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POSY

SIMMONDS

The illustrator shares secrets of her success

How to paint...

- Expressive acrylics
- Watercolour portraits
- Old Master-style oils

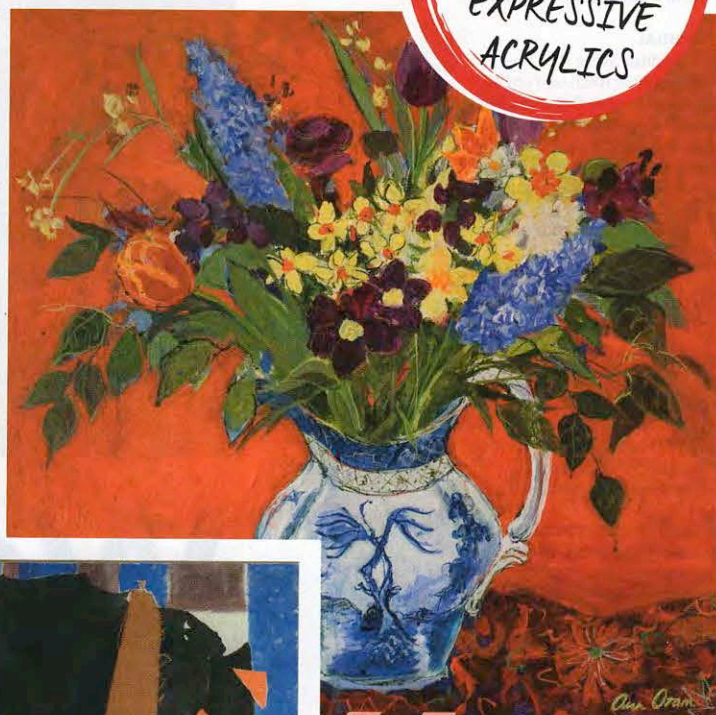
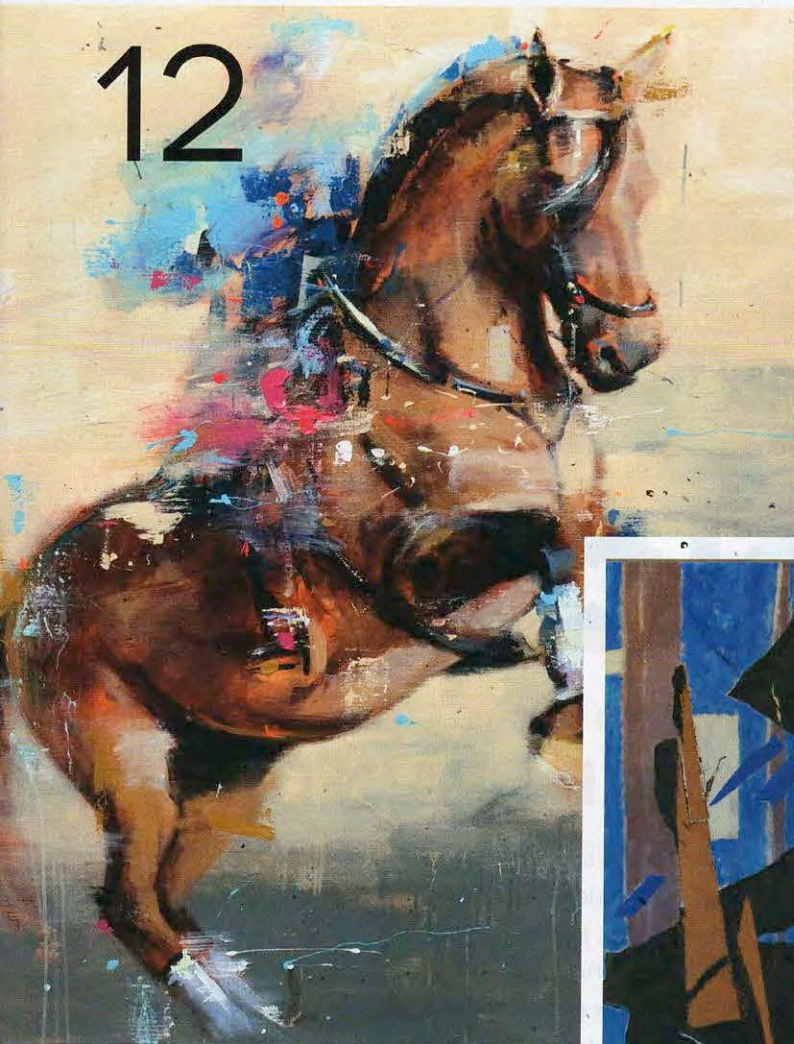
Brush WITH FAME

Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen and the stars of BBC's *Celebrity Painting Challenge* share their passions

