

# love art

your quarterly guide to the visual arts in Hertfordshire



FEATURING MANDY JOHNSON AND ELIF LEWIS

OVERCOMING CREATIVE BLOCK

WHAT'S ON LISTINGS FOR SPRING



# new and returning members



Andrew Burnett – *N. Herts*

Ann Lyon – *E. Herts*

Anna Kellard – *St. Albans*

Beth Salt – *S.W. Herts*

Carrie Cook – *St. Albans*

Claire Given – *N. Herts*

Claire Patterson – *St. Albans*

Deirdre Shepherd – *Dacorum*

Gaynor Hartle – *S.W. Herts*

Jenny Robinson – *St. Albans*

Jessica Ozlo – *St. Albans*

Julia Fonnereau – *E. Herts*

Karin Hutchinson – *N. Herts*

Kate Buchanan – *N. Herts*

Kheira Martalix – *S.W. Herts*

Lauren Catling – *N. Herts*

Lisa Helson – *St. Albans*

Lisa Moon – *S.W. Herts*

Mark Davies – *S.W. Herts*

Mike Rollins – *N. Herts*

Mirna Majer – *St. Albans*

Penelope Picken – *N. Herts*

Reda Simolkiniene – *N. Herts*

Ricky Charalambides – *S.W. Herts*

Ron Osborne – *Harpenden*

Sally McIver – *Dacorum*

Sharon Mitchell – *Barnet*

Sharon Russell – *E. Herts*

Viv Arthur – *N. Herts*

## love art magazine

Love Art is produced by Herts Visual Arts, a county-wide organisation run by artists, for artists. With a membership of over 400 creatives, we provide a strong network of support, development, and opportunity for our art community.

This magazine champions local talent and offers inspiration and information for artists and art lovers alike.

**Thank you for being part of Hertfordshire's creative story.**



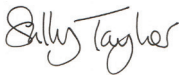
# welcome

Welcome to Love Art magazine – your local guide to creativity and inspiration across Hertfordshire.

As the days grow brighter, so does the region's artistic spirit. With contemporary showcases, and emerging local talent, this season brings an exciting programme of exhibitions, alongside open studios, artist talks, workshops, and vibrant art fairs that celebrate Hertfordshire's thriving visual arts scene.

We are excited to champion local talent, featuring contributions from artists and writers, as well as articles showcasing two of our fabulous members.

Join us as we celebrate the colour, creativity, and community that make Herts Visual Arts a wonderful place to love art.



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 @hertsvisualarts

 @hertfordshirevisualarts

If you would like to contribute to Love Art magazine or advertise in an upcoming issue, please get in touch with [marketing@hvaf.org.uk](mailto:marketing@hvaf.org.uk). The copy deadline for Issue 22 is 5th June.

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**EDITOR:** Helen Clarke

**COPY EDITING:** Tim Gilpin

**FEATURES WRITERS:** Jasmine Hardy, Natalia Millman

**CONTRIBUTORS:** Sally Taylor, Toni Gates, Melissa Proctor

**DESIGN:** Helen Clarke

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Alan Fletcher



# Art Space

Jan Stevens



Lou Longworth



Nadia Thompson



Our 2026 ArtSpace programme is now live! We are very excited to be exhibiting the work of several local artists this spring. Make sure to visit us on the first floor to see the wonderful selection of work. You will be able to enjoy a variety of techniques including diverse methods from painting and drawing, to sculpture and printmaking, all allowing artists to manipulate texture, light and depth to convey emotion.

## Upcoming ArtSpace Exhibitions:

February – March: Lou Longworth and Jan Stevens  
April – May: Nadia Thompson and Alan Fletcher

## Upcoming ArtSpace Plus Exhibitions:

May – August: Summer Group Exhibition

Remember to keep an eye on our website and social media to learn about upcoming exhibitions.

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

**Instagram:** @bishops.stortford.museum @southmillarts

**Facebook:** Bishop's Stortford Museum, South Mill Arts

## Bishop's Stortford Museum

South Mill Arts Centre, 1 - 3 South Rd, Bishop's Stortford, CM23 3JG

# the HVA year ahead

Looking for new artwork? Add these events to your calendar! For more information, see [www.hvaf.org.uk/our-events](http://www.hvaf.org.uk/our-events)



## ARTISTS & MAKERS

11-12 APRIL 2026

BERKHAMSTED CIVIC CENTRE, BERKHAMSTED  
Over 40 local artists and makers exhibit their work over the weekend.

