

# Vettriano reflects as retrospective draws to a close

Jack Vettriano's retrospective at Kirkcaldy Galleries closes on 23 October but the Fife-born artist says the event has rekindled his affection for the county, prompting fond memories of his formative years.

The show, he said, has been a welcome return to the gallery where he developed his passion for art, having been gifted a set of paints for his 21st birthday.

The show, which includes previously unseen works, is the first to focus on the artist's formative years and early career before he achieved international success.

And the former mining engineer said: "It is fitting that this long look back over my career has taken place where it all started."

He recalls his first visit to the gallery in childhood: "I think it was the miners' holiday and my mum and dad were taking us to Edinburgh on the train – we missed it and we lay in the gardens and I wandered into the Galleries.

“I think I was more interested in the museum and not the art works, but eventually that would change and I would ignore the glass cases and go straight upstairs to the paintings.”

The artist was still living at home in Leven when he first took up painting with oils, a process that required copious amounts of turpentine to clean brushes and make the paint more malleable.

It drew a less than enthusiastic response from his father who would often knock on the artist’s bedroom door, protesting about the overpowering smell.

The artist (pictured by *Neil Hanna* and courtesy of OnFife) recalled: “I came home one night and he’d (his father) put a note on the door saying: ‘Do not enter without wearing your barrier gown’.”

Included in the show are several personal effects, including a paint palette, family photographs from childhood days and a model of the Bluebird car which features in one of Vetriciano’s best-loved paintings.

Bluebird at Bonneville is one of 57 private loans in the show, which includes hugely-popular pieces such as Valentine Rose, Mad Dogs and The Critical Hour of 3am.

Fife’s seascapes inspired two of his most successful works, Billy Boys and The Singing Butler, and the artist said: “I used to make the walk along the sands from Leven to Lower Largo – it’s a lovely walk, but if you wanted to go in swimming, you’d have to go a long way out to reach the sea, and that’s where I got the idea for the paintings.”

Also included in the exhibition – the artist’s first retrospective since a major show at Glasgow’s

Kelvingrove Art Gallery in 2013 – is Long Time Gone. The piece is set against the backdrop of a once familiar Fife landmark, the now-demolished Methil Power Station.

He said: “I think Methil Power Station was built when I was maybe eight or nine and it became, in retrospect, a bit like Battersea Power Station, it started to take on its own beauty and you could hardly imagine the landscape without it.”

Also on display are two doodles scribbled on betting slips, which were gifted by the artist to his grandfather. The sketches, completed when the artist was seven or eight, are two of many he drew on unused slips that Pasquale Vettriano provided to encourage young Jack’s love of art.

Jack had a close bond with Pasquale, who left Italy as a boy when his parents emigrated from Lazio in 1904. Known to all as ‘Big Pete’, he was a regular visitor to a bookie’s shop in Leven, where he indulged his love of horseracing.

Vettriano added: “I’ve been drawing pretty much as long as I can remember. For a boy that liked to doodle and get ideas down on paper, those betting slips were ideal.

“Pop loved the horses and, when we visited his home, he would have an ear cupped towards the television set, watching the racing intently.

“He knew if he gave me the slips, I would start to draw, so he would stuff his pockets full of them at the bookie’s and bring a wad back to the house.”

Vettriano said: “Pop was a quiet man and a gentle soul who knew that I loved to create pictures and I know he

would have been proud to have seen the exhibition.”