways." If you weren't quick enough to secure them, paints, pens, water and half-made work would be scattered. Yet the wind and choppy seas also helped her capture the atmosphere. She adds: "You were sometimes buffeted from all sides and unplanned wave spray would merge the colours on paper in interesting ways."

Gliding Through Leaves explores the water-wanderer spirit and intriguing floating world of fishing vessels to reflect on how both inform the modern Norwegian psyche. She worked with acrylic – its versatility and fast-drying quality ideal for working *in situ* – as well as materials sourced en route. "The background reflects the warm light of the night sun that never set," says Kate. "Layers of mixed media were built up, then paint applied with a spatula, leaf details printed with a roller and other parts collaged. The boat rigging was sewn into the piece, which provided the tension and sharp lines of rope from a far."

Emmie's passion for mixed media started when she was young. She recalls childhood creations made with everything from an old biscuit packet to hollowed out wood. Today, travel is the cornerstone of her work and, although she can be found working from her studio in Bristol, she is usually more productive on the move. "The journey and discovery keeps you inspired and your eyes open," she says. "Through sketching, you suddenly see the details you had missed. During the time you are in a place, it gives you the chance to try to understand it a little more."

A Journey in Pictures to 68 Degrees North is at the Sarah Wiseman Gallery in Oxford until 10 February. www.emmievb.com; www.wisegal.com

RIGHT *Gliding Through Leaves*, mixed media on paper, 57x76cm



TOP TIP

Use the material you are depicting as your tool. For example, a feather to paint a bird

Kate Milsom

Part of a series celebrating people who have challenged social norms and advocated freedom and equality, the subject of this painting, Amy Dillwyn, was a Welsh novelist, businesswoman, social benefactor and one of the first female industrialists in Britain. Yet her fascinating life is little known, and Kate wanted to encapsulate her achievements in a single work. "I am trying to achieve not just a portrait of the person, but of their life," she says, "so it is always a challenge to include other significant objects and characters without crowding the protagonist, finding a balance between people and place."

For the artist, historical content and the use of traditional media are intertwined. She adds: "Working part-time in a restoration company for several years, I developed a preference for traditional media – oil paint, glazes and organic gesso – for their permanence, and also the depth

of pigment and richness of colour, which I feel is unmatched by modern alternatives."

The surface preparation for *Amy Dillwyn* was a long process, involving at least five layers of hand-made gesso over a muslin-covered board, which was sanded to a smooth pearly finish. The collage elements were applied with rabbit-skin glue using techniques learned from bookbinding or as direct transfers onto the gesso. Paint was then applied in thin layers and mixed with glazes which add a translucency and vibrancy to the base pigments. "Regardless of the size of a piece I use ridiculously small brushes," adds Kate. "I like to keep brushmarks to a minimum so there is as little change in texture as possible between painted and collaged elements." The result is rich, detailed and beautiful work of visual storytelling. *Kate Milsom and Mary Mabutt is at Martin Tinney Gallery, Cardiff, from 28 February to 24 March. www.artwales.com* >

BELOW *Amy Dillwyn*, oil and mixed media on gesso board, 70x61cm

TOP TIP

Increase the flow and translucency of oil paint by mixing it with a glaze and applying in thin layers



Kathleen Cowie

“Apparently, I have a bad habit of staring at people,” confesses Portfolio Plus artist Kathleen Cowie. “It is because I’m visually dissecting their face as if I were drawing them.” It’s a habit that feeds into her practice, which sees life drawing at the heart of what she does.