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## BIG ART FAIR

17-19 JULY 2026

HITCHIN TOWN HALL, HITCHIN  
Our 10th anniversary brings 60 artists together during Hitchin Arts Festival. Join us on the evening of 17 July for a private view, with a glass of fizz and live music, a lovely celebration of our talented artists.

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## HERTS OPEN STUDIOS

5-27 SEPTEMBER 2026

COUNTYWIDE  
Our flagship event sees our artists throw open their doors to invite the public in. If you would like to register, please see our website: [www.hvaf.uk/our-events/herts-open-studios](http://www.hvaf.uk/our-events/herts-open-studios)

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## BIG MAKERS FAIR

13-15 NOVEMBER 2026

ROYSTON TOWN HALL, ROYSTON  
The popular makers fair comes to Royston for lots of Christmas shopping opportunities. With around 30 makers, this will be a wonderful chance to buy local.

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Artists & Makers returns this spring to Berkhamsted Civic Centre, a lovely historic building with a prominent position on the busy Berkhamsted High Street.

Join us on Saturday 11th and Sunday 12th April to celebrate the talents of 41 HVA members and their wide variety of paintings, prints, and 3D arts and crafts.

On the evening of Saturday 11th, from 6:30pm to 8:30pm there will be a reception with an open bar and the opportunity to meet the artists.





I began sensibly with an Art Foundation, found it too difficult, and swerved into the “easy” option: a law degree. Naturally, I ended up in international tax law – basically wizardry, but with more HMRC.



Then something unexpected happened: people bought it. Then they commissioned more. Suddenly I was showing in London art fairs, painting murals and sculptures across the country and featuring in a 12-page Flux Review article.

### What inspires your art practice?

In my early 30s, I was driven, ambitious and ended up becoming a CEO... then clinical depression knocked me sideways. Enter the NHS, caped hero of plot twists. A therapist nudged me back to drawing, and a year of daily sketching helped pull me back to myself.

I’m inspired by how the visual experience can make people feel. Toy shops and sweet shops are my creative fuel – that sense of magic is what I try to bottle in my work, so people can hang a little of it in their homes and workplaces, or pass it on the street. Being “childish” is underrated, and whenever adulthood isn’t required, I let my inner child loose with paint.

As part of my recovery, when I went to work conferences, I was drawing what I was hearing. People photographed my notes, shared them, and eventually a conference organiser offered to pay me to create “sketch notes” of their keynotes. Six years later, I run a successful business called Sketchnotes UK.



Painting in the evenings kept me steady until my house reached Channel 5 documentary levels of clutter. So, I started selling the work.

From 2-8 October, Mandy will be exhibiting with four other artists at 67A York Street Gallery, Marylebone. Follow Mandy on Instagram @mandy\_johnson\_art. To see more of her art and purchase online, go to [www.mandyjohnson.co.uk](http://www.mandyjohnson.co.uk)

WHAT'S ON

# exhibitions

## JOY IN COLOUR

31 MARCH - 11 APRIL

ARTSDEPOT, NORTH FINCHLEY

Eight talented HVA artists invite you to step into a vibrant celebration of colour.

these ideas continue to inform contemporary artistic practice, shaping the ways we understand identity, place, and belief today. Rather than treating

## COURTYARD OPEN 2026

3 APRIL - 2 MAY

COURTYARD ARTS, HERTFORD

The 19th annual Courtyard Open exhibition.

## ENCHANTED ALCHEMIES

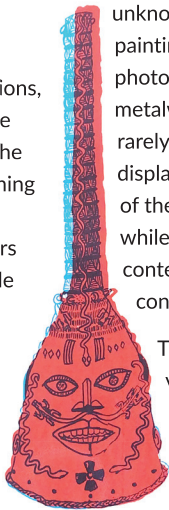
11 MARCH - 24 APRIL

ART + DESIGN GALLERY,  
UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE,  
HATFIELD

What lies beneath the surface of the rational world? Across generations, artists and makers have acted as conduits for the unexplained, transforming the hidden rhythms of nature and the whispers of the past into tangible form.

