

Introducing three new members

This year we welcome three new members, Louise Diggle, Robert Strange and Christine Watsom. Here's an opportunity to get to know them, and their work.

First, **Louise**, whose *Richmond Bridge* appears below. She's worked with pastels for over 30 years and exhibited with the Pastel Society on and off since 2008. "I wanted to seek membership as the Society represents the very best in contemporary pastel work. Its members are some of the greatest exponents of the medium: of course, I wanted to join! To have become a member of this society feels an endorsement and a great privilege. I also wanted to find out more about other painters' working practices."



Next in line is **Robert**, whose *Squashed Vehicles #2* appears top of next column. He describes himself as a collector, an organised hoarder. "I use dry media, mainly Prismacolour pencil, because they are accessible and can create a range of effects and textures," he says. "They are the pencil version of a harder oil pastel, and my students love using them. When I was accepted into my first Pastel Society show I was so excited I had tears in my eyes and couldn't stop telling my old students and colleagues; I had made it! The encouragement of the society cannot be underestimated and has helped me to become a more confident artist and to trust in my own work." He continues to collect and is looking out for old, discarded rusty tins at the moment along with torn sweet packaging inspired by his collection of 12,000 confectionery wrappers.



Colour-obsessed **Christine** (see *Purple Shutter* below) is the last of our trio. "There's nothing better than rifling through the wooden drawers of pastels at Cornelissen & Son," she says. "I've always enjoyed working in different media, but pastels provide me with the most direct way of applying pigment to a surface, without the intermediaries of a brush or having to mix paints on a palette. My work has been accepted for the PS Annual Exhibition on and off since 1991 but to have my work appreciated by some of the best pastel artists in the UK is a great honour."



THE PASTEL SOCIETY



Sketching at the Mall 2, Simon Hodges PS

Don't forget to visit our website at www.thepastelsociety.org.uk

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Featured Artist Simon Hodges, PS



Thames at first light

Who isn't a fan of paintings of the River Thames? In among those that Simon Hodges sent to accompany this article was the one above, in which he gives a modern treatment to subject matter that has inspired countless generations.

He took inspiration for many of those exhibited at the Pastel Society's 2021 Exhibition from time spent the previous year, walking around London recording with sketchbook and camera, both the atmosphere and, in particular, the new building work going on.

He feels that landscape is about both capturing the essence of a place and a narrative. In other words, the world changes, and he wishes to record a little bit of this change.

Having trained as an architect (even J.W. Turner spent time as an architectural draughtsman), he makes full use of his knowledge of buildings and the urban landscape in his painting. But as a professional artist, his previous life has also proved a good training ground.

"To paint 'professionally', I believe it must pay its way," he says. "To this end, the presentations and crits; portfolios, interviews and experiences of running a business have been of great importance in planning a path in this new vocation.

"Having a supportive wife, and gallery owners who have given me encouragement have also been essential."

A talent for the arts does seem to run in the family. One great uncle was an opera singer; an aunt went to art college and was an accomplished amateur artist; an uncle was both art teacher, painter and published his National Serviceman's Sketchbook. Then, there's the cousin who is a concert pianist, another a painter and a final one a film set designer – not counting a father who was a very talented amateur artist who would give paintings away rather than sell them when asked.

Hardly surprising, then, that when he showed talent as a youngster he was encouraged by both parents. "My father turned some drawings into our Christmas card; something that I have continued to this day," he says.

"When I said I wanted to go to art college, however, they asked a friend who did graphics to talk to me about what it took to succeed. I quickly realised that my personality did not match the competitiveness that was required and so, with my father's involvement in the building industry, I followed a career in architecture. Drawing played an important part in my work, but I never regretted it and will ever be thankful for all the guidance that I received."



Bath: past and future

Shaun Duke: "Creating interactions"

Shaun Duke won this year's Pastel Society Young Artist Award for his Self Portrait Head. His interest in art started early, linked to the video games he played as a youngster.

"The drawings for games like Metal Gear Solid, Final Fantasy and the Silent Hill series were incredible," he says, "and sent me down more than a few rabbit holes!"

It spurred him on, after school, to take an art and design course at college, introducing him to so many new artists, techniques, and ways of thinking that he never looked back. The downside was that, after finishing university and having to focus so heavily on contextual study, he found himself in a bit of a slump.

