

# COLCHESTER ART SOCIETY

Founded in 1946 for the promotion of the visual arts



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# newsletter

CONVERSATIONS was an exhibition at The Minories from November 5<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup>.

Eleven students from Colchester School of Art were paired with eleven CAS members. The pairs had their work displayed together, producing some interesting contrasts and connections.

The result was a new association of the art school with CAS, which we hope will continue.

## CONVERSATIONS

The *Conversations* exhibition at the Minories was, from my perspective as a student, an enriching experience. It not only offered me a valuable opportunity to exhibit and test work in a public art space but also provided a forum to meet and talk with fellow artists at very different stages of their professional development.

The pairing of Linda Adcock's *Ladder and Chair* painting with my *Trivium* installation has been beneficial on so many fronts but primarily because we both embraced opportunities to talk with one another, sharing perspectives on the exhibition and discussing approaches to the making of our art. The conversation will continue into the New Year, which is wonderful. Thank you Linda!

I've gained inspirational insights into the work of others but also greater clarity regarding my own emerging art practice. I've certainly consolidated what I'd do differently but it has also helped me to embrace the beauty of imperfection and its connection to my experience of motherhood.

Long may *Conversations* continue!

Susie Scott.



*Ladder and Chair*, Linda Adcock,  
*Trivium*, Susie Scott. Photo, Daphne Sandham.

## Exhibitions at The Minories

**Ian Hay**

“Landscape: Town and City”

February 2nd-25th

**Simon Carter**

“Approaching the Remote”

February 11th-April 8th

Preview for both exhibitions Friday 10<sup>th</sup> February 6-9pm. All welcome.

## C.A.S. Autumn Lecture: Humphrey Ocean 'Pretty much here and pretty much now'

Hosted by Firstsite, Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2016

Reviewed by Jane Frederick

The Colchester Art Society Autumn Lecture with Humphrey Ocean R.A. closed a circle for me.

In 1986 when I first embarked upon my studies at Lincolnshire College of Art, my Dad and I went to hear him speak at The Usher Gallery where a selection of his recent portraiture was currently on exhibition. We were both spellbound by this refreshingly articulate, perceptive and committed artist proudly sporting an African embroidered kufi hat.

I remember how he declared that joining Art School had positively changed his world, offering an open invitation to nurture and explore his personal creativity through drawing and painting.

I repeatedly returned to that exhibition and closely examined the craftsmanship of his award winning painting *Lord Volvo and his Estate* and accompanying studies and fantasised about painting portraits and similarly exhibiting in the B.P. Portrait Award. I did eventually, twelve years later.

Opening his lecture at Firstsite, Ocean modestly stated that he was only now making the paintings that he wanted to make at nineteen. How reassuring.

An accomplished orator, he immediately gathered audience attention, sharing many reflective comments that prompted a supportive murmur or an approving chuckle from the auditorium.

So continued a witty delivery within which he bobbed and wove artistic references, musical connections and humorous anecdotes. A member of the pub rock band Kilburn and the High Roads, he also spoke affectionately about his friendship with his former tutor Ian Dury, reflecting on the importance of music and poetry to his practice.

It became increasingly clear that his practice of painting directly feeds off the wider context of society and culture. Road signs, concrete and fenestration all featured in the discussion.

Speaking with humility and openness about the works he made at the beginning of his career, he revealed how instructive the process of painting poet Philip Larkin's portrait became and how much could be learned when simply sitting with him and visually navigating his person (as well as engaging in discussion between naps.)

Ocean has boldly suggested that colour is probably second to children in terms of what is important in the world. Observing his recent paintings reveals a commitment to working with a limited and closely connected range of colours and tones. Brian Sewell wrote that *'Colour is for him 'a very particular business', and the care with which it is controlled is demonstrated over and over again in the pages of his sketchbooks, where greens and blues already subtle are methodically softened and gentled into the tone that seems to him essential.'*

The quietness of the grey palette can demand time from the viewer and invites a closer contemplation of the work. Interesting then, that he went on to say that actually, black was the colour that all other colours really wanted to be.

On reflection, I felt as though we had all been taking an evening stroll with him, through the studio, the Royal Academy and the streets of London where he revealed the subtleties of such places, the edges of things, the fleeting moments, the greys.

At the start of the evening I swiftly took my opportunity to thank him personally for that other inspiring talk that Dad and I had attended thirty years ago.



Humphrey Ocean enters the Ferens Art Gallery

## The Land - Michael Goodey

The Minories. 10th December 2016 - 4th February 2017

The Land, an exhibition of paintings by Michael Goodey at The Minories until 4th February, charts a journey from common road signs to sophisticated picture making.

