



'Draw what you see, paint what you feel'

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Methodology - "Draw what you see; paint what you feel."

In my work, I try to evoke in the viewer, a sense of pleasure of a remembered day or time or even just a good feeling. To achieve this, I use a combination of visual references, intellectual elements and emotional triggers to try to release the memory.

The visual references are the trees, cottages and other recognisable objects, the intellectual elements are the sense of it being a 'real' place e.g. a Scottish glen or a Spanish hill farm, and the emotional triggers are the colours, shapes and rhythmic 'marks' I make as the painting develops.

The paint surface, the brush marks and gestures, the colour relationships should appear spontaneous, to have an internal energy and an organic life of their own independent of the 'scene' they portray. The surface of the painting should have a discrete appeal which is not necessarily connected to the content of the painting, but at the same time the place or elements portrayed should appear familiar and inviting.

There should be a feeling that what you are looking at is somewhere you remember having a good time or somewhere you want to go someday. My still life paintings also contain elements which should awaken happy memories e.g. champagne, flowers, ribbons and wrapped birthday presents have all featured in recent work. Content is important in achieving the first crucial step of making someone stop to look at your work. One of my artist heroes is Matisse. Not only do you enjoy the world he has created in paint but I, for one, would love to inhabit his paintings and share his world.

My painting style has been pared down and simplified over the years. I try to avoid an emphasis on skill or facility by using old scrubby brushes which simply don't allow precise manipulation of the pigment. I think the viewer can sometimes be overawed by the level of skill shown by an artist and this can come in the way of a proper dialogue with the painting. I would ideally like to reach the stage where I could paint with both hands at the same time!

One of the best compliments I have been paid about my work was by a Professor who had bought quite a large painting. He said he had hung it on a wall at the foot of his bed so it was the first thing he and his wife saw when they woke up each day. He said it made him start each day with a smile!

Recording memories of the total experience - Wherever I am in the world, even on family holidays, I make time to sit down with my sketchbook and record any view or object that appeals to me. If there is a more pleasant way to pass a day than drawing while sitting in the shade of an olive tree in Provence or sheltered by a rock in the Scottish Highlands, then I have yet to find it.

When I look through my old drawing books, even the most cursory of sketches has the power to awaken the memory of the day with amazing clarity. A few pencil lines on paper help me recall where I was sitting, how I got there, the time of day, the time of year and even how I was feeling when I made the drawing. It is this memory of the total experience that I am trying to capture in my paintings.

I find it very difficult to complete a painting without these drawings as aide-memoires, but what I paint and how I paint it is a personal record, a distillation of everything seen and experienced over the years. It is not just the observed Scottish landscape which informs my vision as a painter; it is Walt Disney's "Snow White", Gauguin's Tahiti and childhood years spent in the local "flea-pit" (movie theatre) believing the world really existed in glorious Technicolor.

Creating blots and diagrams - When I begin a new painting, I seldom have any idea how it will look when it is completed. The process of making the work and the uncertainty involved is what holds me in thrall and keeps me happily at my easel every day. The business of creating a painting involves making countless decisions, some big and some small, but every decision will affect the final outcome. (It would be fascinating to wire up an artist with electrodes to measure exactly how many choices must be made during this process of creation.)

One of the first decisions is the type of support to use. I am always keen to try different painting surfaces but at present I tend to use 6mm MDF as a painting support. I often apply several coats of very liquid paint, and this robust board can take heavy soakings without warping or damage. Then comes the preparation of the surface, which is typically a small-sized panel. For me, this has taken on great importance and I go to elaborate lengths to have exactly the right combination of texture - sometimes achieved through collage - and tactile qualities before I even consider beginning with paint.

Like most artists, I have more than my fair share of idiosyncrasies in my methodology and one of them is probably my use of two palettes, side by side. One contains traditional acrylic colours while the other is loaded with heavy bodied acrylics. This gives me much greater control over the flow of the paint and how it attaches to the different surfaces I have created. The physical application of paint is crucial to my work.

I have a real fear of the facile, and to avoid any tendency to produce "slick" work, I use cheap bristle brushes, which defy attempts to manipulate the paint. These include decorator's brushes, and indeed one of my favourites is a cook's pastry brush. These brushes force me to simplify the marks I make. Watching me paint, you would see lots of slapping and poking and scrubbing and very little in the way of careful stroking and caressing.

Applying the initial layers of acrylics is the most interesting and nerve wracking point in the work. At some point, I realise that my options are still wide open but I know that the moment has come to get off the fence and make decisions. The smallest addition can have such impact - a few black lines can turn a dark area into a copse of trees, while adjusting an area of warm colour can suddenly create a feeling of scale and perspective. Almost before I know it, the painting has an internal logic which determines how it must progress.

