

Friends of York Art Gallery: Q and A

A series where artists answer questions about their practice
in dialogue with Judith Glover

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Tim Pearce, painter and ceramicist, based in Warthill, to the east of York



Can you describe your artistic practice?

I am a painter and ceramicist in equal measure, with occasional forays into printmaking and found object assemblages. Such a versatility in both two and three dimensions springs from a fulfilling career as an art educator in South Yorkshire schools, involving a daily engagement with skills in a wide range of media. The relationship between my largely

representational paintings and dominantly abstract sculpture is a continual source of intuitive exploration and revelation.

Since moving into the area some ten years ago, I have had solo shows at Pocklington Arts Centre, St Peter's School's Whitestone Gallery, the University of York's Norman Rea Gallery and most recently at Blossom Street Gallery where, for almost the first time, I was able to show a large amount of my two and three dimensional work together in the same space.

What started you off as an artist?

As an only child I spent much time occupying myself on drawing activities. When I failed the 11+ (hardly anyone passed from my urban Primary School), one small consolation was that I got to spend more time in the art rooms at the Secondary School. Five years later I became apparently one of the first people in England to gain an A Level (Art) from a Secondary Modern establishment at a time, in the early 1960s, when most pupils left such places with nothing. Eventually, moving onto a Teacher Training College and majoring in Art, I became captivated by the contemporary art scene and in particular Op and Kinetic Art. This very much fired my imagination in terms of the part played by illusion in pictorial art, a subject which still preoccupies me to this day.

Who or what are your influences?

No artist works in a vacuum and I am very much aware of so many powerful influences. In 1984 I completed a degree in Art History

specialising in radical developments in Europe between 1860 and 1960. My understanding and in-depth appreciation of the momentous transformations brought about by both the Cubist and Futurist movements greatly informed my practice and liberated my creativity. Such modes of representation are for me a way of responding to the world rather than simply a means of applying a modernist formulaic convention.

In 2010, on my retirement, I completed an MA in ceramics in Bradford,



seizing on the opportunity to apply my cubo/futurist sensitivities in paint into a sculptural dimension in clay, where negative space, intersecting planes, illusionistic ambiguity and geometrically rhythmical structure might be given free expression.

Strong influences have emerged from such diverse sources as modular forms in nature, industrial and agricultural machinery, and the architecture of Frank Gehry!

[Image: *Tumbling Forms*, stoneware ceramic]

More recently, as a volunteer at York Art Gallery in the Anthony Shaw Space, I have had time to study the output of so many UK ceramicists, in particular the work of Gordon Baldwin and Ewan Henderson. My Hands-on-Here involvement with the altarpiece 'St. Luke Painting the Virgin' from the Dirk Bouts Workshop of 1485 encouraged me to carry out media experiments with that very rarely used technique of silverpoint.

How would you describe your recent work?

Recent work continues to oscillate between condensing experienced



events into single dynamic images, and the more autonomous activity of creating primarily abstract compositions. In terms of media I have periodically found ways of bringing the 2D and 3D together more fully. For example, my response to the rhythms of a birdbath in use have found equivalents in paint and clay. At other times I have been able

to explore the possibilities of working in low relief in both ceramic and found objects. [Image: *Birdbath Developments*]

Regarding my ceramics, they are always precisely constructed and made by draping slabs of clay over improvised formers, cutting and joining when leather-hard, and eventually glazing to stoneware temperatures. For many years this was done on modest dimensions, determined partly by the size of my kiln. In more recent times, however, I have sought to work on a larger scale by making forms in sections before typically assembling on vertical metal rods and then placing in outdoor locations.

The process of creating our own sculpture garden in Warthill continues unabated and hopefully can be enjoyed once again by visitors at the 2021 York Open Studios weekends.



What are your main challenges?

I have always found it a challenge to resist the temptation to simply replicate that which appears successful, thereby missing the opportunity to explore the unfamiliar, even though it may be out of my comfort zone with a higher chance of failure. This is particularly true in ceramics where the craft pottery tradition so often conditions expectation towards skilful but predictable and repetitious outcomes. The stereotype of a bearded, sandal-wearing and muesli-eating country potter still dictates much of society's perception here. I, on the other hand, am a sculptor who happens to work in the superbly versatile medium that we call clay.

