

## John Hunt: Painter. Paint BigThink Big



The monthly Wednesday morning talks are going from strength to strength and it was a fully packed Craft Studio again this April at Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum. Lots of new members found their way to us and we are looking forward to exhibiting with them at the upcoming show at Sheep Dip Lane.

Painter John Hunt who is based in Leamington Spa started his talk by mentioning that a very long time ago he attended

Birmingham College of Art with artist Terry Webster who was in the audience. It was then located at the stunning location of Margaret Street. John spent many happy years there undertaking hours of life and cityscape drawing. He added that he, at first, knew nothing about art and showed an initial black and white sketch and a small painting. The view from the drawing no longer exists.

Whilst visiting a Picasso exhibition at the Tate Gallery John wandered around from room to room struggling to connect with what was shown, until he entered the room which contained paintings of bathers from the 1920s. There were female bathers running along the beach chasing beach balls and the whole scenery looked like it came away from the surface, coming towards the spectator. This Picasso painting initiated some kind of epiphany. It was different than other 20th century works he had ever seen.

John progressed with his artistic journey and moved on to making larger prints which needed the spectator's active involvement to make the works come alive. There were moving circles that eliminated gravity. Other geometric shapes were added and it didn't matter which way you would hold up the painting to make it work, or in other words, the compositions were not fixed. He brought along an example of this series of work.

He got a job at the technology department where John had access to all kinds of milling and other machineries. He now says that he wishes he had done more work inspired by those machines. John mentioned Robert Rauschenberg, an artist who he very much admires. They both see a painting as an object and what is depicted by the painting is nonrepresentational. He saw Rauschenberg's works at his first exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in London. He distinctively remembered a painting which had a radio attached to it; it even played when turned on.

John now showed us a film clip from an exhibition that featured many of his large

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moving shapes works. The show was held at a vast industrial space at Montague Road, Warwick and part of the Art On The Move Festival. He transferred the film from videotape to dvd. At this kinetic show spectators were encouraged to actively get engaged with the works by moving the attachments around. Most pieces were made of wood and plastic, combined with screen printing, and put together with the school equipment where John was based at that time. He did find that adults were reluctant to get involved but that children didn't need any encouragement at all to play with the art works. He didn't fit the

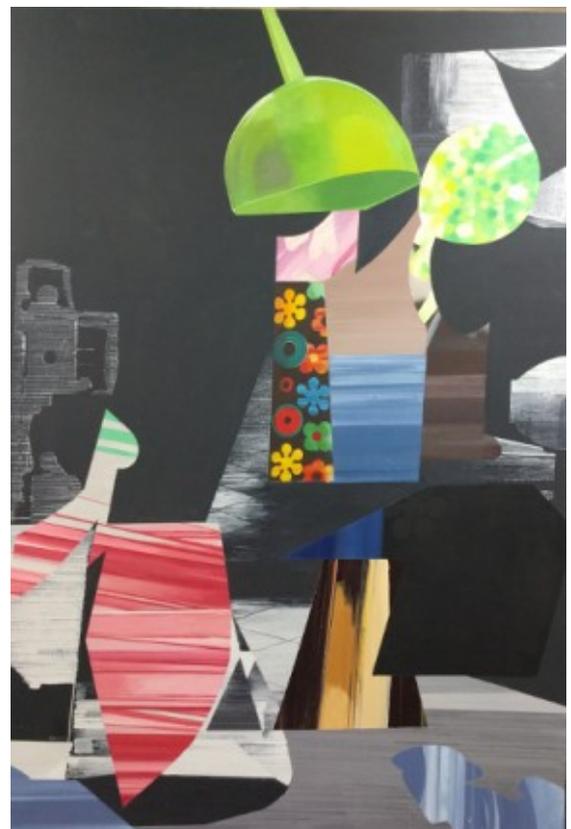
works with motors because he felt that it would stop the spectator's involvement. It looked quite impressive when all the pieces were moving at the same time. He doesn't like it when his works get labelled as conceptual.

After the film we looked in more detail at John's paintings which were included in a PowerPoint presentation. The pastel 'Dulce Domum' developed from collage drawings. He first started with creating collages of closed in interiors, these paper clippings could come from Ikea catalogues. He found that these photographs in Ikea catalogues carry a wonderful atmosphere with them. Then he proceeded with drawings inspired by the interior collages.

'LA Deli' is an acrylic painting with paper collage. Here he was looking for forms which would introduce human elements and forms. The paper can be torn or cut. He is trying to get away from 'tightening up' and wants his work to be as free and loose as possible.