This continued until he felt the urge to get back to a life drawing room, more to just feel creative and meet other people than to chase any technical goals or produce anything meaningful. The quiet process of looking, reacting and reflecting in class enabled him to connect with complete strangers in a way that was unfamiliar – and he became hooked.

Now that he has people sitting just for him, he can delve deeper into the connection he found most interesting when he started. "I've never been very keen on overt narrative or in being a drawing room philosopher, so I just find shapes and compositions that appeal to me and use them as a springboard for creating these interactions," he says.

"The familiarity and relatability of people always pulls me back to figure drawing and portraiture. I think there's something about the depiction of other humans that captivates us at a base level and makes us want to look more deeply."

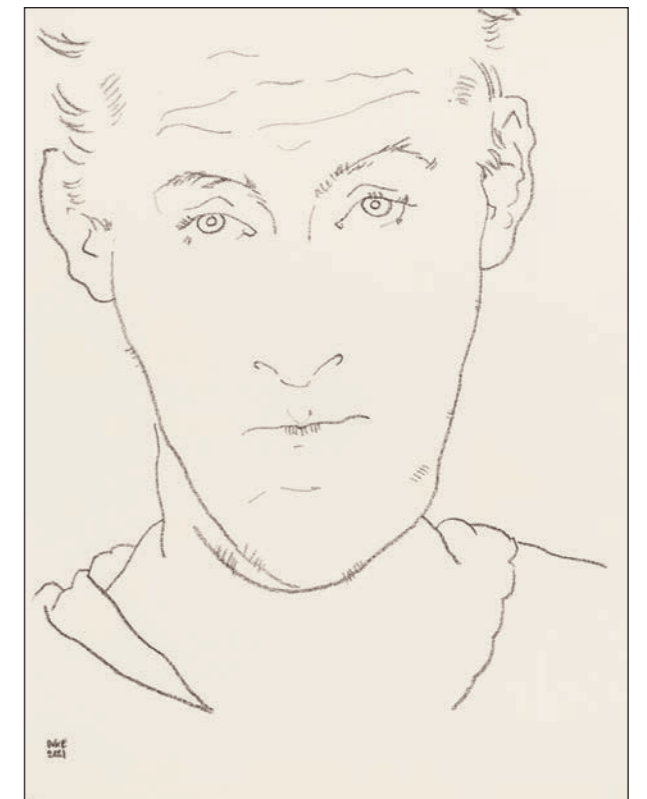
His attraction to pencil/pastel as a medium, apart from its immediacy and tactility, stems from an appreciation of how every mark can be seen in a much more direct way to oil paint, for instance. With line, he suggests, it's rather naked and transparent. "You can follow it and see where it breaks, the changing weight of the hand," he says. "It seems like a more honest document of the moment, like it could have been done yesterday or 500 years ago, and we'd still be able to perceive

the human touch." Maybe as an analogy it's worth thinking of the difference between a machine-printed book and a handwritten journal.

So will his prize impact on his perception of the Pastel Society? "I always assumed that the Pastel Society was only about, well, pastels, but after seeing the brilliant work on display I now realise it's also a celebration of the broader field of drawing itself," he says.

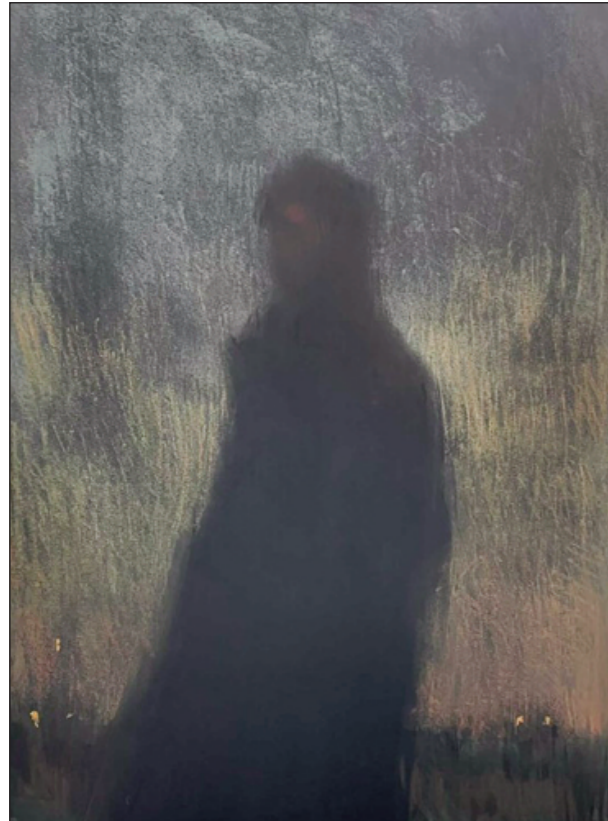
"So if you're an artist that's hesitant because you don't think your work would fit in, just apply anyway! My entry was submitted on a bit of a whim, and I never really expected for my drawing to make it past selection, let alone win the Young Artist Award.

