

## Friends of York Art Gallery

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

6.

Alison Taylor, Associate of the Royal Photographic Society



*Can you describe your artistic practice?*

I am a seascape photographer, mostly working on the shoreline of the North East coast between Northumberland and Bridlington. It is a fabulous coast with cliffs, amazing sandy beaches and years of history still in evidence – ready to be explored by photographers. My submission to the panel of the Licentiate of the Royal Photographic Society in June 2018 consisted of landscapes, but as soon as it was finished I knew I wanted to specialise in seascape photography. I am fascinated by the sea, whatever its moods.

I have two main methods of working when on the shoreline. If I am going to photograph waves I attach my 70-200mm lens to the camera (Fujifilm XT-2) and position myself upwind of where I am likely to shoot. I spend time reading the waves, so that I can aim the camera at the probable point of impact. With the lens at 200mm the field of view is very small, so I need to be able to visualise and predict where the action is going to be.

Most of the time I wander along the shoreline with my wide-angle lens looking for shapes. These can be water channels, ripples, swash lines, foam, or anything that attracts my attention. The tides rise and fall incredibly rapidly; so when I see a composition I have to work very quickly, in order to take the photograph before it is washed away by the sea or is stranded. This is especially true when working right on the strandline.

A tripod and neutral density filters are essentials, as the exposure can vary from 0.5 seconds to 2 minutes depending on what I want to capture. Long exposures reveal shapes and patterns that aren't visible to the naked eye, so I have to use my imagination and experience to find compositions that will work.



