

Impressions: a new exhibition at The Gallery on the Corner



*'I want to feel brave with my art' says **Otis Berry**, 'I want it to stand out as my style.'*

Otis is one of five trainees who are about to complete their traineeships at the **Gallery On the Corner** in Northumberland Street. He and **Freya Levy** agree that it's been a great year. The gallery's new exhibition *Impressions* is the culmination of that year, and it's an outstanding testament to the talent, skill and hard work of the trainees – and the dedication, encouragement and enthusiasm of the gallery managers.



The Gallery on the Corner was set up by **Autism Ventures Scotland** (AVS) : it offers traineeships to people with Autism Spectrum conditions, and also exhibits work by artists with a physical or mental health condition, or who have come from a disadvantaged background. There's nothing amateurish about this set-up – the gallery is a commercial operation showcasing high quality art; there is plenty of competition for traineeships, with applicants being required to submit a portfolio before being selected on the basis of merit. Whilst tuition is provided in everything from painting and drawing to monoprinting, lino cutting, screen printing and ceramics, the gallery also places emphasis on the development of commercial skills. The studio underneath the gallery provides work space for the trainees, who attend on a rotational basis throughout the week.



Trainees are employed and paid by AVS and are expected to

stick to regular hours like any other staff member. Assistant Manager **Paul Penrice** explains that the aim is to give the trainees the ability not only to develop their artistic practices but also to create their own 'brands' and benchmark pieces – they are encouraged to build a platform for their work, to engage with social media and to think about how their art can be translated into marketable items such as prints and bags.




In *Impressions* Otis shows monoprints of Edinburgh landmarks – Fettes College, St Stephen's Church and Edinburgh University all feature, each of them displaying Otis's excellent mastery of perspective and line. His signature technique is the use of watercolour: he adds a wash of colour to the paper and dries it with a hairdryer before laying it over inked perspex and starting to draw. This gives a three dimensional effect and highlights the details of each building; Otis's study of the National Gallery is an excellent example. For me, *Murrayfield* is a particularly effective work, the curves of the building appearing almost like an eggshell, encapsulating the stands and suggesting the spectators' complete engagement with the game: for 90 minutes nothing else matters.

Freya had already established her practice in crafts – particularly mosaic and glass – before coming to the gallery. Having worked full-time in London, she relished the opportunity to focus solely on her art, and the chance to experiment in new areas like painting and drawing, 'This has helped me to think outside the box.' Although many of the trainees base their work on the city itself, Freya prefers to concentrate on animals; the black spikes and shimmering gold bodies of her stunning hedgehog prints contrast beautifully with their sensitive faces. Meanwhile her witty pictures of chickens are highlighted with swathes of colour – pinks, blues, purples and yellows; a solitary rooster has an eye-

catching red crest. Freya's wonderful mosaics also feature animals; *Moonlit Owl* sits on a branch against a glorious turquoise background, his wide open glare a sharp contrast to the peaceful, serene eyes of *Resting Fox*. Whilst the mosaics include Murano glass canes, Freya also uses many found materials, including pottery mudlarked from the Thames and pieces of driftwood.



 **Carole Simonsen** shows lino and screen prints: the soft green background of *Ivy* emphasises the delicate lines of the leaves, whilst in *Sunflower* Carole focuses on a small part of one head, using muted autumnal colours for the brown seeds and yellow petals. *Wishes and Barley* contrasts the perfect circle of a blown dandelion head with the wilder sheaves of barley, bits of which seem to escape around the edges of the black background as the 'wishes' fly away into the wind.



The buildings of Edinburgh also provide subject matter for **Lee Mylne's** screen and lino prints. In *Grassmarket* a bold orange sunset blazes through the bare bones of the Old Town tenements. *Cog*, meanwhile, is a psychedelic swirl of lines and colours emanating from an engine, a turquoise/yellow explosion of steam or water.

Calvin McCluskie exhibits a fascinating ceramic interpretation of the *Scott Monument*: the detailed turrets look like minarets and give the building an exotic air. I had never thought of the Monument in these terms, but on my way home I looked at it through new eyes – it really does have an almost Turkish feel.

A former gallery trainee, **Alice Shaw**, is also showing in the gallery just now. In an exhibition entitled *Natural Earth*, Alice's black and white lino prints are full of life and movement, from *River I*, in which banks covered in birds abut a

the fast flowing water, itself crammed with fish, to *Hunter*, in which a fox charges after a fleeing hare. In *The Fox and The Bird*, however, the fox looks up at a bird on a branch with a gentle, almost smiling face, the softness of the scene so different from the furious energy of the chase. In another far more sinister print, a slow moving river reveals the terrifying eyes and teeth of a crocodile as he glides silently along.

As the year comes to an end, Otis is well ahead with plans for the future. He is sharing a studio in **Cockenzie House** in East Lothian and over the next few years he hopes to build up his artistic reputation and make a living from his work. As well as exhibiting in galleries, he has created a Facebook page for his business and has already made some sales through this. He is appreciative of all the commercial training he has had from Paul, manager **Susie Anderson** and **Rob Williams**, something he feels he may not have received in a conventional art college.

Freya has already had a successful exhibition of her mosaics at **Glass & Thompson** in Dundas Street, and is holding a second – this time to include prints – at the same venue in November and December 2014. She explains that the owner has been very supportive of her work, and that showing in a cafe-style setting can lead to more sales than a traditional gallery. She's building a website and is also busy with other activities – after seeing an exhibition at the gallery by adults with special needs, she now works with a group on a voluntary basis. She and Otis both stress how much they have benefited from being in the trainee group, all of whom are now also friends.

Almost all of the work in these two shows is for sale, at very competitive prices (Otis's monoprints, for example, are just £65 framed) – Christmas is fast approaching, and this would be an ideal and pain-free way to buy your presents and support emerging artists.

Impressions and *Natural Earth* are on at [The Gallery On the Corner](#), Northumberland Street until Friday 20th September 2014: the gallery is open 10am-5pm Tuesday to Saturday.