"The praise and appreciation the Pastel Society's members have shown me has been really encouraging and their willingness to support emerging artists through an open call like this has been quite refreshing after the past couple of years we've had! My warmest thanks to all involved."



Self Portrait Head

Anne Magill: Need for 'inner resilience'



Nocturne

Anne Magill's *Nocturne* was the winner of this year's Henri Roche Award. It's a painting that exemplifies her style, drawing you in and making you want to know more about the subject matter. She's a born storyteller.

As an illustrator in the mid-'80s, given that there was no scanning, her work had to be taken to the art director for approval then sent to a photographer. The size of her paintings (very large), their fragility, and the nature of the medium meant they were easily damaged and so after a few accidents she gradually moved across to using paint.

She never left pastels completely, though, using charcoal more over the years. The long drying time of oils, meanwhile, had begun to frustrate her and she became beguiled again by the immediacy of pastels, the beautiful rich colours and the breadth of different types now available.

"I lay out the pastels as I would my brushes," she says. "One side of my studio is for pastel and charcoal work.

Anne conjures a feeling of stillness in her paintings, and I was curious as to how she achieved that. Her initial response was that she hadn't a clue. But, having considered it for a few more minutes, she answered that she keeps working at a picture until it appears 'right'. "It's quite hard to pin down what that 'rightness' is for me," she says, "but I know that when I initially make a drawing or painting it is much, much more detailed, more technically correct than at the stage when I consider it finished.

"There's a middle stage where the picture may look completely finished but it doesn't feel finished to me and then that's when much visual busyness gets eliminated, so there's less distraction away from the main subject of the work, the space around them becomes clearer and perhaps from that comes a sense of stillness."

Her technique, she says, has evolved over time, generally becoming looser, and textural. The larger works have influenced her mark making, "it's a bit more expressive," she says, "I'm freer in how I work. Instinctive. I get less bogged down with detail. I'm a bit more patient with it, too." She's also experiencing real joy in the making of her art now and hopes that comes through in the work. "I'd love it if that continues – with a few surprises," she says.

Anne is realistic about her choice of career. "Painting," she says, "is a solitary job. I don't think we acknowledge that inner resilience, it's so important to be able to keep going as we weave through all the high and lows of the job. We all have times of work going well, or not so well, and of self-doubt."

Looking back, she highlights the influence of two 'amazing' teachers, who also happened to be practicing artists: one at primary school, and the other at secondary. "I was brought up in a small rural village in Ireland," she says. "This is over 50 years ago, so very different times.

"They endeavored to give me a sense of self belief in what I did. That consistent encouragement and generosity propelled me on to art college and beyond – despite my own reticence. I can still hear their 'look at this!' 'Try that!' 'Crack on!' – even now when I'm hurling canvases across my studio in frustration!"

His technique has evolved over time. "All the architects I have met can draw but they don't paint," he says. "Having spent over ten years drawing in pencil, charcoal and water-based mediums, I have just begun to paint with pastels and to paint with colour, albeit very muted ones to suit our British weather. I love the challenge and directness of laying down pure pigment without anything other than your hand."

His process, he claims, is uncomplicated. "The beginning is easy; wherever we go 'is a busman's holiday'," he says. "My way of working is best compared to an iceberg. Sketching must be about 75% of my work. Self-indulgent maybe as I enjoy it so much, but also essential to exploring a subject and the possibilities that it may reveal.

"As to materials; for en plein air sketching; less is more. For studio sketching and studies; anything goes. But when it gets to the finished painting, both my mood and the possible outlet is considered. As confidence has grown, I think I have progressed from drawing and painting to painting and then some drawing if that makes sense. It helps me to free myself from my architectural roots.

"No plan is sacrosanct and the finished work may vary a lot from the initial idea. My favourite quotation at the moment is from Heraclitus; 'there is nothing permanent except change.'"