The 'Edge Of The Garden' is a gouache on paper. This image combines the inside and outside on many levels. He wanted to portray the feeling that, when you are, for example, sitting inside looking outside out of the window; creating movement between different spaces. Almost impossibly he tries to visualize the transition period of being inside and outside at the same time. John approaches his painting practice from a highly philosophical point of view. He thinks about how we as humans move around in different states of unconsciousness and consciousness.

The 'Estee Lauder' gouache feels slightly Pop Arty but that is a term John is not keen on. He says that commercial images nowadays are difficult to avoid. This specific painting is inspired by the Estee Lauder



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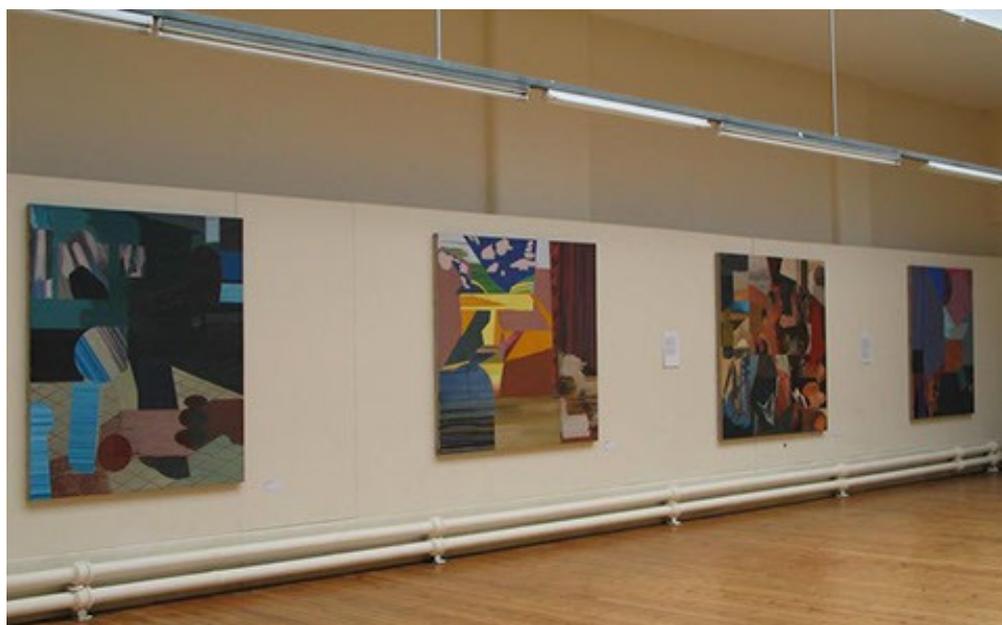
advert. There are painted and collage elements. Collage is for John a very spontaneous approach and one where you can make quick changes.

'Café At 2am' is an oil on canvas. Again it is based on an interior image. Sometimes pictures develop whilst you are working on them and you don't know what you mean until you see what is 'good'.

Stanley's Game is also an oil on canvas. This image is build up of separate sections. He used a lot of masking tape to get straight edges and added that the use of the tape sometimes can get a bit too addictive. John would like viewers to refrain from constantly looking for a narrative in his work. Titles are not there to look for clues either; here Stanley could refer loosely to a Stanley Kubrick film he might have seen during the time he was creating the painting. <insert image> Contents Of The Store, another oil, relates to computers, a facility he is getting to grips with at the moment, this concept is combined again with an Ikea inspired interior collage. He doesn't follow the 'Renaissance template' of fixed perspectives and other fixed rules. You must be able to move things around in a composition. The curtain theme here is a mystery to himself as well.

The Old Library Gallery, Leamington is a location where John had an impressive solo show. It was a great chance to see many of his large paintings together.

More of John's art can be viewed on his website [johnbarriehunt.co.uk](http://johnbarriehunt.co.uk) There you can look in



detail at other techniques he uses in his paintings, like home made squeegees, spray paints and paper stencils. He doesn't apply palette knives. One of the dilemma's he struggled with as a student was how to stop oil painting sinking. The investigation into the nature of painting, making painting sculptural, pushing the boundaries of the

canvas were all elements of his investigations. Try to see one of his oil paintings for real and judge for yourself if he has solved this issue. Whatever you call his paintings, don't call them abstract; John is very wary of this label. Paintings are either part of the Renaissance with their fixed rules or not, when they can be dated post Renaissance. Components that form the basis of his works are colour, scale, movement between inside and outside. A lecturer once advised him to use big sheets of board; 'Paint big and think big'.

Visit John's website to see the full selection of his work [www.johnbarriehunt.co.uk](http://www.johnbarriehunt.co.uk)

Tammy Woodrow