

# YOUNG ARTISTS NEW DIRECTION



Norfolk Contemporary Art 2012 bursts of bright creativity and a focus on youthful talent. **IAN COLLINS** reports.

Founded as far back as 1956, the Norfolk Contemporary Art Society turns 56 this year - but a pending show proves that the seasoned outfit remains at the cutting edge of creativity across the county and even beyond.

NCAS again teamed up with The Forum after the success of two open exhibitions in 2008 and 2010 showed the need for a regular biennial event.

Nine selectors have looked at a wide variety of submissions from 152 artist members of the society, in every possible medium, from which 70 works have now been chosen.

Keith Roberts, chairman of the judging panel and of the NCAS, says: "The selection process was conducted anonymously, so panel members knew neither the artist's name nor the price of the work presented, a process that interestingly meant that some of our more established local artists did not get work accepted.

"So, pleasingly, there is a lot of new work by young and emerging talents as well as by better-known figures. This all bodes well for the next biennial in 2014."

The latest assembly ranges freely and fascinatingly from paintings, prints, drawings and photographs to collages, constructions, sculptures, ceramics, textiles and film. Although there are some fine adventures in abstraction — especially with a haunting series of dark and silvery Alchemy paintings which form a poignant tribute to Keith Pomeroy, who died recently - NCAS artists are drawn most powerfully to explore new avenues in representation.

And no wonder, given the scenic and atmospheric riches on our doorstep in a region which, two centuries ago, inspired the revolutionary artists of the Norwich School to abandon imaginary and Italianate landscapes for the marvellous world beyond their windows.

Traditionally Norfolk was widely believed to have lacked dramatic features - but the erosion of the coastal cliffs at Happisburgh inspires an evocative painting by Mark Bower in which nature is blasting steel girders and concrete slabs and the mixed media Coastal Erosion drawing of Joan Murray.

There is an ongoing trend for edgy imagery from roadways to marginal landscapes, as demonstrated by the paintings of Natalie Odile Lang and the drawings of Katarzyna Coleman, the latter continuing to explore the world "between the seen and sensed".

New arrivals to our rural region can be horrified by the scale of our roadkill and the strikingly surreal photographs of Steve Baker featuring furred and feathered fatalities are not for the squeamish.



But NCAS artists are also a widely travelled lot, and there are visitors' visions from France and the Scilly Isles to as far afield as South China and New Zealand - the latter courtesy of Barry Watkins. I especially like the Klint-like birch wood by Heather Tilley which evokes Moscow scenery in brilliant and highly experimental textiles.

Meanwhile, Gill Levin produces an almost Oriental meditation in an Autumn Leaves study of the Waveney Valley garden where she had planted 47 trees since 1981.

There are some very serious artistic projects here, but especially memorable are some playful escapades. Steve Highton offers the obliterated marker of a burnt-wood Sign, perhaps suggesting global warming but reminding me of how regularly I get lost in remoter regions of rural Norfolk where sign posts were probably removed in the war and apparently never replaced.

The splendid ink drawings of Peter Kent are both precise and disorientating - with scenes from an architectural alphabet suggesting that a great pyramid of crops and a ziggurat of straw might just rise from East Anglian fields.



The latter makes a brilliant link with Bob Catchpole's Ziggurat I in which conventional garden implements are stretched, twisted and plaited into sculpture exploring our often skewed relationship with landscape. And art is rarely more liberated - and exhilarating - than in the work of the artists of the Barrington Farm Day Centre at Walcott. With an exuberant colourist painting and a sampler-like needlework panel revelling in "animals, beads and pretty things", Ian Partridge and Barbara Symmons again come close to stealing the show.

■ **NCA 2012 runs at the Forum from July 17-26, 9am-5pm, free admission. Works are for sale, with prices starting at £80, [www.n-cas.org.uk](http://www.n-cas.org.uk)**

■ **You can meet, listen and talk to some of the key artists at three free lunchtime sessions in the Curve, on July 19, 20 and 21, from 12.30pm.**

[www.theforumnorwich.co.uk](http://www.theforumnorwich.co.uk)

NEN 13.07.2012