

January 2020 is a good month for watercolours in Edinburgh

In January 2020, National Galleries of Scotland will exhibit JMW Turner, RSW will present the 139th Open Annual exhibition at the RSA (on the Mound) and the Birch Tree Gallery on Dundas will bring back Shetland watercolour painter Peter Davis.



Peter Davis

January always brings JMW Turner's works to the display at the National Galleries of Scotland. These works were gifted to the Galleries by the distinguished collector Henry Vaughan. He was concerned that the works would be preserved and in his bequest he specified them to be 'exhibited to the public all at one time, free of charge, during the month of January'. And that

has been respected for over 100 years.

Why January? January is the month when the northern winter light, at its weakest, comes very low above the horizon and, in Scotland, barely clears rooftops.

Is there a connection between climate and watercolour on a scientific level? It was an issue that was prominent in the late nineteenth century and even led to a parliamentary report on the Action of Light on Watercolours by Russell and Abney in 1888. That report concluded that certain colours were not lightfast and its findings eventually led to paint manufacturers, slowly, to adapt new standards and guidelines. However one of the offshoots of this research was the decision to display London gallery watercolours in low light.

In our own time the permanence and lightfastness of watercolours is carefully recorded and some are, perhaps, even more permanent than oil paints relying on the qualities of the pigments involved.



Duska- Heilia Water, Watercolour on paper 2019 (70x50cm) Photo courtesy of the artist

But coincidentally there will be other watercolour exhibitions in Edinburgh next January. The 139th Open Annual exhibition by Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Watercolour opens on 29 December and will run until 30 January 2020 in the Lower Galleries of Royal Scottish Academy on the Mound.

The exhibition 'Between Earth and Sky' will open on 9 January 2020 and will display glass works by Angie Packer along with Peter's paintings.

Peter's watercolours reveal themselves slowly. The transparency of layers and clearly visible edges of each wash give a feeling of them being 'easy to read' and understand (almost to the level of being able to 'count'). Perhaps that simplicity, the absence of unnecessary detail, gives a great sense of comfort. After all, our lives are full of 'noise', complexity and distractions, and there is none of that in

these watercolours. There is nothing complicated or 'muddled' in Peter's work – they truly represent Shetland's landscape, raw and simple, composed in limited palette and defined by intersecting edges on a large scale.

The overlapping layers subconsciously take one deeper into the painting revealing greater detail of how the pigment travelled, settled and dried. Peter has no fear in allowing watercolour to do 'its own thing', like developing 'marks of drying', that some might consider as 'lack of control'. Peter is not afraid of 'whiteness' of paper as a layer by itself either. As Duncan McMillan commented: 'watercolour is not just paint. Much more than with oil painting the support, paper, is integral to the finished image.'

Peter added: 'I have no wish to simply record what I see. I do not seek sedate topographies often associated with the term 'watercolour landscapes. Instead I prefer the uncertain balance between abstraction and reality'.

Preview of 'Between Earth and Sky' is on Thursday 9 January 2020 at 7.00pm. Peter Davis will also have a 'Meet the Artist' seated talk on Saturday 11 January 2019 Registration on Eventbrite will open in December.

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Voar, Neeans Neap, Watercolour on paper 2019 (70x50cm) Photo courtesy of the artist