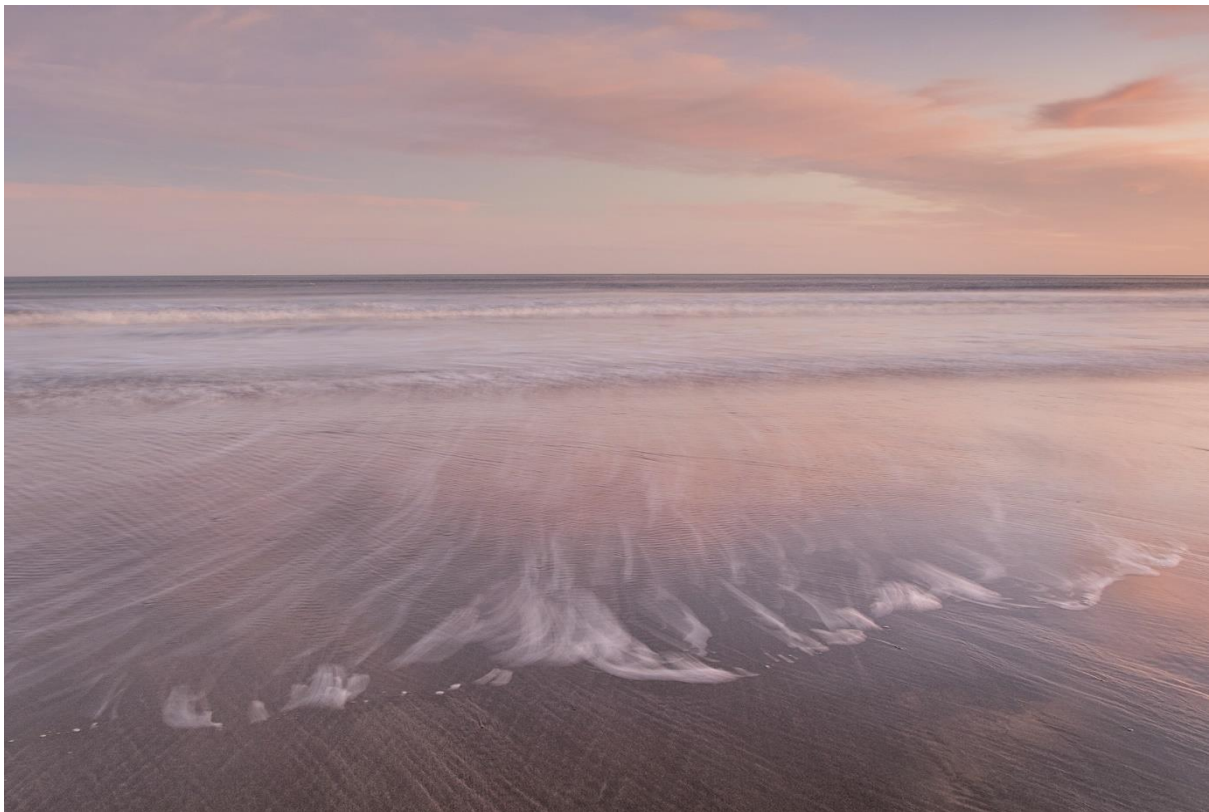
*Saltwick Bay*

Back at home I download my images onto the laptop and process them in Adobe Photoshop. I only spend a few minutes on each photo, correcting exposure and light balance, with a few tweaks in contrast and

saturation. I focus on the water to bring out a bit more detail in its flow lines.

*What started you off as an artist?*

Like many landscape photographers, I used to set off for a walk in the Lake District or Yorkshire Dales, armed with a camera in order to capture anything that caught my eye. To start with this would involve large vistas, but soon I discovered that the beauty and interest were in the light and detail. I spent a lot of time revisiting locations and discovering new angles and compositions. When I retired I found myself driving to the coast more often in order to explore the sea and shore.



*Dawn Foam*

*Who or what are your influences?*

My main influences are the photographers with whom I've had the privilege of working. [Mark Littlejohn](#) captures the light in every fleeting moment, whilst [Joe Cornish](#) takes a more measured approach and taught me a great deal about field craft. This involved learning how to read a scene and analysing the important elements in your photograph.



This is where technical expertise is essential so that you can select aperture, shutter speed and focus settings to best display your subject and overall composition. Finally, this has to be achieved with the sea swirling around your feet, so concentration is essential. Consequently, my main influences are [Rachael Talibart](#) and [Jenifer Bunnett](#), both of whom are coastal photographers renowned for their storm waves and emotive shoreline images.

*How would you describe your recent work?*

The past two years have been focussed on preparing a panel for my Associate of the Royal Photographic Society (ARPS) submission, assessed in October 2020. The theme, 'The lonely sea and the sky', involved frequent visits to the coast to capture the light, waves and patterns on the shoreline. The submission consisted of fifteen prints which hung together as a single panel, accompanied by a statement of intent. I couldn't just pick my fifteen favourites, as they might not have fitted the theme, or matched the tones and content of the other prints.

I've recently written an article for the Royal Photographic Society *Landscape Group* magazine, had photos printed in *Outdoor Photography*, and I exhibited my storm waves work in York District and Fossbank Hospitals.



