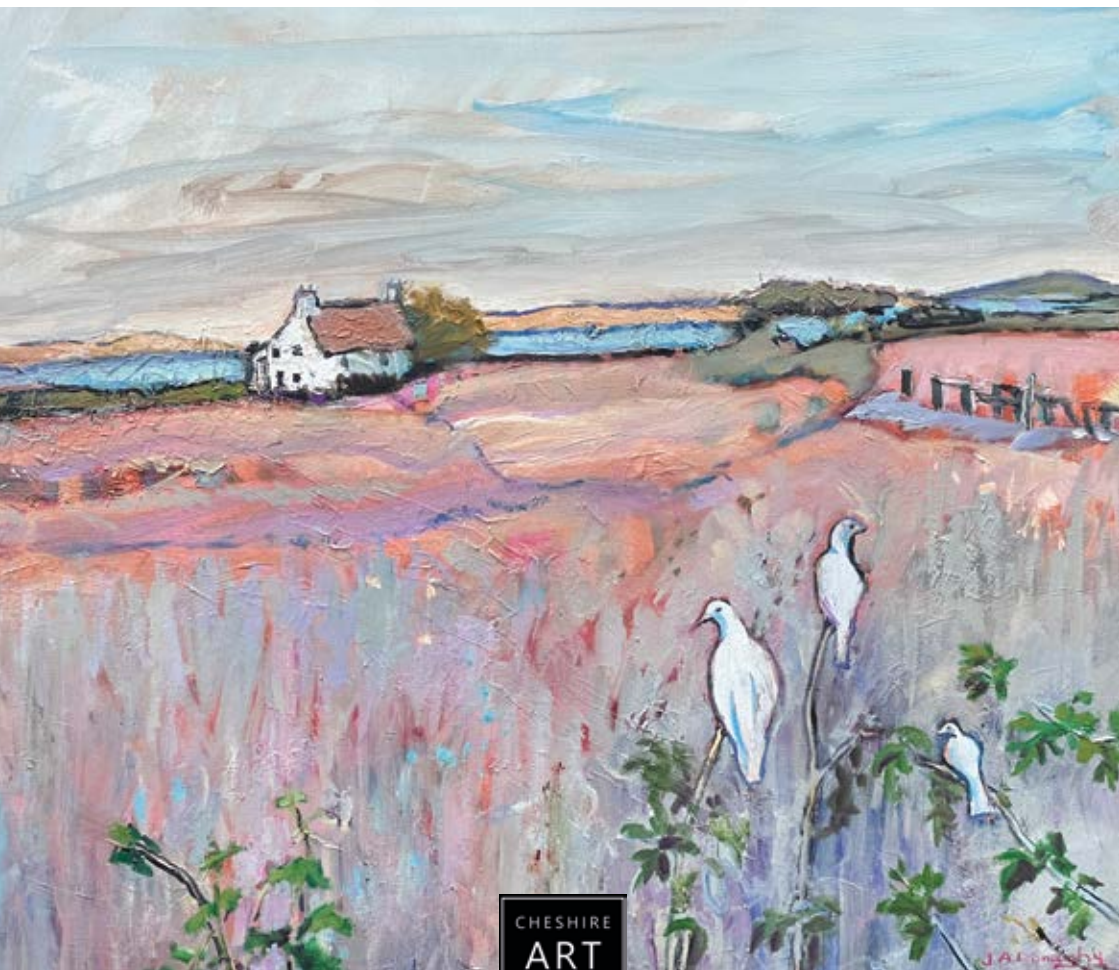


JUDITH DONAGHY
As the Bird Sings
SOLO EXHIBITION

2nd - 16th DECEMBER 2023



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ALL WORKS ARE AVAILABLE FOR SALE UPON RECEIPT OF THIS CATALOGUE

Introduction by Nick Brown

Cheshire Art Gallery
13 Ack Lane East, Bramhall,
Stockport, Cheshire, SK7 2BE.



As the Bird Sings

SOLO EXHIBITION

Judith Donaghy has built up a considerable and well-deserved artistic reputation. Her distinctive painting has been widely exhibited and even more widely collected and praised. Whilst often regarded as impressionist in nature and associated with seascapes and landscapes with their skilful combination of muted pastel tones; Judith's artistic scope is far more wide-ranging and experimental with a dramatic sensibility.

It is, however, highly appropriate that Judith should have chosen the title 'As The Bird Sings' for her major exhibition at Cheshire Art Gallery, referencing, as it does, Claud Monet's evocative statement, 'I would like to paint the way a bird sings.' These sentiments emphasise Judith's affinity to the feelings developed by the impressionists which began at school where she won her first artistic prize, a copy of a book on Van Gogh.