Drawing from the University of Hertfordshire Art Collection, Enchanted Alchemies explores rituals, beliefs, myths, and the intersection of folklore and the natural world. The exhibition considers how

mystery as something to be solved, the exhibition presents it as an evolving dialogue between people and the unknown. Bringing together painting, sculpture, drawing, photography, glass, and metalwork — including works rarely shown before — the display reveals the breadth of the University's collection while placing historical and contemporary perspectives in conversation.



Through these varied artistic responses, Enchanted Alchemies reflects on the enduring human impulse to look beyond the rational — whether through folklore, spiritual traditions, or our relationship with the natural environment.



## MV ART EXHIBITION

28-31 MAY

KINGSBURY BARN, ST. ALBANS

A fundraising exhibition for Mount Vernon Hospital garden, held in the fabulous mediaeval Kingsbury Barn. Horticultural celebrities, alongside prominent and local artists, will be donating artworks. Nurseries will also be displaying and selling their products to raise funds. Donations of artworks (all mediums accepted) can be made through the website: [www.mvartexhibition.co.uk](http://www.mvartexhibition.co.uk)

## SPIRIT OF SUMMER

1 - 11 JUNE

THE HENDERSON HUB, ABBOTS LANGLEY

Spirit of Summer is as much about connection as it is about artwork — connection to season, to place, and to one another. The exhibition celebrates the simple but powerful idea that making art together can be generous, life-affirming, and deeply rooted in community.

Full listings of workshops and exhibitions by HVA members can be viewed at: [www.hvaf.org.uk/workshops](http://www.hvaf.org.uk/workshops) and [www.hvaf.org.uk/artist-exhibitions](http://www.hvaf.org.uk/artist-exhibitions)

WHAT'S ON

# workshops & classes

## EXERCISING CREATIVITY: BUILDING UNIQUE DESIGNS THROUGH COLLAGE

YEAR ROUND  
ONLINE

[www.marianhallart.com/learn-with-me](http://www.marianhallart.com/learn-with-me)

Unlock your creativity with a magazine, scissors, and glue stick. Discover how this hands-on approach can spark endless ideas.

## HANDMADE JOURNALS

12 APRIL, 10:30AM - 3:30PM

MILL GREEN MUSEUM, HATFIELD  
[www.millgreenmuseum.co.uk](http://www.millgreenmuseum.co.uk)

Combining printing, photo transfer, and book binding techniques to create your own personalised journal.

## CONTEMPORARY BASKETRY FOR ALL ABILITIES

15 APRIL - 20 MAY

LETCWORTH SETTLEMENT  
[www.letchworthsettlement.com](http://www.letchworthsettlement.com)

A five-week short course with Hazel Godfrey, introducing a variety of materials and construction.

## THE QUIET PLACE

15 APRIL, 7:30PM - 9:30PM

KNOOPS, ST ALBANS  
[www.nataliamillmanart.com](http://www.nataliamillmanart.com)

A two-hour creative rest experience for busy minds, guided by artist Natalia Millman. An opportunity to create without expectation.

## COLLAGE AND GEL PRINTING

18 APRIL, 10AM-4PM

COMMUNITY CENTRE,  
GADEBRIDGE, HEMEL H'STD  
[www.mitziogreen.co.uk](http://www.mitziogreen.co.uk)

Explore colour, shapes, textures, and more to achieve a pleasing composition with visual impact.

## WINE AND JAPANESE PAPER CUTTING

22 APRIL, 7:30PM - 9:30PM

THE WEE VINOTECA, HITCHIN  
Email: [hello@yoshieallan.art](mailto:hello@yoshieallan.art)

Led by a local artist and wine lover Yoshie, you'll learn the delicate art of paper cutting using exquisite Japanese hand-pressed paper and gold brass leaf.

## PAINTING & SKETCHING IN PURBECK

26 APRIL - 1 MAY

CORFE CASTLE, DORSET  
[www.helenhalliday.com](http://www.helenhalliday.com)

Four days sketching, painting, and exploring under Helen Halliday's expert guidance.

