

A nip and a print, landlord

It's 3.10pm on a dreich Saturday afternoon. We're in a city centre pub packed with punters escaping the arctic weather and driving rain.

In one corner is a large TV set showing Sky Sports' afternoon football coverage with score flashes popping up a regular intervals.

The noise level increased as the scores came in and the chat is mostly about the football and the latest results from the horse racing at tracks around the country. Some punters were drowning their sorrows.

In another corner, thankfully next to the roaring, log fire, were a selection of pictures pinned to the wall.

Not Athena posters or sepia prints linking back to the look of the pub in earlier years, instead, these were real art painted by living artists and the works formed part of what was claimed to be the UK's first fine art crawl.

The pub word was missing but the pop up art was in popular hostelries and we were in one of Edinburgh's busiest city centre watering holes, Mather's, at the top of Queensferry Street.

Heads near us turned as our guide introduced Ann Cowan, an Edinburgh artist who loves to paint streetscapes in her home city.

It's a far cry from her former life as a solicitor for a leading firm in the city, but she told in detail how she picks her subjects and how she creates her works which are on sale

in galleries and at exhibitions around Scotland.

Ann spends time walking and drawing on location and takes inspiration from the architecture and cityscapes of Edinburgh as well as the East Lothian coastline.

Many of Ann's works develop directly from her sketchbooks in which initial ink drawings are overlaid with collage and acrylic to create an emotional response to her surroundings.

Many drinkers, more used to hearing the voice of former Welsh international footballer, Robbie Savage, on the big screen above their heads on a Saturday during the soccer season, surprisingly lent an ear and took an interest.

We did, however, also sample a delightful, ten-year-old, deliciously peaty dram from the event sponsors, Tobermory, before vacating the reserved tables, to the delight of non-art lovers who just wanted a thirst-quenching swally and as they attempted to put the world to rights.

We moved on, thankfully just over the road, to Usquabae, an atmospheric, basement whisky bar and larder in Hope Street near Charlotte Square.

Clive Ramage (pictured) was there to greet us in his distinctive cap and the Dunfermline-based artist shared a perspective on his inspiration and the process.

He also opened up on how difficult it is to make your mark, and a living, in the art world.

Clive is also inspired by the architecture of Edinburgh. However, he also likes to travel around the country in his campervan visiting Scotland's wild and remote corners and suffering often dramatic weather.

His paintings and prints have featured in exhibitions at the Royal Scottish Academy Open, the Royal Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts Annual Open, The Royal Scottish Society of Painters

in Watercolour and the Society of Scottish Artists.

Clive's work is also held in private collections around the world and he showcased some of his extensive portfolio in the pub.

They proved an attraction as did the whisky, Scottish cheeses and savouries, plus Tobermory's newly-created gin, a really soft taste, by the way.

Stephen Woodcock, Tobermory Distillery manager, explained the link between the brands and art. Creative expression, he said, is at the heart of everything they do at Tobermory.

He added: "A distillery in the remote serenity of Mull and with so much creativity coming from the colours and landscapes of the island, how could we not be inspired to bring this onto the mainland and into bars for everyone to see?"

"The passion for art in nature is reflected in the spirits that we craft at the distillery and that's why we introduced the first fine art crawl for art lovers to experience."

The walk, in the shadow of some of the city's leading art galleries, aimed to celebrate and deepen the appreciation original inspiration and the drive to create.

It certainly brought art to a different audience and the warmth of the company's products helped erase the discomfort of wet clothes and soggy shoes.

Walking out of the last pub, Ryan's Bar in Hope Street, I was reminded of John Heywood's proverb collection of 1546: "A man maie well bring a horse to the water, But he can not make him drinke without he will." In this case the subject was led to art. Time will tell if a link between art is fully established between devotees of a nip and a pint and a print.