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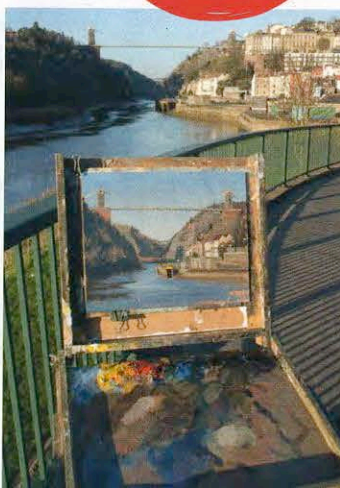
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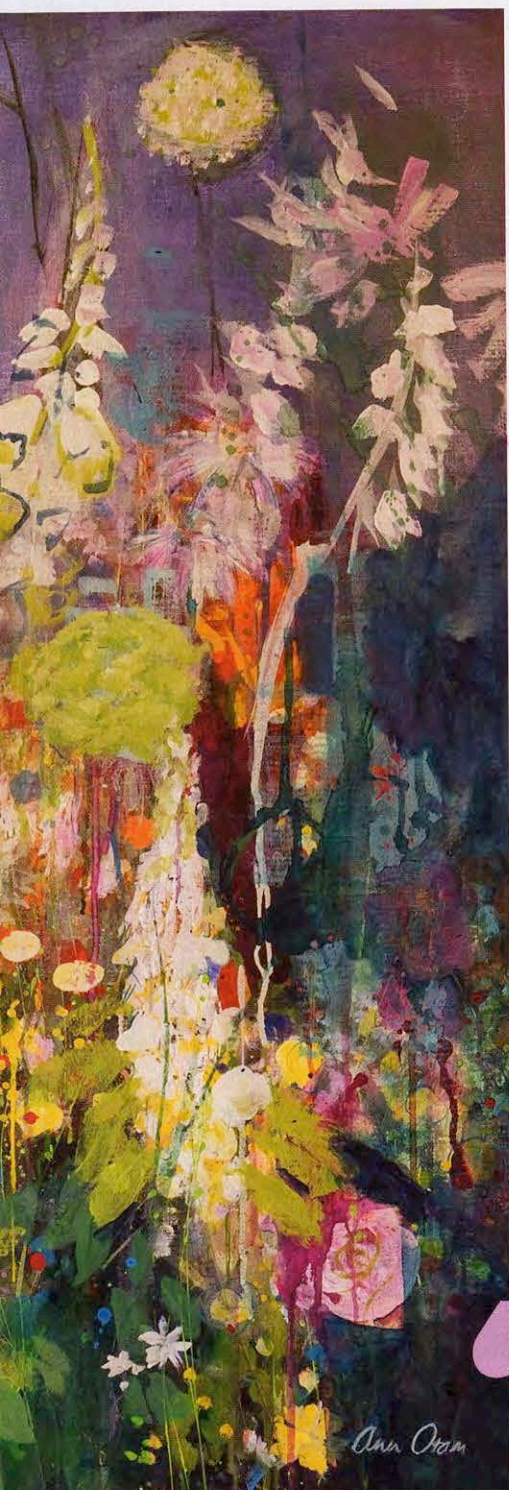
Norfolk Painting School's Martin Kinnear on the underused art technique of scumbling



YOUR QUESTIONS

EXPRESSIVE ACRYLICS

Want to create vibrant, colourful paintings that still retain a level of realism?
ANN ORAM RSW shares her techniques for breathing life into subjects



I often use gesso to paint out bits that are not working... Trying to not be precious about the work is important

What paints do you favour and why?

I use mostly Golden Heavy Body or Fluid Acrylics. The colour is phenomenal and much stronger than other makes. Mixed media technique is another favourite: I can include watercolour, gouache, inks, wax candle and oil pastel. The last two give the wax resist effect I love so much.

What do you look for in a subject?

It has to excite, I think that is the best advice I can give. A lot of artists will stick rigidly to one subject, but I'm always looking at everything. Usually it will be about the colour, or it could be something to do with the architecture.

A beautiful harmonious garden and a cathedral will elicit the same response in me. You just feel it in the gut and know you have to work on it. Perhaps it is something spiritual I sense?

How does a typical painting begin?

I usually start with a coloured ground, perhaps one or several colours. I draw early on, rub it out, start all over again. A cloth is just as important as a brush in my painting arsenal. As I use acrylic alot, I often use gesso to paint out bits that are not working so that I can start again. Trying to not be precious about the work is important. The minute you hold onto stuff, the more trouble you

can get yourself into. Leave it be and return to look at it a day or two later, sometimes even longer. Seeing things with a fresh eye always leads to a better outcome, even if that means abandoning a work.

Do you always work from life for the garden paintings?