Away from his painting, Simon has a full schedule. He is the Pastel Society's Vice President, in charge of redesigning its website, and suggested setting up a studio for workshops and demonstrations in the East at this year's annual exhibition (see pages 6 and 7), which proved a major attraction.

So what does he see as his main challenge when painting? "For me; depression. There are some days when I just don't see the point of painting and others when I have so much 'noise' in my head that I have to lose myself in my garden to refocus."

For all this, the colour in his paintings is so joyous that it lifts the spirits and encouraged me to ask which one is his favourite or that gives him particular pleasure? The answer is possibly to be expected.

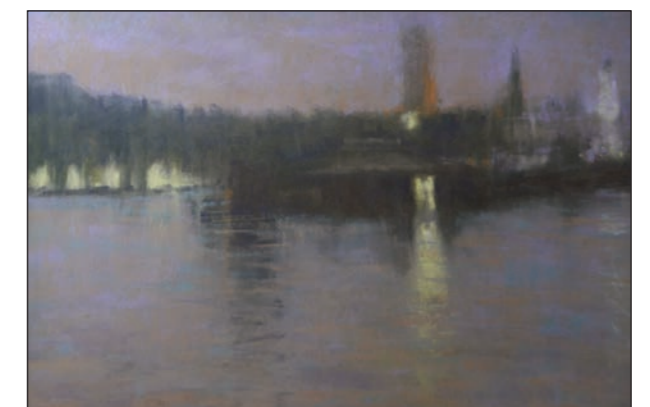
"The last one; for about a couple of minutes," he says. "I then have to think about the next one before I start getting too negative about what I have just completed. It is a constant problem but at the same time I am so delighted when I see one of my old paintings and can think 'not so bad.'"



Sketching in Venice



Sketching in the Peaks



Thames at night

The President's Letter

By the time you read this, we should have had some pleasant warm weather. That wasn't the case in the first week of this year's Annual Exhibition, when the bad weather included what amounted to a small hurricane. I was in the Pastel Society Exhibition Studio at the Mall Galleries doing a hands-on demonstration of oil pastels on the day of the 'big wind' and I had all the people in the Gallery joining me – all six of them!

Vice President Simon Hodges' cleverly put together Studio Space was fortunately much more heavily used for much of the rest of the Exhibition. He was there every day giving people the chance to try out pastels and discuss their use. This was immensely popular, and gratifying given that only a few weeks earlier we still had COVID restrictions in place.

Having managed to successfully navigate my first Annual Exhibition with everybody's generous help, I was pleased with several aspects of it and disappointed with a few others. The disappointments were that the sales were nowhere near our target (set by the Mall Galleries) and that the weather badly affected visitor numbers in the first week.

We always want good sales as that encourages members to continue to submit their best work to the Exhibition. The mitigating circumstance this year is that we had a July 2021 exhibition and virtual exhibition that together saw a very large sales figure achieved.

There is likely a current downturn in buying generally due to increases in cost of living and the fact that people are now spending more disposable income on holidays and leisure. The RBA's sales figures were similarly impacted in March. The bad weather issue is one that will naturally occur with our February time slot, and we are looking into that with the Mall Galleries to see if another, later, date could be made available.

The pleasing aspects of the Exhibition were, as mentioned, the Studio, the response to the quality of the hang, and the positive feedback about the quality of the selection. The Members have also voted in three candidates (see page 12 for further details) out of the five who applied. This bodes well for our future, and I would like to congratulate them on achieving their goal of joining us. We continue to

encourage a range of diverse new talent with our 'Encouraged Artists' list to try and get more applications. A big thank you goes out to those of you who donated to the Sealed Bids this year. You managed to raise £3,793, which will help with our running costs that will now incur the payment of a treasurer.

There were two exhibitions for members planned outside the Mall Galleries so far this year; at the RAC in Pall Mall in March and at Thompson's Gallery in Aldeburgh in April/May (see articles). The Council continues to look out for opportunities to exhibit. If you have any ideas for exhibition venues, please let us know.

I thought that, post-exhibition, my Presidential duties would tail-off but there is still an awful lot for Simon and I to do. We are updating the Website and sorting out our treasurer issues. I intend, however, to return to pastel painting soon inspired by my colleagues' work and I hope you do, too. Have a very productive summer so that we can see all your new work next year.