Judith's path towards the standing of a successful artist was far from traditional. She was born in Frodsham in Cheshire and, following success at school, she was offered an unconditional place at Liverpool college of art but owing to family circumstances was unable to take up her place and her life led in a different direction. However, she never lost her passion for art and a second brush with formal art teaching occurred in the 1970s at Stockport College under the tutelage of local artist, Eric Thompson.

So impressed was he with her talent that he encouraged Judith to sell her works and embark on a career as an artist. But again, fate intervened, this time in the shape of family life and looking after children. Judith managed, however, to combine family life with a diverse range of occupations and experiences including designing and selling jigsaws.

Throughout this time she was continuing to paint and in particular to develop her experimental work with colour. Looking back on this, Judith reflected,

"Having an idea that excites me to try different colour palettes is very seductive as colour is a great motivator."

These experiments with colour may be traced across the paintings curated for the exhibition.



Artist *Judith Donaghy*





During the years since the nineteen seventies Judith raised a family, ran a successful business with her husband and experienced more than her fair share of tragedy. Throughout this, and perhaps aided by experience both good and bad, she continued to paint and develop her own artistic style.

Judith took a studio in Vernon Mill in Stockport and in the new millennium had her first solo exhibition at the Blyth gallery on Canal Street, central Manchester, followed by a second at Collect Art in Lymm. During this time she also began to sell her work internationally and began to teach art, an activity she found deeply rewarding. Recognition arrived with an exhibition at Stockport Art Gallery.

The biography of an artist, however, may only hint at the nature and development of the oeuvre; creativity is an internal and largely solitary route to pursue. Something often difficult to understand. For Judith the process embraces more than the actual application of line and paint.

Subject matter

Her starting points are subject matter alongside colour, which for Judith is something of an obsession as well as a joy and occasional torment. She regards colour as a great motivator, something that stimulates or perhaps drives ideas, as she explains,

“I can sometimes spend a long time thinking about an idea which will eventually become a painting, the execution of which must be spontaneous and swift in the beginning, free of the limitations of technique.”

The latter part of this reminds us of Matisse saying,

“I must be so impregnated by my subject that I can draw it eyes closed and it pours naturally from me.”

Judith’s work develops in stages beginning with an energetic burst of activity and then,

“slowing as the work progresses and demands more complex decisions. The fine tuning at the end is also important as it must be considered but, at the same time uninhibited, which can sometimes be a difficult path to tread.”

This melding of technique and preparation with an untrammelled creative process is not for the faint-hearted depending, as it does, on the ability to execute the correct critical decisions without losing the essential feel of the work.

To get this ‘right’ Judith wields her own version of Occam’s Razor.

“I try to dispense with unnecessary detail, getting rid of what I don’t want and cherry picking what I need for the painting. Any sketches used at the beginning of a new work are pared down to the essentials and sometimes abandoned altogether.”

Once the gestation is complete and the painting commences, the working technique is driven by mood and feeling. There is no aim to please an audience or work to a particular plan, the act of painting takes over.

“I like to do an impression but leave something open for people to complete or find for themselves. All I want is to create that initial touch of magic.”

This explains the feeling of something about to happen or spring to life in the paintings, something which involves the viewer, inviting us to make our own interpretive involvement as if we were antiquarians confronted with an ancient Linear B tablet.

A bit of magic

“I find it difficult to be totally satisfied with limiting myself to one subject or style of painting, so it’s always challenging me, while at the same time I have to paint what attracts me. In this I think I’m a bit like a butterfly, there’s always something to try, some bit of magic to find. At present I’ve been looking at the Castlefield area of Manchester and to recreate what I see in my mind’s eye has meant I need to experiment a bit with style.”

These urban works are certainly very different but also recognisably stem from the same artist as the watercolours of local places.

“Yes, I wanted to catch in the cityscapes oils an element of the loosely-sketched feel of the watercolour, it’s required a completely different approach to anything I’ve attempted before. So far only a few have made it from original sketch to finished oil painting but I hope to paint more in the future.”

These paintings are different but retain the same richness of texture which tends to characterise the full range of Judith’s oil paintings. All artists find their own particular methods; Judith’s oils are richly layered and her mastery of a sense of diffuse light created from thickly blended shades of grey, and pink suggests a fondness for impasto and the palette knife.





“Yes, that’s right, I paint with palette knives and brushes. Hog’s hair decorators’ brushes, old scrubby brushes and a fine ‘signing brush’ really meant for acrylics, which is used to add fine lines occasionally. I have no particular technique relying on instinct and choice of colour to get me through. I’ll use anything, including my hands to get the effect I’m looking for.”