## COUNTRY FRAME BASKETS

10 MAY

RANSOM'S PAVILLION, HITCHIN  
[www.trianglegarden.org/event/country-frame-basket-workshop/](http://www.trianglegarden.org/event/country-frame-basket-workshop/)

Make a willow frame basket for harvesting small garden produce, foraging, or collecting eggs.

## KIDS COLLAGE WORKSHOP

HALF TERM - MAY 24

NORTH HERTS MUSEUM,  
HITCHIN  
[www.yoshieallan.art](http://www.yoshieallan.art)

Brighten up the sky with a super colourful bird! All materials included. Suitable for ages 4+.

## PAINTING IN PORTUGAL

3 - 10 JUNE

CASA ROSA, OLHAO, PORTUGAL  
[www.helenhalliday.com](http://www.helenhalliday.com)

Art retreat with five days of painting tuition.

# new suppliers

For 2026, Herts Visual Arts has created a new supplier membership, offering art-related suppliers the opportunity to advertise on our website and through our media channels. See [hvaf.org.uk/suppliers](http://hvaf.org.uk/suppliers).



## DRAGONFLY DIGITAL

A long-time supporter and sponsor of HVA, Ken at Dragonfly Digital specialises in high-quality fine art/giclée and photographic reproductions, using the best quality fine art and photographic papers for printing. Dragonfly provide a professional but friendly service, offering help and advice as needed, and produce gallery-quality scans and prints.

[www.dragonflydigital.co.uk](http://www.dragonflydigital.co.uk)  
[ken@dragonflydigital.co.uk](mailto:ken@dragonflydigital.co.uk)

5 PORTER MEWS  
CODICOTE, SG4 8US

For more information see our website  
[www.hvaf.org.uk/supplier-membership](http://www.hvaf.org.uk/supplier-membership)



## ART @ MG – MARDLEYBURY GALLERY

With an eclectic mix of art, Mardleybury Gallery is a fantastic creative destination located in Datchworth, Hertfordshire. The gallery, which has been operating for over 10 years, showcases a diverse range of contemporary art from both established and emerging artists predominantly from within Hertfordshire.

[www.mardleyburygallery.co.uk](http://www.mardleyburygallery.co.uk)  
[info@mardleyburygallery.co.uk](mailto:info@mardleyburygallery.co.uk)

ART @ MG MARDLEYBURY GALLERY  
UNIT 3C, MARDLEYBURY FARM  
MARDLEYBURY ROAD  
DATCHWORTH, SG3 6SG



# Art & Craft @ Settlement Summer Term 2026

Summer Terms start w/b 13th April & 1st June

**Chinese Brush Painting**  
**02/06/2026 10am-12.30pm**

Looking at the techniques and compositional forms used in Chinese Xieyi (free style) landscape painting. Using Chinese brush painting materials throughout. Suitable for beginners and improvers

**Contemporary Basketry for all**  
**15/04/2026 & 03/06/2026**  
**10am-1pm**

This mixed-ability basketry course is contemporary in its' approach and will use a wide variety of natural materials. Exploration of surface and form is at the core of learners' creative outcomes.

**Lino Cut 15/04/2026**  
**1pm-3pm**

Learn how to use linocut tools to explore the possibilities of print. Building your skills in the exciting world of printmaking. In each session you'll design, carve and print a collection of limited-edition linocuts.

**Patch to Quilt**  
**28/04/2026**  
**& 29/04/2026 7pm-9.30pm**

Learn the skills of machine patchwork and quilting. Rotary cutting, getting the best from your sewing machine, colour choices, machine piecing and quilting, and basic construction methods.

**The Sketchbook**  
**15/04/2026 & 03/06/2026**  
**12.50pm-2.50pm**

The Sketchbook course is an ideal course for anyone wishing to explore an idea or theme in greater detail. Develop drawings, prints and painting studies in an array of different mediums and techniques all guided by the tutor throughout.

**Oil Painting**  
**16/04/2026 & 04/06/2026**  
**12.30pm-2.45pm**

Learners are encouraged to build and respond to their own natural strengths and focus on building their own unique style within the painting process.

**Portrait Painting in Oils**  
**17/04/2026 1pm-3pm**

This course is suitable for learners of all abilities looking for guidance.

We will explore portrait composition, choosing a palette, colour mixing and colour relationships.

