



# Colour burst

For Hove-based artist Kirsty Wither the importance of colour in influencing how we feel cannot be overstated. Simone Hellyer meets the artist at the gallery she set up with her husband to find out more

With winter setting in and the days getting greyer a burst of colour is always a welcome sight. Hove-based painter Kirsty Wither's paintings provide just that.

Her vibrant still life, flower and landscape paintings have earned her 37 solo exhibitions and led her to be described as one of the UK's most successful female painters.

For Kirsty colour is her most important consideration, with the subject matter often paying second fiddle: "My paintings are mostly about colour, texture and the paint itself. The subject matter is often secondary because they're really about a memory of a thing. So I don't ever paint with a bunch of flowers in front of me or sit on a hill and sketch the landscape or anything like that – they're all coming from my imagination, memory and things that resonate in terms of colour or shape."

Originally from Scotland, Kirsty trained at Gray's School of Art in Aberdeen. Her Scottish roots have

**"My paintings are mostly about colour, texture and the paint itself"**

provided the inspiration for her love of colour.

"There's a bit of a Scottish colourist tradition in there, which lots of people have commented on," she says.

"I suppose because of all the grey days in Scotland it is natural to pray for colour and summer.

"I always want my pictures to be uplifting as well – I think that's something that's really important to me. We all have enough worry in our lives and gloomy things to think about. But I don't think that makes my paintings facile or

shallow. I just think that for me it's important to wake up and look at something positive in my day. I'd like that to be reflected in the work that I do," she adds.

After a brief dabble with water-based paints, Kirsty now works in oils as she prefers the intensity of colour, malleability and stability of the material.

When starting a new painting she first covers the canvas in a mid-tone colour, depending on whether she feels the painting will be warm or cool, as she explains: "If you're painting directly onto white canvas I find you can't go any lighter, the same way you can't go any darker if you're painting onto a black canvas. So, somewhere in the mid-tones you can always pull things out and push things back.

"And then as I work on it and as the days go by and the paint slightly dries, I keep adding to it," she says. "That's when all the layers develop and you start to see all the different colours coming through. I think this technique makes your eyes dance around the surface a bit more."

Kirsty comes from a creative family, her mother was a ceramicist and the family often made their own toys and clothes. Her husband is also from the art world – the two met while working in an art gallery in Glasgow and together they set up the Cameron Contemporary Art gallery in Second Avenue, Hove five years ago.

Cameron Contemporary Art shows a changing programme of established and up and coming British artists, ranging from traditional to modern, figurative to abstract.

The duo also exhibits at UK art fairs and have just returned from

exhibiting for the first time in New York.

The couple has dealt art for many years and Kirsty says that developing a permanent base for those endeavours has been really useful: "Having a permanent space is really helpful because it means you can hold on to work by artists after their exhibitions are over because often people will come back a couple of months later and want to buy something."

Despite the flourishing creative scene in Brighton and Hove, Kirsty believes that there is a distinct lack of galleries in the area – one of the other reasons they opened Cameron Contemporary Art. "Generally a lot of creative people move down here because it's a great place to be an artist, but there just aren't that many galleries around," she says.

The gallery has been a useful side project because it allows her to learn more about the people that buy her art and understand what people want to display in their homes. It's something that artists don't always get to experience when they're locked away in the studio.

This is also one of the benefits of the Artist Open Houses (AOH) festival, which Kirsty will be participating in at the gallery.

"It's quite a nice exposure," she says. "People see artist's studios or a new gallery that they wouldn't normally go to. The footfall is also really high too because people come from all over." ♦

## GOOD TO KNOW:

The 2018 Christmas AOH Festival opens on Saturday 24 November and runs for three weekends. Kirsty will also exhibit her work at Cameron Contemporary Art's Winter Exhibition from November 23 and at the London Art Fair 2019 from 16 January.

## LEFT

### CLOCKWISE:

*Seven Lemons*, *Mercury Rising*, and *In the Blue Square* by Kirsty Wither