Returning to sketches - At this stage, I am totally absorbed in the physical act of painting and work very quickly and intuitively. When I feel I have taken this phase of the work as far as I can, I will put it to one side in the studio and look at it from time to time over a period of days. I wait for the panel to awaken some memory or suggest a location, which I can find in my sketchbooks to provide the impetus for finishing the work. I have several sketchpads full of drawings, made on location over the years, and these drawings provide the compositional elements that give each work its sense of "place".

Once completed, these small panels become the starting point for larger pieces. I will try to develop those elements in the smaller panels that I feel are the most successful. If the larger pieces are successful in their own right, they in turn become the starting point for even larger scale paintings. The

process can also be reversed with larger paintings being de-constructed and reworked as small panels, and then the process starts again.

Concentrating on colour balance and paint quality

My method of working has developed over several years, but is constantly evolving and open to change. Just as I have little idea how each painting will develop, I have only a vague idea of the direction my work will take over the next few years. Recently, I have found myself working in series, each painting exploring a similar theme or approach. This means working on several very small panels at the same time, concentrating on colour balance and paint qualities.

Many people have suggested that my work would suit sunnier climes - Spain, Italy and Morocco being some of the places mentioned - and I must admit to finding the prospect appealing. So if you are in one of these places and you see a short, slightly plump figure drawing in the shade of an olive tree, with a big smile on his face, say hello. It'll be me!

Process - My colour palette and painting process.

	lemon
	cadmium yellow
	cadmium red
	crimson
	deep violet
	monestial blue
	cobalt blue
	monestial green
	black
	titanium white

system 3 acrylics

	cadmium yellow
	pthalo blue
	cadmium red
	crimson
	titanium white

heavy body acrylics

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Art in the making: the creation of a work - Clevans Farm



1. Building a textured foundation. As a large expanse of white can be quite intimidating, I immediately established broad areas of warm and cool colour. I then began to create a heavily textured, collaged surface, using torn strips of different papers and pieces of canvas.

I also used a trowel and brush to build up areas with a mixture of impasto medium and PVA adhesive. The board was in a horizontal position at this stage so I could work on it from all sides.

2. Enhancing surface appeal. When this had dried, I applied several coats of a mixture of very liquid acrylic and liquid soap, using a large decorator's brush. This adhered in different ways to the varying surfaces, giving the painting a very attractive tactile quality.



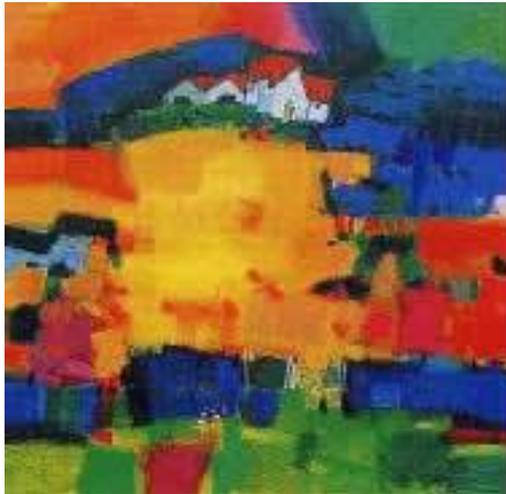
It was so nice, in fact, that it took a degree of resolve to continue working, as there was a real fear that I might not be able to improve on it.



3. Developing abstract form. Using mostly thinned acrylic paints and flat bristle brushes, I concentrated on manipulating the key ingredients colour, shape and texture - in a purely abstract form.

4. Communicating with the work. I then continued to develop the abstract pattern with applications of heavier, more opaque paint. At some point in this process, the painting began to "talk" to me, suggesting a location or mood for me to develop.

Although I had already decided which edge would be the top, I had not yet established a foreground or horizon or indeed any sense of scale in the painting.



5. Fitting into a composition. At this point, I decided to develop the compositional elements based loosely on a drawing I had made several years ago while staying with friends near Glasgow. I put in the farm sitting on the brow of a small hill at the absolute point where the city ended and the countryside began. The day I made the drawing was a typical summer's day in the west of Scotland - gloriously warm and sunny but with the threat of squalls never far away. It was this state of flux and

sudden change that I eventually tried to capture.

6. Starting over. Having completed the small-scale, preparatory painting, I set about creating "Clevan's Farm" (acrylic/mixed media) at its final size of 90 x 120cm (35 x 47").