**Seasons in stitching: A slow stitch applique journey**  
**13/04/2026 7pm-9pm**

you'll be introduced to the gentle art of slow stitching and appliqué, focusing on creative expression, mindfulness, and working at your own pace.

**Woven Tapestry**  
**14/04/2026 & 02/06/2026**  
**7pm-9pm and**  
**15/04/2026 10am-12pm**

Learn the basics in tapestry weaving and for further developing skills and woven tapestry knowledge. Choose from a selection of projects aimed at various skill levels from beginner to improver.

**Abstract Painting**  
**13/04/2026 & 01/06/2026**  
**12.30pm-2.45pm**

Each lesson begins with an approachable practical experiment that is later developed using various materials such as acrylic paints, watercolours, ink and collage.

**Applied Arts**  
**14/04/2026 & 02/06/2026**  
**12.30pm-2.45pm**

Art Club focuses on experimentation with a wide range of materials and mixed media. Each class begins with demonstrations, and you are then encouraged to develop ideas and allow your work to take on its own unique style.

**Expressive Watercolours**  
**22/04/2026 10am-12.30pm**

Explore versatility with colour and a host of different techniques such as laying washes, wet-in-wet, sponging on a range of different subjects from flowers to landscapes

**The Letchworth Settlement is an independent adult education  
centre offering 100 courses each term  
Book online at [www.leitchworthsettlement.org.uk](http://www.leitchworthsettlement.org.uk)**

# Impressionism and the birth of modern anonymity

BY JASMINE HARDY

In 2026, we are all guilty of scrolling. Our brains register thousands of faces each day, most of them strangers, flicked past as casually as someone on a busy street. Anonymous, fleeting, and immediately forgotten. But anonymity in modern life did not begin with social media. It was born in the streets of 19th-century Paris.

The dramatic shift from agricultural towns to industrial cities transformed not only livelihoods and architecture, but the experience of seeing and being seen. Out of this tumultuous time emerged the figure of the flâneur — the leisurely urban observer who wandered the boulevards, absorbing and exploring the modern city. He was both immersed and detached, an engaged spectator with the privilege of idleness, yet plagued by isolation. The flâneur did not simply stroll; he consumed the city visually, lacking a sense of community.

This concept was born through radical urban change. In the second half of the 19th century, Napoleon III sought

to transform Paris into a capital that emanated order and beauty. He appointed Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann to oversee the city's reconstruction. Old-fashioned and narrow streets were demolished and replaced with vast boulevards that structured the capital from north to south and east to west.

Haussmann's redesign was not only an aesthetic change but also a social change. The cramped, impoverished districts were targeted first, their residents displaced to the city's outskirts with no consideration. The reconstruction reshaped Paris in every aspect. Poverty was pushed out of sight, while the gentry flourished in new spaces that consisted of cafés, parks, and shops. The modern city became a stage designed for visibility and consumption.

In this new Paris, technology completely transformed daily life. Photography began to rival painting, capturing candid scenes with labourless precision. Transport systems

expanded, and the streets were filled with constant motion. The city no longer functioned as a collection of close-knit neighbourhoods but as a sea of anonymous bodies. It was this contemporary sensation of speed and ephemerality that artists sought to capture.

For the first time, Impressionism rejected staged historical compositions in favour of capturing fleeting moments. Painters such as Claude Monet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir embraced loose brushwork, impasto, and modern subject matter that consisted of boulevards, cafés, and theatres. Their work focused on how modern life felt rather than how it formally appeared, with emphasis on light, movement, and atmosphere.

In *Boulevard des Capucines* (1873), Monet renders the crowd as a dynamic blur of dabs and strokes. Individual figures almost dissolve, evoking the immediacy of photography while asserting the tactile nature of paint. The boulevard becomes a conveyor belt of passing bodies that are visible but unknowable.

Yet the freedom to wander anonymously was not universal. Alongside being wealthy, the flâneur was also male. A woman walking alone risked being labelled a

prostitute; her presence in public space was scrutinised rather than celebrated. Modernity offered liberation for some and restriction for others.

The rise of the flâneur marks a turning point in how we relate to strangers. Industrial Paris cultivated the habit of looking without engaging, of experiencing crowds as spectacle rather than community. The 19th-century city, with its streams of anonymous passers-by, anticipates today's endless digital scrolling and social detachment.