When it’s suggested this sounds almost a touch Fauvist, she replies,

“Perhaps this is why some of my paintings might feel a little unconnected. They all start with an idea which excites me and which I try to pursue with a degree of abandonment and spontaneity.”

But when required Judith will also paint with discipline and restraint. This different style applies to a particular and deeply personal category of her art. Following the tragic death of her son some years ago, she received an array of beautiful flowers from friends and family. She began to paint them, painstakingly from life. These very different but heartfelt paintings were initially made into cards.

She describes the painting of these original flowers as a coping strategy and perhaps the painting of them is cathartic. New paintings of flowers, always from life are continuing. That they are extremely popular may be ascribed to the emotion generating them.

The works

The paintings for the exhibition were waiting in the studio.. There is an adage that a great deal may be learnt from the condition of an artist’s studio. From ‘lived experience’, I have found that the artists whose work I most admire have one thing, at least, in common; their studios tend to occupy the untidy end of the spectrum. It was pleasing to note this is a trait Judith shares. Perhaps it is laid down in the terms and conditions of exhibiting at Cheshire Art Gallery.

Judith aims to leave something within her paintings for the viewer to see, feel and interpret for themselves. What follows then, is a personal reaction to the paintings studied over a period of days. Others may see things differently which is, of course, one of the reasons behind the genesis of the work.

The first thing which strikes the eye when looking at this particular body of work is its diversity. The expected qualities of light, tone and feel commonly associated with Judith Donaghy’s painting are all there but displayed to contrasting effect. Even within examples of what might be considered the same genre there are marked differences.

Take, for instance, two of her particularly popular seascapes on display: Aberffraw and Abersoch. Both of these oils portray sea and coastline. The latter, Abersoch although richly layered and impressionistic clearly shows a naturalistic world following the physical laws of nature. The former, Aberffraw, although also clearly a seascape, subtly subverts the laws of nature.

The sea skirting Aberffraw, like the sea in Abersoch, is constantly shifting, but the movement is not in this more abstract work disturbed by waves, rather it moves towards the land in a series of square sections following the laws of cubism rather than nature. The cliff line and village of Aberffraw in the background merging into the skyline are naturalistic enough but the interface of sea and land resembles a clash of different shape and colour.

In this interface the paint is applied most thickly as the sandy colour of land and the myriad blues of the sea form a rolling unstable zone, constantly shifting. The sea carried towards the land in a series of squares which become compressed and agitated as they near the shore clashes with a shapeless sandy shoreline. The more abstract and turbulent bottom half of the canvas with its thickly applied paint contrasts with the more sedate naturalistic top half which, by comparison, conveys a sense of calm.

Although highly abstracted, Aberffraw manages to accentuate the natural forces of nature. Described thus, the two paintings seem to strive for an entirely different response, but in fact, viewed together, both capture beautifully the emotion of that realm of struggle between land and sea.

There are similarly diverse fieldscapes set in the North Cheshire countryside around Judith's hometown of Frodsham. These also experiment with shape and colour, contrasting an almost cubist foreground, replete with strong straight lines and vivid blocks of red for the fields, with a naturalistic background. In contrast to the strong movement of the seascapes, these evoke a sense of repose.

The application of the reds, were it not for the sombre Cheshire sky replete with lowering cloud, might make us think we were regarding the Tuscan countryside.

Across all the landscapes in the exhibition we can see an artist experimenting with texture, colour and shape within a single canvas, all of which exude a particular atmosphere and 'spiritus loci'. I think this is what Judith is referring to when she talks of finding a "little bit of magic in each picture".

The magic is the element from which it is intended the viewer picks up the vibrations and feels the spirit of the painting. This element of authenticity is important to the artist who will often pick up an object at the site of the painting and bring it to the studio carrying with it a physical aide memoir of the feelings the site engendered. An almost archaeological approach to painting.

The still life and landscape paintings, despite the experimentation, all lie within the reality of observed phenomena and retain an inherent sense of wonder. Just look at the beautiful bowl of cherries. The specifically abstract works are very different. These not only show the range of the artist's aspirations but also evoke a different felt response.





JUDITH DONAGHY

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Look also at 'Castlefield Re-imagined'. One glance and you are immediately 'in medias res' submerged in the bustling urban development glimpsed in stages as it shifts through time. Everything in this is moving, seemingly changing before our eyes. In this constantly shifting concatenation, the land and canal basin interact with the sky and its shadowy outline of cranes and appear to be both emerging and disappearing while the developments along the quayside appear to jostle for space.