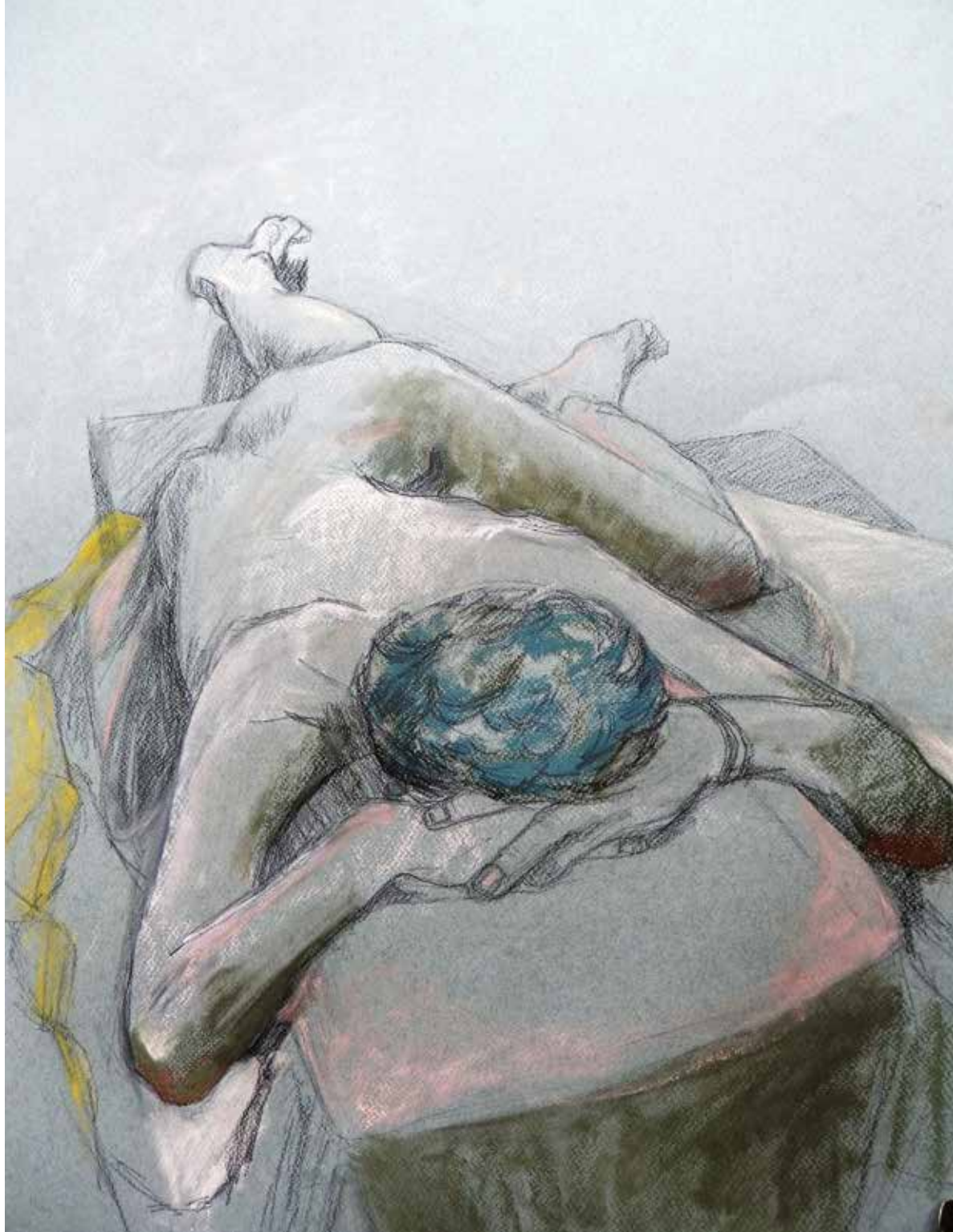
But it’s the inevitable expiry date of a pose that injects a sense of energy into Kathleen’s drawings. “It forces you to concentrate and make quick decisions because the pose may be short-lived and the model is likely to move a little bit,” she explains, “also the light on the figure will change.” At her weekly, untutored Life Drawing for Artists group, based in her home city of Aberdeen, the artist usually warms up by sketching a couple of five-minute poses, increasing to two half-hour sessions, finishing with a generous hour-and-a-half timeframe to observe the sitter.

Her recent work, *Life Drawing 70184*, was born out of the latter. She positioned herself to allow for lots of foreshortening and awkward angles to produce a more dynamic view of the model. First, she succeeded in getting the pose anatomically correct, choosing to work – from her collection of pastels, gouache, watercolours and Aquarelle pencils – with her favourite Wolfe carbon pencil, similar to a firm charcoal pencil, as well as Unison soft pastels.

After she quickly and loosely ‘ghosted’ in the body shape using the side of a light-toned pastel, she added carbon pencil to build the angles of the form, starting closest to her and receding into the distance. Later, a strong tone and hard line increased this depth, while contours and tone were formed with soft, chunky pastels, which were also used to suggest props in order to ground the sitter.

She’ll only choose four to five colours for her life drawings, taking the general shades from the model’s skin tone, allowing the Fabriano Tiziano paper, 160gms, to play a role too. Kathleen keeps the drawing fresh with an unfinished quality, leaving the viewer to fill in the gaps, when it’s their turn to sit and stare.

www.artistsandillustrators.co.uk/kathleencowie



ABOVE *Life Drawing 70184*, carbon pastel and soft pencil, 60x42cm

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