*Jasmine Hardy is a recent art history graduate who loves to write and learn. Instagram & TikTok @unde.rthewillowtree*



*Boulevard des Capucines, Claude Monet*

# spirit of summer

An exhibition by the South West Herts Area Group, HVA  
1–13 June 2026 | The Henderson Hub, Abbots Langley.

This June, The Henderson Hub in Abbots Langley will be filled with colour, warmth, and creative energy as six artists from Hertfordshire Visual Arts South West Herts Area come together for a shared exhibition, titled “Spirit of Summer”.

Now in its fourth year, this show brings together the work of Gill Woods, Sarah How, Eleanor Sidaway, Barbara Burrows, Lynne Watkins, and Jackie Uphill – artists who first connected through HVA and, over time, formed a relaxed and supportive group. What began as a shared membership has grown into friendship, regular conversation, and a natural desire to exhibit together.

Although each artist has a distinct visual language, Spirit of Summer feels like an intuitive fit. The theme reflects not only seasonal light and colour, but also the underlying qualities that run through their practices: a responsiveness to colour, a sense of vitality, and a love of nostalgia, movement, and reflection. Across the exhibition, visitors can expect

a rich variety of work, united by an unmistakable seasonal energy.

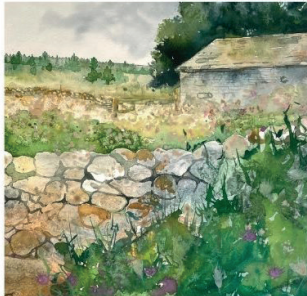
Set within the welcoming surroundings of The Henderson Hub, the exhibition is designed to feel accessible and engaging for all visitors, whether they are regular gallery-goers or simply curious to see what is happening locally. The artists will also be running “Make & Take” creative sessions, inviting visitors to step beyond viewing and take part in the act of making.

Spirit of Summer is as much about connection as it is about artwork – connection to season, to place, and to one another. It celebrates the simple but powerful idea that making art together can be generous, life-affirming, and deeply rooted in community.

*The exhibition runs from 1st to 13th June, from 10am to 4pm daily, at The Henderson Hub, Abbots Langley. Artwork and greetings cards will be available for sale, and visitors are warmly invited to join in at the Make & Take sessions on Fridays, 5th and 12th of June. No booking is needed, just turn up.*

# SPIRIT OF SUMMER EXHIBITION

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## 1 - 13 JUNE 2026

**Paintings, Textiles and Jewellery - FREE ENTRY**  
**Make & Take Community Events - Fridays 5<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup>**  
**£3 per make, no booking needed.**



**The Henderson Hub**

**Abbots Langley,  
Hertfordshire, WD5 0AR**

**10 am - 4pm Mon - Sat**



# creative blocks are not a failure — they are a signal

BY NATALIA MILLMAN

A creative block is not a dead end. It is information and is an essential part of the creative process.

It is your system quietly telling you that something needs to shift. Not necessarily the work itself, but the way you are approaching it. When ideas dry up, most of us panic and try to push harder. We add pressure, raise expectations, and start comparing ourselves to everyone else who seems to be doing better. Creative blocks usually appear when we are stuck in our heads instead of in conversation with the work itself.

For artists working with materials, this often shows up as avoiding the studio, not wanting to waste expensive materials, or feeling unsure about committing too soon.

## Lower the Stakes on Purpose

One of the quickest ways to unblock yourself is to deliberately make work that does not matter. Use test pieces. Offcuts. Cheap materials. Surfaces

that can be reused. Set a timer for 20 minutes and make something unfinished or temporary.

Work small and fast. Treat it as a study, not a statement. When nothing is at stake, your hands remember what to do and with it comes play — the most magical ingredient of productivity.

## Change the Question

Instead of asking, “What should I make?” try asking:

- What does this material want to do?
- What happens if I push this process too far?
- What am I avoiding committing to?

Often, the block is not about ideas; it’s about hesitation. The form you keep circling without touching is usually the one that needs your hands first.

## Borrow a Container

Too much freedom can be paralyzing, especially in an open-ended studio

practice. Constraints are quietly generous; limit your materials, use one tool, print in one colour, make 10 versions of the same small form.