In much the same way that Roy Lichtenstein appropriated the language of the printed comic, Goodey draws on what Humphrey Ocean calls the largest free art gallery in the country, our road signs. From these icons of mid 20th century design Goodey constructs his own fresh language and, in doing so challenges and renews the idea of landscape in painting.

Photographs documenting Goodey's 2005 *Viewfinder Trail* show how the artist has taken the pictograms from road signs and began to use them to make equivalents for particular views. The user of the trail comes across the sign in the landscape and is directed to look at the view indicated by the sign, but then also to reconsider the sign as depiction of that same view. So these early pieces explore not only how signs in combination can be creatively deployed to picture the world but also the complex relationship between sign and that which is signified.

Over the intervening years Goodey has pursued this idea until we arrive at the current paintings. Still possessing the stark clarity of signs these new paintings feel both sophisticated and elegant. They highlight that central problem of depiction, namely what it means, and how it is possible, to present 3-dimensional space on a flat surface. Goodey keeps faith with the drastic reductions of signage, with flat colour and flat paint handling but out of this, almost counter-intuitively, he conjures space and light. He does this with an elegance and economy of means that bring to mind the great Edward Bawden. It would be a treat to see one of Goodey's landscape triptychs hung alongside Bawden's large scale linocut *Liverpool Street Station* or *Brighton Pier*.

Go and enjoy the paintings in The Land before it closes on 4th February, think and be challenged, but most of all feel the fresh breeze of invention that still blows across the landscape of Essex and Suffolk.

Simon Carter December 2016



## Essex Open

According to the internet, The Fermoy Gallery in Kings Lynn has reopened but it is uncertain if the Eastern Open exhibition will return. However the good news is that The Beecroft Gallery, showing the Essex Open, reopened last year in a modern spacious building just a short walk from the town centre. The bad news is that the town is Southend and the only way there is along the A127, not pleasant at the best of times but at the moment, and for many weeks, there are road works in both directions reducing the road to a single lane. It is close to the Victoria station so a rail journey, changing at Shenfield, might be an option.

The building is part of the library complex and you enter via automatic doors. At street level there is a large area, most of which is empty, with the art works on display on walls and substantial partitions at the far left. However there is a large lower level, accessible by stairs and a lift, which is mostly open so that it can be viewed from the street level area.

Unfortunately this show is badly organised. There was just one person, Polly Morgan, selecting purely from photographs sent by email. Despite this the works exhibited showed a wide range of original art but with over one hundred people submitting up to three works this meant that the results were late. In the week we were told we would hear the results, there was no message from the gallery and after a few days came the information that the time for delivering art works had been extended. At least works could be delivered over several days but, when I took my painting in, there was just one lady sitting at a desk in the main area. She told me to leave it against her desk but when I got home I realised that I had no receipt, nothing to prove I had a painting there. I was not able to attend the private view but, when I did visit, I voiced my concerns to someone at the desk and was told that I would be contacted when the exhibition finishes on February 11th. I asked for a list of exhibits but there wasn't one. I intended to use the list to check which art society members were among the exhibitors, so from memory they were: Jane Barry, Pam Booker, Abbie Cairns, Charles Debenham, Rosie Harman, Ken Kempley, David Marshall and myself. If I have omitted anyone I apologise. The list would also have been of use to investigate some of the other artists whose work I admired. In spite of my criticisms I have to admit that it is an excellent show of a high standard in an impressive gallery.



*Night Owls*, Mervyn Vallance

Mervyn Vallance.

## Nat Young in conversation with Michael Fletcher

With the sounds of Chuck Berry coming from a juke box and a sign from a seaside funfair saying 'no trash here' I entered into a sparkling conversation with Michael. It ranged in over a variety of art and artists that were as close to his own heart as they were to mine.

He was born in Gloucester but spent his formative years in London. Not being particularly academic he had an awful time at Grammar School but liked history and literature. For a time he worked in a menswear shop before becoming a petrol pump attendant. Fortunately his art aspirations were saved by going to Putney Art School. Shrewd move this, because in years to come he was invited to take over the headship. After Putney he went to Chelsea Art College (his mother nearly cried) and somehow missed the swinging sixties and became involved with communism and left wing politics. So it was an exciting mix of art with Bratby, Lowry and raw politics!

Unsurprisingly he was not at peace with himself, art and life but although uncomfortable, he succeeded with his degree show. Afterwards he worked in London, working part time and painting from imagination. After twenty five years he met Julia, and then spent time living in Spain.

At this point he decided to look in and at the landscape. He and Julia bought a property in Ronda, Spain. He became a neighbour of Miles Richmond. Richmond was an entertaining man over drinks in the evening. Obviously conversations ranged through the art scene and once again 'the spirit in the mass'-the mantra of all David Bomberg's group became part of it. Michael painted and exhibited successfully whilst there. Bomberg's influence on his pupils was immense, especially with the linear and angular drawings.