*Coronet*



*Triton*

*What would you say is the main challenge in your practice?*

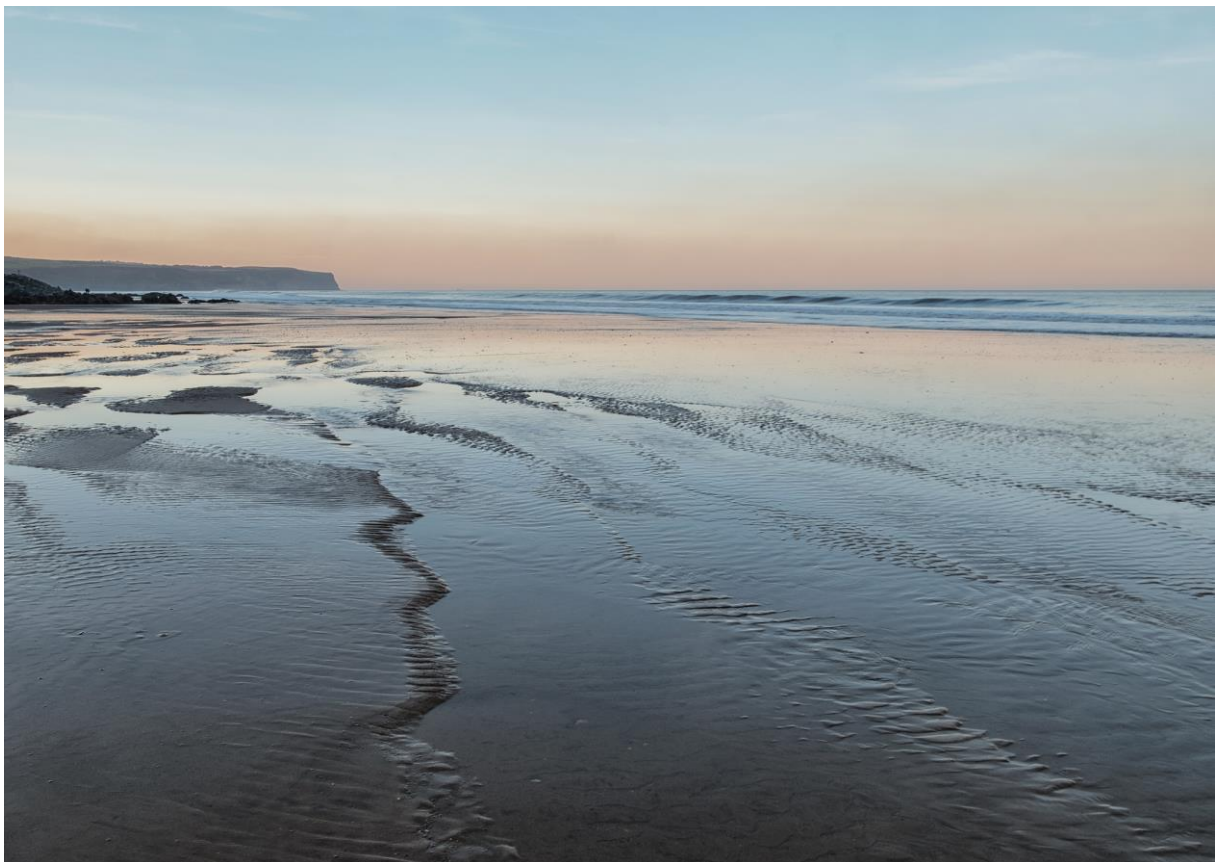
The main challenge for me is working with the elements. Before I set off anywhere there is quite a bit of planning: I check the tides and the weather forecast so I can decide where it is best to go, and what conditions I am likely to experience when I arrive – storm waves or a calm sea. This also enables me to choose which lens to attach, as they can't be changed once on the foreshore because of salt spray and sand. Even on a calm day there is salt in the air, a camera killer if it gets inside the casing.

I also have to factor in my own safety, as it is easy to be stranded on some stretches of coastline with limited access. Cliffs are a problem as there is usually only one point of access, so I try to work on an outgoing tide unless I am on an open beach.

*How have these recent periods of lockdown affected your work?*

I spent much of the spring and summer preparing my ARPS panel, compiling a large book of my coastal prints, and giving talks on Zoom.

It has been hard not to be able to drive to the coast to experience and capture the mood of the sea. It was the first thing I did after the early lockdown, as I was so desperate to see the sun rising over the horizon. I got up at 3 a.m. to drive to Fraisthorpe and I wasn't disappointed. It was magical to see the ever-changing light alongside the backdrop of the sea, and so worth the lack of sleep. I have visited the coast almost every week during the summer, including another 3 a.m. start in August. Needless to say, most landscape photographers prefer the winter months when the light is better, and sunrise and sunset are at sensible times.



*Ripples on Whitby West Sands*

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

[www.alisontaylorphotography.org](http://www.alisontaylorphotography.org)

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