
A portrait of the **artists...**

These three Partners' artistic talents have led them to exhibit their work in galleries as far apart as Great Yarmouth, Sheffield and Istanbul, writes Catherine Riley

As Chronicle Assistant at John Lewis Norwich, Paul Zawadzki has a role that's clearly creative – writing, layout and photography are all part of his day job – but he gets his real artistic kicks outside the business.

Paul creates oil paintings that he exhibits under the pseudonym artbear and he's also a musician, recording and releasing his own albums. "I guess you could say I keep myself busy," he laughs. "I wouldn't have it any other way. I just love creating."

A SPLASH OF COLOUR

Paul has developed his own painting technique over the years, where he manipulates the paint using mottling, dripping and splashing to create a textured, layered finish. "I wanted to move away from the more traditional look of oil painting to create my own style. I never know how the painting will look once it's finished, which is really exciting."

His inspiration, he says, is nature and his native East Anglian coastline features in a lot of his work. "I've exhibited my work in several studios this year, and had a lot of local coverage. The Upstairs Gallery in Great Yarmouth gave me a guest artist exhibition last summer, and they now represent me, which is a great way of selling my work. I make enough to cover





the cost of materials, so I'm a way off the big league!"

Paul admits that he would love to be able to paint all day – “and write songs about it!” – but for now is happy to have art as a hobby. “The Partnership’s been really supportive of what I’ve done so far, letting me work flexibly when I need to so that I can install a show or take an exhibition down. And I’ve had a bit of an audience from work, with colleagues taking the time to see my work when it’s on display, which is brilliant.”

He’s also been commissioned to paint Ambleside Park, following a request from a former Partner who wanted a reminder of it. “It’d be nice to follow that up with paintings of all the holiday centres,” he says. “The perfect combination of business and pleasure!”

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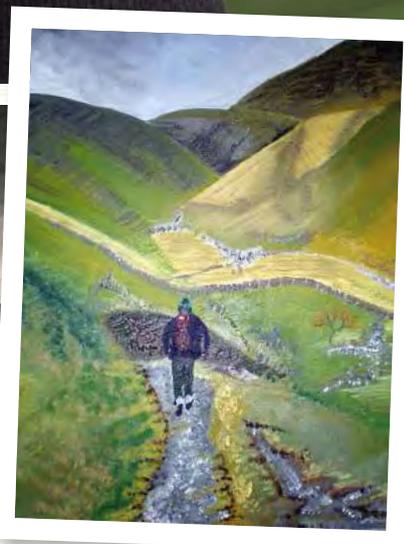
It was a secret commission to paint an oil rig – in oils, naturally – that reconnected Rebecca Middleton with her talent for art. “I’d loved art at school, and always done well in it, but I’d stopped painting,” explains the Visual Merchandiser from John Lewis Sheffield.

“Years later, my father-in-law was looking for a painting of an oil rig as he works in the industry but could never find one. As a surprise, I painted one for him as a Christmas present. I signed it ‘Dot Limend’ – an anagram of my surname – and my father-in-law was delighted with it. He tried to find out about the artist – he even Googled the name! I didn’t tell him it was my work for more than six months.”

This somewhat unorthodox commission has led Rebecca to return to her easel. “I painted a whole series of oil rigs and exhibited them at the Great Sheffield Art Show, one of the north’s largest exhibitions. More than 4,000 visitors saw my work.”

Her commissions come from friends, family and colleagues. “I paint landscapes and seascapes, which are proving popular as presents,” she explains. “And I like to paint as much as I can on holiday, so I can bring back lots of reminders of where I’ve been. It’s better than a photo album.”

Fellow Partners, she says, have ☺





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CECILIA KINNEAR

been very encouraging: "I painted a landscape from the Lake District for Dawn [Williams] who I work with and I did a painting of St Andrew's golf course for a Partner's parents."

SOURCE MATERIAL

Rebecca is also showing her work in an unusual setting in Sheffield city centre, as she explains: "A charity called Source is using empty shop windows to show local artists' work; a series of my paintings were on display in the foyer of their offices and have now been installed in a shop window. It's fantastic to think so many people will see them."

Despite the popularity of her work, Rebecca isn't setting any firm plans. "I'd like to do another show at some point, but really I'm just interested in getting on with painting. I absolutely love it."

Another Visual Merchandising Partner – Cecilia Kinnear at John Lewis Liverpool – creates conceptual art. One of her first major pieces was the creation of an installation for Liverpool's Capital of Culture celebrations in 2008. "I produced a Warhol-inspired work by creating 2008 tins of scouse [a traditional stew from the city], rather than Campbell's soup, which was put on

display around the city.

Cecilia used to make her living as an artist but now enjoys the freedom to create work without commercial restraints. "I have continued my art practice alongside my career in John Lewis" she says. "There's less pressure to sell my art, so I'm more able to explore concepts and branch out into different media."

This means she is as likely to use Facebook as paintbrushes to create her work. "I'm thinking more and more about how we use the internet and electronic media to create moments of 'art'. Social

media has become a vital part of artists' dialogue, so I'm partial to a tweet or two!" says Cecilia, known as Gardenwarbler on Twitter. This means she rarely works in her studio these days, and is as likely to start thinking up ideas while sitting in a café or out running.

John Lewis is also often a source of inspiration. "At work, I'm always thinking about brands, about the way people behave, about how people consume... it really influences my art and sparks off new ideas."

ART IN AUSTERITY

Since Cecilia often explores the marketing of identity, for the *Gazette* shoot she 'wanted to have fun'. "I play with some of the gender and social constructs that exist around the reinvention of the modern domestic goddess," she explains, "and how in this 'age of austerity' we return to home comforts and the escapism of living 'for the weekend'."

Her art has taken her far from home. "I helped set up an artists' collective called POST (postliverpool.com) and we've followed the Capital of Culture around Europe, from Liverpool in 2008 to Linz in Austria, and then to Istanbul this year," she says.

Cecilia acknowledges the role the Partnership plays in helping her balance her work and art. "I've received a Bursary of Excellence from the business [which provides support and financial help to working Partners who meet specific requirements]. "It was an enormous help.

"Equally important is how the business supports me by allowing more flexibility in my working life, such as time banking or unpaid leave. This enables me to travel for residencies or to show my work abroad. The trust and commitment is two-way – from me to the business, and back again." 

Cecilia's work will next be exhibited in Istanbul on 1 March at Pi Arts gallery, www.piartworks.com. You can see Paul's work and find out about exhibitions on artbear.co.uk. Rebecca's work can be seen in Pinstone Street, Sheffield. To find out more, email r_middletonuk@yahoo.co.uk.