A container gives the work something to push against. Friction creates momentum.

## Work Sideways

If the work feels impossible, stop forcing it. Do something adjacent. Prepare materials. Clean and reset your tools. Make samples. In physical practices, momentum often comes from touch rather than thought.

Progress does not always look like finished work. Sometimes it looks like preparing the ground.

## Trust the Lag

Not everything resolves immediately, especially when materials and processes are involved. Some ideas need to be handled, left overnight, or returned to after they have cooled, dried, or settled.

John Cleese said it best, “When your creative juices are not flowing, do not beat yourself up. Play. Rest. Let your unconscious do its work. Getting discouraged is a waste of energy. Curiosity is fuel.” (*Creativity, a short and cheerful guide.*)

## Build a Gentle Rhythm

Consistency matters, but it does not need to be punishing. Track your energy rather than your hours. Notice when you feel most alert or physically engaged, and protect that time. Show up, even if it is only to make a small adjustment. It feels so good just to show up, even for 15 minutes.

## Things That Help Me When I Am Stuck

- I go on an arty day out and look at other people’s work, especially outside my own medium.
  - I read a book or an essay connected to what I am exploring or an artist I admire.
  - I do automatic writing – three handwritten pages without stopping, analysing, or re-reading, as per *The Artist’s Way*. The release is real. Ideas surface when the noise quietsens.
  - I walk in nature or exercise. I grab my golf clubs and head out for 9 holes. Two hours later, I come back wanting to make something with my hands.
- Creative blocks do not mean you are failing. They mean your relationship with the work is changing. And that is often where the most interesting things emerge.

@nataliamillmanart | @nataliamillmaninteriors

FEATURED ARTIST

# Elif Lewis

Meet Elif, a ceramicist and painter, who is currently exhibiting at the Mudlarks Café in Hertford and will be taking part in Open Studios this September.

## How would you describe your practice?

I work both in acrylic paints and in ceramics. One of my key targets, whichever medium I am working in, is to show as much respect for that medium as for the subject. For example, I want anyone looking at one of my nautical paintings to be thinking about the nature of the acrylic paint making up the boats, as well as thinking about the boats themselves, and to appreciate what is actually present as much as what it represents. For that reason, I use somewhat unconventional methods of painting – I'll apply the paint using palette knives, rather than brushes in most parts of the paintings, and I sometimes use some household objects to paint and create textures.

## How did you become an artist?

I've always been interested in creating, and in the relationship between an object and its representation. My first career was in city planning, which



many could argue is an area where art is useful, but in many ways is the reverse of traditional realism in art; the representation precedes the reality, and “success” is measured in how well the reality can imitate the “art”. Throughout my adult life, I have always been keen to try out various different media and techniques, but in terms of using acrylics to paint, this was something I took a great interest in during lockdown.

## What has been the highlight of your career so far?

It wasn't my biggest sale, but I was very proud when I sold my painting "Olives" to a collector in North America. This sale was the third continent to which I had sold art, having previously sold to collectors in Europe and Asia. (I have since sold to Africa.)

I think art represents the connection of the local and the global; art can be representative of a specific place, and yet that painting can travel anywhere in the world. In my art, I like to communicate the emotions that I feel associated with a particular place, and it feels wonderful that these emotions can somehow be communicated through acrylic paints and canvas, and hopefully inspire emotions in others across the globe.



## What inspires your art practice?

Although I am not a naturalist artist, I am very inspired by nature, and specifically its influence on human emotions. There are key elements that recur in my artworks: water (in particular the sea), trees, idealized landscapes.



Movement and change are also an inspiration. Art, in the form of paintings, doesn't have the dimension of time to convey this motion, so I enjoy experimenting with different techniques to ensure that the associated feelings are somehow captured and communicated, whether this change is rapid, as in a dance, or slower, as in the changes in a face over time.

# making social media work for you

Social media can feel overwhelming, but when used intentionally it becomes one of the most powerful (and affordable) tools for growing your artistic practice. Here are 10 practical tips to help you make the most of it.