A very powerful abstract urban landscape in which blues predominate punctuated by pulses of vivid red and violet. An entirely satisfactory depiction of rapid urban change.

'Upside-down Cat' is a studio interior with furniture of disproportionate size, the eyes are drawn towards the ceiling where a cat hangs upside down. Look again and it looks like a first rapid glance at a room with the details still settling down with the large canvasses on the floor suggesting a point of entry. This strange juxtaposition of familiar objects out of sync with each other and their setting holds in suspension an atmosphere of calm.

Judith explained that the cat stemmed from a painting that had been placed upside down by mistake and that this suggested its inclusion as if it were adhered to the ceiling. The sensations engendered by these pieces, although very different in execution, reminded me of the works of Nick Holmes which I have collected over the years.

Michael Holroyd wrote of Roger Fry's controversial Post Impressionist exhibition of 1910 that it displayed the,

're-arrangement of visual facts, their unconventional structures thus provoking incorrectness and appalling liberties to distort their comfortable way of seeing things.'

There is a much gentler version of this inversion influencing Judith's abstracts.

This is a fascinating and highly diverting collection which will both delight and surprise. Enjoy.

Nick Brown.

OBE, FRSA,

Patron of the Manchester Academy of Fine Art



CASTLEFIELD REIMAGINED I



CASTLEFIELD REIMAGINED II



UPSIDE DOWN CAT

A painting of a landscape, possibly a book cover. The scene depicts a house with a brown roof and white walls, situated on a hillside. A stream flows through the landscape, with a small tree near the house. The foreground is dominated by a large, textured area of purple and pinkish-red, suggesting a field or a specific type of vegetation. The background shows rolling hills in shades of blue and grey. The overall style is impressionistic and textured.

JUDITH DONAGHY
As the Bird Sings



J. A. P. 1914



CAT 1:
AS THE BIRD SINGS

Dimensions: (Inches)

20 x 24

Price:

£749



CAT 2:
ABERFFRAW, ANGLESEY

Dimensions: (Inches)

24 x 24

Price:

£799



CAT 3:
ABERSOCH HARBOUR BEACH

Dimensions: (Inches)

20 x 24

Price:

£749





CAT 4:
HYDRANGEA COTTAGE

Dimensions: (Inches)

20 x 24

Price:

£749

CAT 5:

BLUE HEAVEN

Dimensions: (Inches)

20 x 24

Price:

£749





CAT 6:

ACROSS THE FIELDS

Dimensions: (Inches)

28 x 36

Price:

£1,499

CAT 7:

CHAMPAGNE SUNDAY

Dimensions: (Inches)

28 x 36

Price:

£1,499



CAT 8:

CASCADE

Dimensions: (Inches)

28 x 36

Price:

£1,499





CAT 9:
CHERRY BLOSSOM

Dimensions: (Inches)

20 x 24

Price:

£749

CAT 10:
CHESHIRE HILLS

Dimensions: (Inches)

20 x 24

Price:

£749





CAT 11:
MAGIC OF THE MOORS

Dimensions: (Inches)

24 x 24

Price:

£799



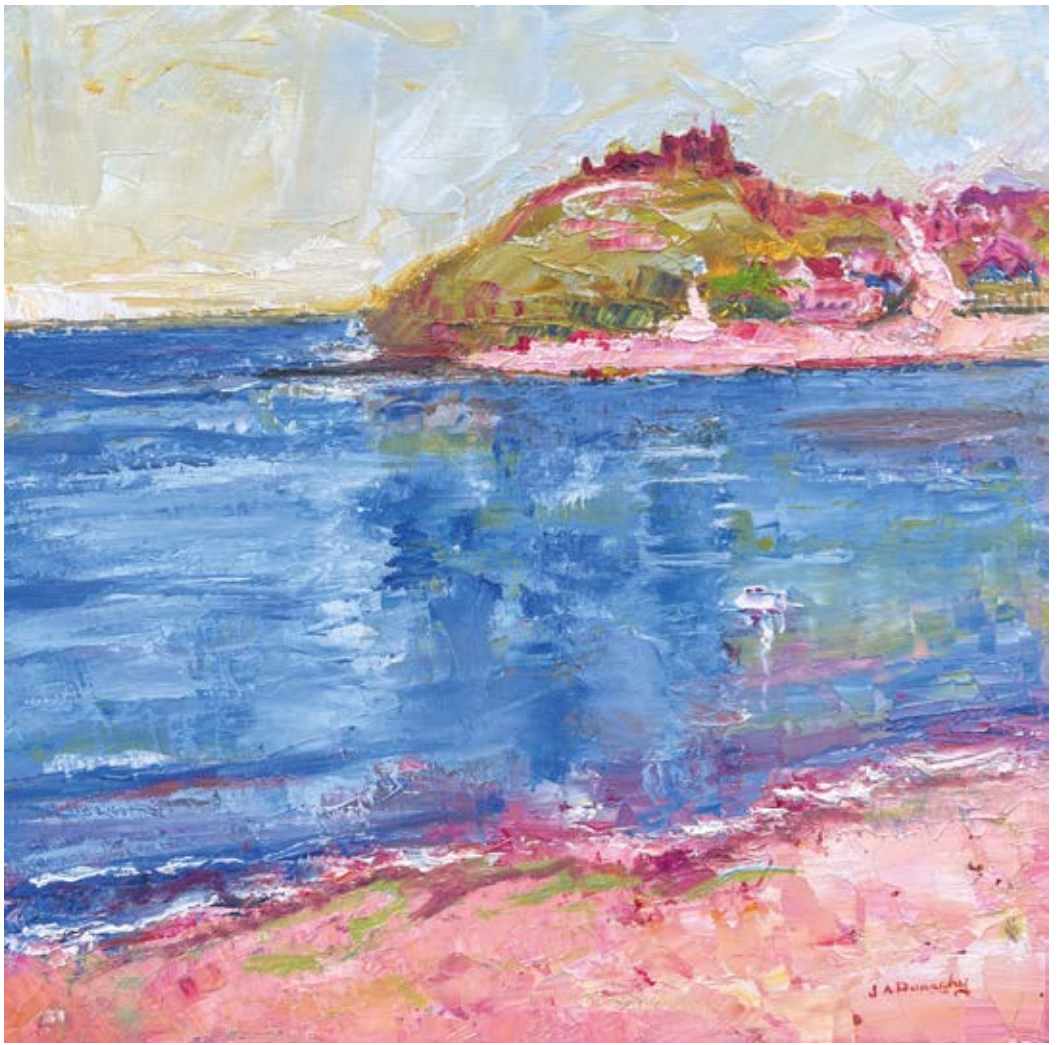
CAT 12:
COASTAL REFLECTION

Dimensions: (Inches)

24 x 24

Price:

£799



CAT 13:
CRICCIETH CASTLE

Dimensions: (Inches)

24 x 24

Price:

£799

CAT 14:
FRODSHAM MARSHES

Dimensions: (Inches)

20 x 24

Price:

£749





CAT 15:
TURQOISE REFLECTIONS

Dimensions: (Inches)

24 x 24

Price:

£799



CAT 16:
THE DUNES, RHOSNEIGR

Dimensions: (Inches)

20 x 24

Price:

£749





CAT 17:
ABERSOCH BEACH
Dimensions: (Inches)
20 x 24
Price:
£749



CAT 18:
WINTER AT HYDE PARK

Dimensions: (Inches)

24 x 30

Price:

£1,079





CAT 19:
CASTLEFIELD REIMAGINED I

Dimensions: (Inches)

24 x 30

Price:

£1,079

CAT 20:
CASTLEFIELD REIMAGINED II

Dimensions: (Inches)
20 x 24

Price:
£749





CAT 21:
UPSIDE DOWN CAT

Dimensions: (Inches)

24 x 30

Price:

£1,079



CAT 22:
SWAN ON A SHELF
Dimensions: (Inches)
20 x 24
Price:
£749

As the Bird Sings
MINIATURE COLLECTION



CAT 23:
WINTER COTTAGE

Dimensions: (Inches)
8 x 10
Price:
£249



CAT 24
CHEERS

Dimensions: (Inches)
10 x 12
Price:
£279





CAT 25:
FRANKIES FLOWERS

Dimensions: (Inches)

12 x 10

Price:

£279



CAT 26:
CHERRIES

Dimensions: (Inches)

8 x 8

Price:

£225



CAT 27:
BUILD ME UP BUTTERCUP

Dimensions: (Inches)

8 x 8

Price:

£225



CAT 28:
DELPHINIUMS

Dimensions: (Inches)
8 x 8
Price:
£225



CAT 29:
FLOWERS FROM THE GARDEN

Dimensions: (Inches)
8 x 8
Price:
£225



CAT 30:
DONAGHY PINK HYDRANGEAS

Dimensions: (Inches)
8 x 8
Price:
£225

CAT 31:
RED & ORANGE

Dimensions: (Inches)

8 x 8

Price:

£225





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