Sometimes. It really depends on where you are working. I go up to a garden in Fife, at Wemyss Castle. I know and love the garden and generally get it to myself. However, for this show at Thackeray Gallery, the imagery came mostly from Chelsea Flower Show. It was impossible to

ABOVE *Spring Flowers on a Red Ground*, acrylic on board, 51x51cm
TOP LEFT *Darkening Garden, Chelsea*, acrylic on linen, 91x132cm

YOUR QUESTIONS

work among the crowds, so you have to just drink it all in and use your camera.

You manage to balance lots of surprising colours together seamlessly in one work. Do you plan colour schemes in advance?

You are led by the original image and idea in your mind's eye. It could be the mass of colour in the garden, or it could be the overall mood of the scene you want to depict. This also grows and develops with the painting, as it grows.

You can be halfway through and decide it needs more atmosphere, so you adjust the tones. Perhaps the colour has become a little too safe and needs to be brightened. It's a process of constant adjustment.

It is easy for bright colours to become muddy, yet you keep that vibrancy in your paintings. Do you have any advice for colour mixing?

Keep your water clean for starters. Also palettes can become cluttered too so I use disposable ones and just peel off a layer when it all gets too full of mixed colour.

Don't be afraid of priming over an area of the painting if the colour has gone off. The same applies to watercolour and gouache, you can sponge it out. However, if the remaining stain is not to your liking, then a watercolour primer will take you back to white.

I would say that you must be careful not to overwork. The first vision is often the most accurate, and although you have to adjust parts of the painting, it's important not to lose the very essence of what you set out to do.

There are fantastic textures in your paintings. How do you develop those?

Texture is the making of a painting for me. With watercolour, I use wax or oil pastels and wash. This gives resist which is so exciting.

With the acrylics, I like to use very thin washes alongside really thick paint with a painting medium mixed in to it to give extra body. I love to splash colour on and also like to scumble the paint on with a palette knife so that you can get a play between the surface below and the new layer going on.



The exciting thing about Golden Fluid Acrylics is that they can also be used just like a watercolour. The finish is very similar as it splodges and pools on board or canvas. Working flat is essential here, but then I add the less dilute acrylic paint at the easel later.

Is atmosphere important to you for expressive painting? Do you have certain things you need in order to paint to the best of your abilities?

I now have a wooden studio in the garden, although I paint in the house too. The garden studio is very peaceful and the light is very good. I like to play music, it was jazz yesterday afternoon. Sometimes silence is good too!

Having solid tables to work on, shelves for storing still life, and a plan chest for finished work; this all helps.

Some artists struggle with confidence when it comes to painting more expressively. Do you have any tips?

Confidence is something that you can grow. Some people have it in spades and others will always feel lacking.

I do think that you should not compare yourself to others, and just do your own thing. If you feel excited by your subject and results, you will always feed that inner confidence. Pleasing others is not the way to go.

Enjoy the process regardless of the outcome, that is where creativity begins. Eventually it will fall into place and you will find your own voice.

Is your stance and how you hold the paintbrush important?

I work on the floor for the large pieces and on easels and tables for the rest. I like to stand at the easel, as you can cross the room and look at your work from a distance. That's very important. I also have a Stokke adjustable stool which means I can work at an angle (it's on a rocking circular base) and close to the canvas if need be.

I usually hold my brushes at the end of the handle so that I don't exert too

Enjoy the process regardless of the outcome... Eventually it will fall into place and you will find your own voice

much pressure. More detailed work requires a firmer hand and working nearer the canvas with the brush being held nearer the tip end. I work that way towards the end of a painting as I don't like to be bogged down with too much tight detail earlier on.

What brushes do you use for the thinner stems and fine, drawn elements on your paintings?

I like to use Pro Arte swordliners and riggers. You can draw lines into wet or dry paint depending on what kind of effect you are after. Working into wet paint is exciting because you have little control and the lines will blur. Obviously on a dry surface it will achieve more precision. Because I work with water-based mediums, the paint can dry very quickly. The only thing that is different is if you are working on a huge watercolour – the

puddles of colour will take several hours to dry. So leave well alone in this instance.

Your paintings often include vibrant splashes of colour but in a very controlled manner. How do you go about making these marks?

I use Golden Fluid Acrylics for this and find that there is a terrific ability for them to be like an ink and very splashy. I splatter with fan brushes and the swordliners too. Pipettes are quite good fun to use too. Anything I don't like simply gets wiped away with a cloth. That's about the only control I have. I think the reason I paint this way is that you have less control overall. The materials do what they do and I find that quite exciting.

Ann's next exhibition runs from 4-21 June at Thackeray Gallery, London W8. www.annoram.com

BELOW Table with Chinese Lanterns, acrylic on linen, 91x131cm

OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP Chelsea Garden, Corner, acrylic on board, 60x50cm; Spring Flowers on a Blue Ground, acrylic on board, 30x30cm

