

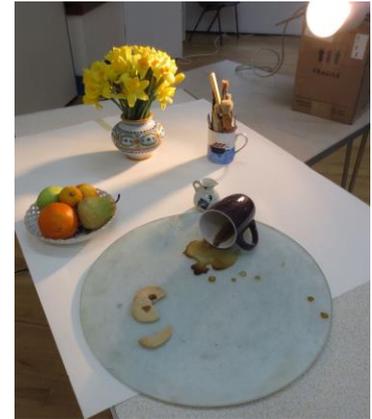


ODIHAM ART GROUP DEMONSTRATION REPORT

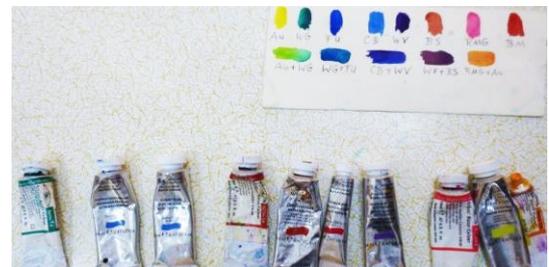
Bettina Schroeder demonstration, 6th February 2016; Luminous watercolours

Bettina was introduced by Jocelyn who gave us a glowing account of the painting holiday courses she had taken with Bettina in Scotland and Morocco and who made us all very envious, as we huddled in the village hall sheltering from a cold and stormy Saturday afternoon in February!

Bettina started by explaining how she approaches still life paintings by ensuring there is usually something a little out of kilter or unusual about the mix of objects, thereby creating tension in the subject rather than simply painting a vase of flowers or a bowl of fruit. She likes to encourage the viewer to imagine stories from the image. This was illustrated by her subject matter for the demonstration; there was a vase of daffodils, a bowl of fruit, jugs and a pot full of artist brushes but there was also a mug on its side with coffee spilled onto a mirrored plate and a broken biscuit, with strong lighting throwing shadows. What had happened? Why had the mug been knocked over? This ambiguity can be encouraged by the title you give to a painting; in this case maybe 'What happened' or 'Spillage' or 'Rushed'. There are no obvious answers in the set-up, the viewer has to make up their own mind on what it portrays.



First, the technical information. Bettina uses Arches NOT watercolour paper heavy weight (350gsm or 640gsm) because she finds it much more forgiving than lighter brands, which cannot stand up to rubbing out or scratching on the surface. She uses Winsor & Newton artist watercolours for demonstrations and always concentrates on high key, vibrant, translucent colours which she rarely mixes together, preferring to layer them thinly on top of one another to achieve the correct hue. Bettina recommends using squirrel mop brushes, which hold a lot of water and paint so are ideal for washes but also work well for fine work as they have a delicate point. However, she does have cheap synthetic flats for creating sharp lines where needed plus a rigger brush for detail. She also recommended using good quality Scotch masking tape to create horizons or straight lines in a painting – cheaper tape would lift any paint underneath but Scotch masking tape leaves the image undisturbed.



Bettina had completed a couple of paintings of the same subject for practice, one in a slightly looser style than the other, see right. These practice pieces had allowed her to finalise the paint choices for the demonstration, and she had brought them along for us to compare with the final piece. She had already drawn the objects' outline onto the demonstration paper – it is important to have an accurate drawing in place to allow the artist to have freedom to be loose with the paint, secure in the knowledge that the dimensions and perspective of the still life are correct.



She began by painting the vase of daffodils as they were light, delicate and central to guiding the eye around the scene. Wetting sections of the flowers first she then dropped Winsor Lemon onto them, allowing the paint to spread across the petals. This was followed by a touch of Winsor Orange in the centre of some flowers whilst it was still wet. She used the same washes on the bowl of fruit, all the time checking the strength of each wash on a piece of scrap paper before using it, to ensure the shade was right. Whilst Bettina did use a hairdryer to dry parts of the painting as she went along, she recommended using that method sparingly as it pushes the colour into the paper and tends to dull it rather than allowing it to float on top of the image. She painted the daffodil stems in washes of French Ultramarine, Winsor Green (Blue shade) and Apple Green, being careful that they overlapped correctly.



Bettina moved around the painting to work on all the image, ensuring it was balanced. She dropped water onto each area first then paint, using the natural tension on the waters' surface to pull colour across the page and letting it settle into the dimples in the paper – a combination of controlling the shapes whilst letting them flow. She stressed that it was vital to leave clean white paper for highlights that shine, don't cover all the paper or you will lose the freshness of the image. The Cobalt Blue lines on the pot were done with a dash of the brush, followed by a warm lilac/grey wash (Winsor Violet & Cobalt Blue) for the shadows cast by the objects. She then moved her easel so the painting was flat and used clean water to wet the top of the paper, carefully going round the outlines of the objects projecting into the background. She dropped a dark turquoise green mix into the water, creating a strong background to make the image leap out, particularly in those areas of paper left purposely clean and white.



Bettina made sure she used the same colours around the painting so it held together; for example she used the same shade in different strengths for the coffee spillage, the biscuit and a couple of the brushes. She stressed that it was very important to remember the three metre rule – keep standing back from your painting to see what works and what still needs balancing with shade or darks. She felt the cup was too dominant so blotted out some colour with damp cotton wool, which picks up the colour without damaging the paper or leaving marks. She washed a little pale grey around the painting to create harmony throughout the image and then added pale shadows to the side of the jugs and under the plate, bowl and basket as well as inside the mug. Faint yellow reflections on the mirrored plate picked up the yellow of the flowers and a stronger French Ultramarine wash over the larger jug made the small jug stand out.



The demonstration was a great opportunity to watch a very successful professional artist and tutor create a loose, colourful and intricate painting whilst explaining in straightforward terms her method of working. She is a lady who is obviously passionate about all aspects of the arts (she is a musician and performance artist too) and she brought that enthusiasm into her excellent demonstration. A very enjoyable afternoon.



Christine Sharp