Richard Rees PPS

Officers and Council Members

President	Richard Rees
Vice-President	Simon Hodges
Treasurer	Colin Murfet
Honorary Secretary	Jenny Halstead
Trustee	Moirra Huntly
Membership Secretary	Sheila Goodman
Publicity Secretary	Melodie Cook
Friends Secretary	Norma Stephenson, Felicity House
Education Secretary	Richard Rees
Exhibitions Secretary	Peter Vincent

Council: Sarah Bee, Jeannette Hayes, Susan Relph, Roy Wright.

Editorial Contributions

This newsletter aims to reflect the news and views of its members, and so if you are planning any workshops or exhibitions, please get in touch and I will endeavour to feature your input in a forthcoming issue. Likewise, if you have an article that is bursting to be written, please forward it to me. My email is Louella.miles@writers4management.com and I will acknowledge receipt and get back to you as soon as I can.

News about the Pastel Society

Heatherley's wasn't the only workshop venue, though.

This year, for the first time, there was a dedicated space in the east gallery at the annual exhibition for demonstrations and workshops, as well exhibiting paintings. Despite the weather, and the ensuing lack of people at times, these sessions were well received.

As Simon Hodges, who proposed the idea, explained: "While we have the benefit of using essentially dry mediums with no solvents, as a society we are showing the way with our endeavours to communicate with our audience. As a studio artist myself, this appeared 'a no brainer' to me and watching Felicity, Richard, John and Roger embrace the idea was as exciting as spending time there myself."

Calling all tutors

Workshops and demonstrations are a key tool to spread the word about pastels and encourage greater numbers to experiment. But this, of course, needs a comprehensive database of members who are prepared both give of their time and expertise to teach. Richard Rees has compiled the list below as a starter but is keen to add to it. If you're able to add your name, please get in touch with him.

- Melodie Cook
- Katrina Wallis-King
- John Tookey
- Richard Rees
- Roger Dellar
- Felicity House
- Tony Allain
- Halla Shafey
- Caroline Bays

Pastel Society Website

The role of a Vice President is never easy, but Simon Hodges has also taken on responsibility for updating the Pastel Society's website. I asked him a few questions about the challenge. What, for example, is the brief?

"I see it as the virtual HQ for The Pastel Society," says Simon. "As such, it has to be a visually exciting space that has news, information and archives and compatible with how we all search for information in this day and age. Architect Alex Gordon coined the phrase 'long-life, loose-fit.' Technology moves so fast that we need a site that can adapt to changing information delivery and changing art markets and whilst it will not be a selling site it will guide the user to both individual artists and their sales or The Mall Gallery and theirs."

The old version, he continues, served its time very well but life goes on and "we all need to embrace change if we are to progress." Perhaps even more important, it also needs to suit the use of smart phones.

The challenges are not to be under-estimated. The Pastel Society is by no means a large organization, it has a limited budget and a small but dedicated membership.

"While change is needed, it cannot be rushed," he says. "We must find the right website designer for both the initial design and set up, but who will also be around to ensure continuity and consider how the site can be run without unpaid individuals being asked to take on too much."

The look of the site is another hot potato. The ROI site is frequently mentioned, and as a starting point it has many good elements. "But the site must have the stamp of The Pastel Society and not just the strong logo we already use designed by our member Peter Vincent," he says. As to the schedule, the clock is ticking. Simon says: "Hopefully the website will be up and running efficiently before the next call for work for the 2023 exhibition but time will tell."

Inside PS Workshops

It has been a busy time since the last newsletter. We've had the annual exhibition at the Mall Galleries, workshops there and at Heatherley's, and members displaying their paintings up and down the country. And that's without talking about what's being going on behind the scenes. So, let's attempt a catch up.

Workshops

This spring saw the Pastel Society hold a number of workshops, with expert tuition and enthusiastic participation of attendees.



Heatherley's hosted courses by Melodie Cook, Richard Rees, John Tookey, and Katrina Wallis-King. We were taken on a tour of paths and streams by Katrina (*one of whose students is shown hard at work above*) and challenged by Melodie throughout the day (*see top of next column*) to complete rapid fire sketches and a longer pose after lunch. Richard (*middle, next column*), meanwhile, was putting his students through their paces, exploring the use of colour and colour combinations. He led a short discussion on colour theory before looking at the ways student could learn from different pastel artists how to use colour subtly and effectively.