Notice that in the second work, I switched from a square to a horizontal format. I repeated my collage techniques but I also added "squiggles" and "swirls" of fluid paint, all of which I then covered with more intense, richer, opaque paints. I felt this brought out the sensation of unpredictability and sudden shifts.



Analysis - About some of my paintings

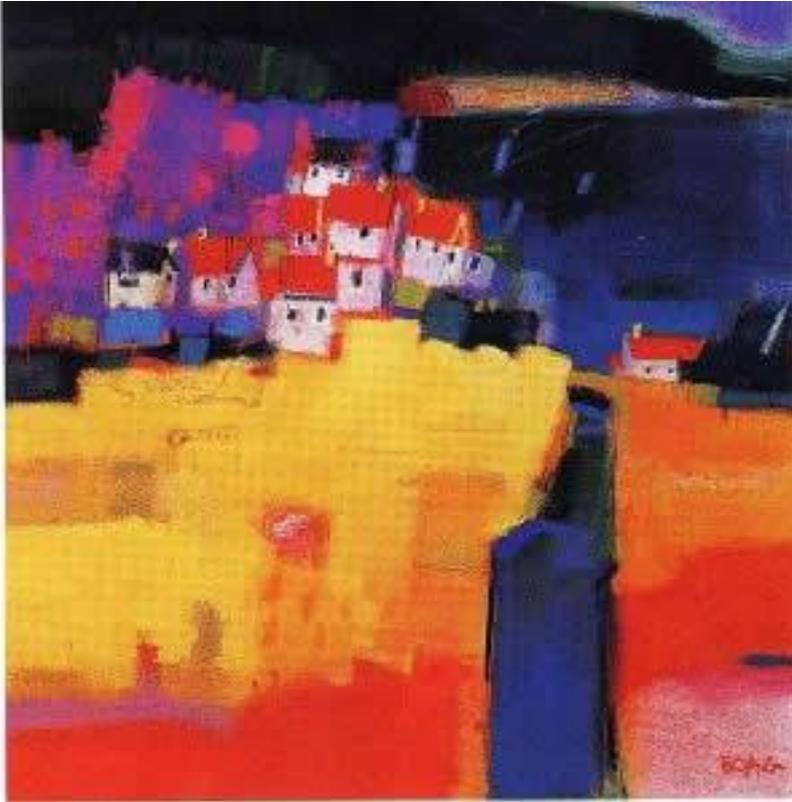
1. Approaching rain, Durris

For this painting I adapted a technique, which was a favourite of an old friend. The first layers of colour are not paint, but cut and torn pieces of colour tissue paper. This creates a beautiful luminosity in the light areas and a rich violet hue for the shadows. I tried to preserve these qualities as much as possible as I worked the painting and I was very pleased when the final coat of Daler Rowney acrylic gloss varnish enhanced the effect even more.



2. Headland Skateraw

Skateraw is the name of the old fishing village from which Newtonhill grew and I thought it an appropriate title for this painting, which shows the natural harbour and cliffs, which provided the genesis of the community. I liked this composition, which combines elements of drawings from different viewpoints, and have used several variations of it in other paintings.



3. New Houses Cammachmore

The high horizon line and thick bank of trees in this painting are typical features of the area around my home where I do most of my outdoor drawing. Working with reds of this intensity can be an exhilarating experience, but one fraught with problems, as they can overpower some quiet, calmer colour relationships happening in other parts of the painting. But bold strong colour need not mean crude colour, and it can require a subtle touch to successfully paint a high intensity colour composition.



4. Spring Day Windyedge

If I had to choose to paint only one subject for the rest of my days, it would be this little group of houses and farm buildings, set on the skyline, less than a mile from my studio. There is only one way out of Newtonhill, where I live and as you cross the flyover, this is the view you see. I estimate I must have looked at this scene at least 4,000 times and it rarely ceases to inspire me. Like Monet's 'Haystacks' the ever-changing light and seasons create a different painting every time you look.



5. Summerfield with crows

I was beguiled by an oil painting I saw by Nael Hannah, an Iranian artist working in Scotland, who uses thick, sumptuous impasto in his work. I wanted to try a similar technique in this painting and decided to renew my acquaintance with oil paint. It did not take me long to remember why I had taken up acrylics! Although the oil paint itself is more sensuous and holding, the long drying time between coats left me tearing my hair out with impatience.



6. Windyedge with zingy yellow

This painting is about as large as I usually go, though I have had an urge recently to paint really BIG! The main problem with large paintings is retaining the freshness and spontaneity which comes easily to smaller pieces. Painting a large work is a bit like a poker player suddenly having to raise the stakes - but if you can hold your nerve you can still win the jackpot.