Observational art became Michael's own mission statement, and when he came back to live in London, was invited to lead Putney Art School until he retired.

He has had a preoccupation with the landscape for the past twenty five years. He found his influence in the likes of Keith Vaughan, Prunella Clough and Anthony Wishaw. Although his earliest boyhood sale was a pastiche of the Australian artist Sidney Nolan which Michael entitled 'the dying bushranger'.

He lived under the tensions of diametrically opposed teachings of William Coldstream and Patrick Caulfield.

His paintings exhibit a philosophical palimpsestic layering

of memories, emotions, and direct observations. He is a deep thinker. His most significant work has been the Fourteen Stations of the Cross, hopefully to be exhibited during Lent. I think that it is fair to say that the creation of these abstract images have had a profound effect upon his own deeper thinking, that life has been missing something. His faith has been altered and perhaps deepened

I was deeply impressed and moved by Michael because his life has been so coloured by his own depth of thought and influences. I am sure that his art society input will be significant and beneficial.

The Stations of The Cross can be seen at Oasis, Free Church, Frinton.

Preview March 11th, 2 to 4 pm, with an evening talk on Wednesday, 22nd March 2017.



Michael Fletcher, busy

**Charles Bartlett, P.P.R.W.S., R.E., A.R.C.A.**

**A WORKING LIFE**

Exhibition at Chappel Galleries, Colchester Rd., Chappel CO6 2DE

[www.chappalgalleries.co.uk](http://www.chappalgalleries.co.uk)

11th March—2<sup>nd</sup> April 2017. Wednesday and Sundays, 10-5

## Art Reading Group at Firstsite.

Jean McNeil

Our group has been meeting monthly and reading a wide variety of books related to art. We started in May 2016 with Grayson Perry *Playing to the Gallery*, then *Old Man Goya* by Julia Blackburn, a fictional biography of Goya's later years; this was followed by a novel by Margaret Forster, *Keeping the World Away*, which featured a painting by Gwen John, and *Weatherlands* by Alexandra Harris, a survey of the influence of weather on art and literature in Britain through the ages. This was a more difficult book, and from then on we tried to alternate easier reads with books that required more concentration. Sue Roe's *In Montmartre* gave us a lively, chatty picture of the early days of modernism, and we followed this with Roger Scruton's *Beauty – a very short introduction*. This had us tied in knots, but provoked a fruitful discussion. B A Shapiro, *The Art Forger*, followed in December, with a thriller about art collectors, galleries and forgers, and Julian Bell in January 2017 provided the heavier read: *What is Painting?*

I was asked last spring to help organise the Contemporary British Painters reading group. As membership had fallen off I thought it might be a good idea to ask the membership of CAS if anyone would be interested in joining such a group. I myself feel that as a painter I need to be nourished intellectually, and am lazy about reading the more difficult works on my own. I emailed CAS membership and received 10 positive replies. We now have a regular attendance of five or six, mostly, but not all, CAS members; it would be good to have a few more members. The reading group is publicised in the newsletters of both Firstsite and Contemporary British Painters.

The books are chosen by the members who attend. At a recent review of our experience over the last six months, we decided to continue to meet on a monthly basis and to have a variety of art-related subjects including books about artists, art history, art theory, and the contemporary art world. We try to balance 'heavy' texts with 'lighter' ones. We have set a price limit of £10 a book, and often the books are available from the library. Red Lion Books gives us a £1.50 discount.

We meet on the first Saturday of the month, at 10.30 in Meeting Room 1 at Firstsite. Just turn up, or email me at [mcneilj27@outlook.com](mailto:mcneilj27@outlook.com).

### Gilly Burrell

Gilly died on January 11th. For all who knew her, she was a delight. She was understated in her manner and also in her artistry. She had this unique ability to be able to affirm those who had the privilege of meeting her. She loved music, poetry and literature –and was always a good touch to discuss many and varied subjects. Her allotment garden with a 'Meg Merrilies' feel and shed to boot, was another wilderness of loveliness, and at one with nature with soft fruit, plants and anything else that grew in abundance.

Gilly suffered from two cancers, to recover from one and then to suffer another was not fair. She bore her illnesses with bravery and managed to cover any fears with smiles and concern for the welfare of others.

'No man is an island,  
Entire of itself.....  
Any man's death diminishes me,  
Because I am involved in mankind'. John Donne.  
This is so relevant to us all.  
Gilly, we will miss you,  
Our love to Lionel and Nicola .

Nat Young

Judith Moy, an artist and former member of CAS, has died at the age of 89.

Mrs Weiss, née Joan Dare, widow of the artist Ivor Weiss, has also died recently. She was also a successful artist and teacher.