Award Winners 2021

This year we welcomed Richard Saxon CBE to open the Pastel Society 2021 Exhibition. Richard is now a construction client adviser, having started as an architect and urban designer. He chaired the international practice BDP as the climax of a 40-year career at the practice. A lifelong reformer, he co-founded the British Council for Offices, chaired the ginger group, the Reading Construction Forum, and wrote extensively about creating value, digital ways of working and the atrium building concept. His award-winning design career spans the now-listed HQ of the Halifax Building Society and the master plan for the All England Lawn Tennis Club. A Past Master of the Worshipful Company of Chartered Architects, he was awarded a CBE for services to architecture and construction.

Derwent Award

Caitlin Heslop (Umbrian Hills - below)



Caran D'Ache

Tony Allain PS RSMA (Ripples On Loch Earn)

Artists & Illustrators/Unison Non-Member

Hero Johnson (Matthew)

Mamut

Norma Stephenson (Mr Price's Old Farm Shed)

West Design and Faber-Castell Award

Mantas Poderys (Shota)

Henri Roché – La Maison Du Pastel

Anne Magill (Nocturne)

Anthony J Lester & Frank Herring & Sons Award

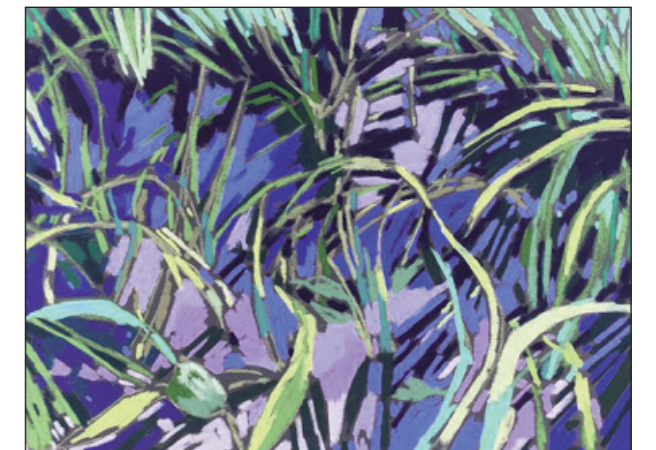
Curtis Holder (The Talk)

The Pastel Society Young Artist Award

Shaun Duke (Self Portrait Head)

The Pastel Society Catalogue Award

First Prize: Caitlin Heslop (By Your Side - below)
Second Prize: Maria Kaleta (Covent Garden London)



Schmincke

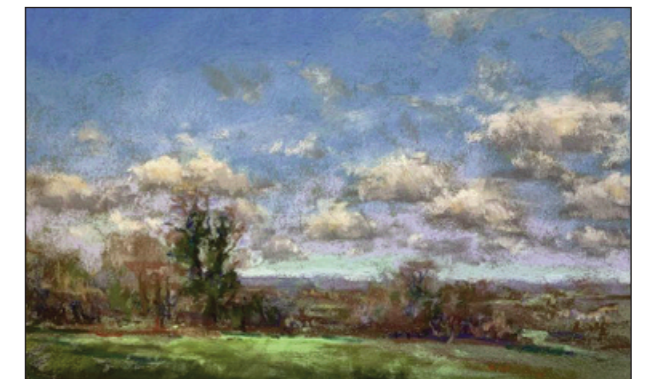
John Threlfall (Winter Stubble)

The Artist Magazine

Keith Bennett PS (Mousehole)

The Yoshimoto Prize

(£1,000 for an outstanding work, in any dry medium, by a non-member)
Georgina Potter (Ivy Clad Oak Trees - below)



Unison Colour

Member Award: Felicity House PS (Japanese Anemones in a David Garland)

Young Artists Award: Tanya Avchinnikova (Crosby Beach, Hiding in the Dunes)

Hurricanes hardly ever happen...



President Richard Rees addresses a packed exhibition on the opening night



Clockwise from above: Artists at work at this year's Exhibition; Sam Stephenson receives the Mamut Award on behalf of Norma Stephenson; Felicity House PS Winner of the Unison Member Award; Richard G Saxon CBE Opens the exhibition

...unless it's Exhibition time!



Clockwise from top: Hero Johnson, Winner of the Unison Non Member award & the Artists & Illustrators Award (With Matthew); Retiring President Jeannette Hayes receives her 'Thank you' Gifts from the Society; Keith Bennett PS Winner of The Artist Magazine Award; Life class in progress