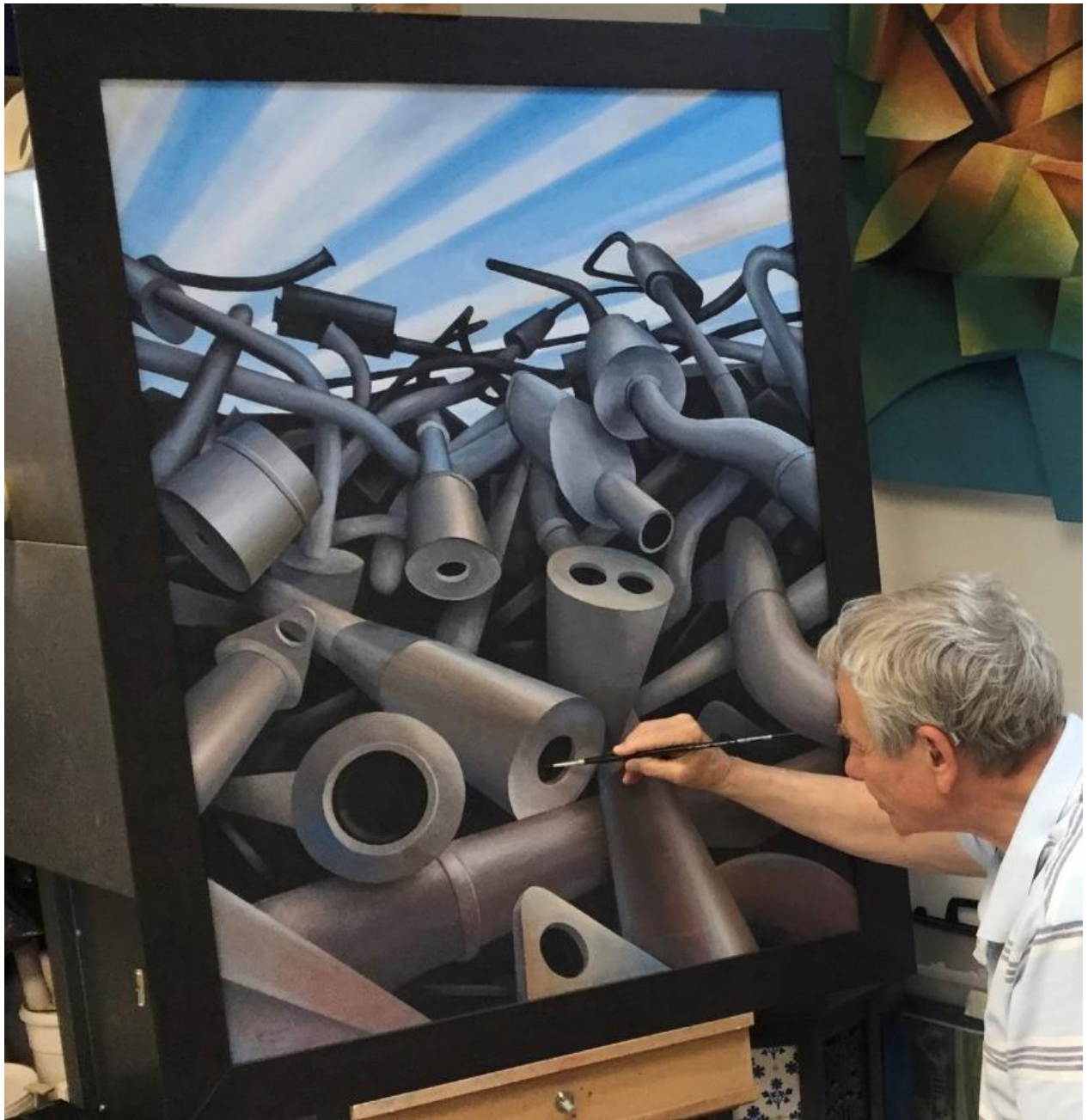
How has the recent lockdown affected your practice?

In terms of access to my studio, I have had few difficulties as it is situated in a purpose-built building adjacent to the house. More problematic has been the removal of exhibiting opportunities as motivating objectives within the year. York Open Studios was cancelled and my participation in Leeds Fine Artists annual show at Dean Clough in Halifax postponed until 2021.

However, lockdown did result in having more time to discover aspects of the local environment, one such walk, for example, offering up the chance encounter with an abandoned plough at Welburn. The painted interpretation below reveals a rather more psychological outcome than most of my pre-pandemic pieces. [Image: *Ploughshare Reverie*]



Equally surrealist in feel is the stacked exhaust systems painting below, completed during this period of enforced restrictive movement. This has been specially created for a forthcoming exhibition at the University of Leeds Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery, in which each submission is a personal take on a specific item in their permanent collection. Titled *Entwined Forms*, this is a response to [Edward Wadsworth's](#) 1919 watercolour of the debris left over from a Black Country steelworks.



Do you have a website where our members can find out more about your practice?

My website is www.tim-pearce.com. I also have a gallery page at www.leedsfineartists.co.uk