## 1. Be Clear About Your Voice

Take time to reflect on what sets your work apart. Consider your subject matter, materials, themes, and influences — and how you want people to feel when they encounter your art. When your posts consistently reflect your unique creative identity, your audience begins to recognise your work instantly and associate you with a particular style or perspective.

## 2. Show the Process, Not Just the Product

Audiences love seeing behind the scenes. Share sketchbook pages, studio experiments, glazing tests, or works in progress. Consider making a time lapse video of you working, even just your hands at work creates an engaging post. Revealing the journey behind a finished piece builds connection and helps people appreciate the time, skill, and decision-making involved.

## 3. Tell the Story Behind the Work

What inspired this collection? Was it a walk across the Chiltern Hills, changing coastal light, or a personal memory? Stories create emotional investment, and emotional investment often leads to stronger engagement and sales.

## 4. Post Consistently (But Realistically)

You don't need to post every day to stay relevant, but you do need a steady rhythm. Choose a schedule that fits comfortably alongside your creative practice — perhaps two or three times a week — and maintain it so your audience knows when to expect new content.

## 5. Use Quality Images

In a visual marketplace, presentation matters enormously. Good lighting, sharp focus, and uncluttered

how professional your work appears online. Natural daylight is usually best, position your work near a window and avoid harsh direct sunlight that can distort colour. If you're photographing 2D work, ensure the camera is square to the piece to avoid distortion; for 3D work, experiment with different angles to show scale and detail.

## **6. Engage, Don't Just Broadcast**

Reply to comments, acknowledge messages, and actively support fellow artists. Engaging with other Hertfordshire creatives, galleries, and arts organisations strengthens relationships and increases your visibility within the arts community.

## **7. Make Use of Hashtags and Tags**

When taking part in an HVA event, use the promoted hashtags such as #hertsopenstudios or #bigartfair. Research relevant local hashtags to connect with nearby buyers and collaborators. Process and thematic hashtags will help others with shared interests find you.

## **8. Share Exhibitions and Events**

Your exhibitions, open studios, workshops, and markets deserve more than one post. Build anticipation beforehand, share preparation insights, and post highlights afterwards to extend the life and reach of the

event. Tag @hertsvisualarts with your upcoming events and we will endeavour to repost to our story.

## **9. Don't Be Afraid of Video**

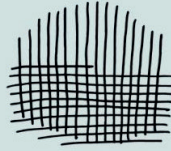
Short studio clips, time lapses, packing orders, or informal chats to camera can significantly increase reach and engagement. Video helps audiences feel closer to you and your process. Authenticity matters far more than high production value.

## **10. Remember Your Purpose**

Whether you want to sell work, attract commissions, secure exhibition opportunities, teach workshops, or simply build community, keep your goal firmly in mind. Set boundaries around your time online and ensure social media supports – rather than distracts from – your creative practice.

Used thoughtfully and with intention, social media can become far more than a promotional tool; it can be a powerful extension of your creative voice. Social media allows you to build genuine relationships, share your journey, attract collectors and collaborators, and create opportunities that may never have arisen otherwise.

*Next Issue: Open Studios: How To Turn Visitors Into Buyers*



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# art @ BTC

The BTC in Stevenage is a hub for start-ups and small to medium enterprises. Owned by Stevenage Borough Council, the three-floor building exhibits the work of 24 local HVA artists. In this issue, we take a look at one of those artists, Leon Barnes.

Leon Barnes is a specialist oil painter with a background in sign writing and model making, which developed his love for detail. This detail plays a major role in his painting. Leon is drawn to light and shadows and the effect these have on the overall picture from the dappling of light on the woodland floor to the high sheen on an animal's coat.

Leon paints to evoke the feeling of being lost in the moment, allowing the viewer to feel a genuine connection with the work. He has a passion for landscapes and the simple yet intricate beauty of nature. Whilst working predominantly with landscapes, Leon is versatile and accomplished in animal studies, pet and human portraits, botanicals, and still life. He has expressed his creativity in many forms over the years, from

fronting a band and working on movie sets, to running a DJ business. For several years now, Leon has channelled his creativity into various areas of oil painting, teaching private 1-2-1 sessions and group classes, undertaking commissioned, and painting for the pure joy of it.



You can find a mixture of Leon's work on display at the BTC, including some of his early landscapes, prints of more recent work, and big cat studies.



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