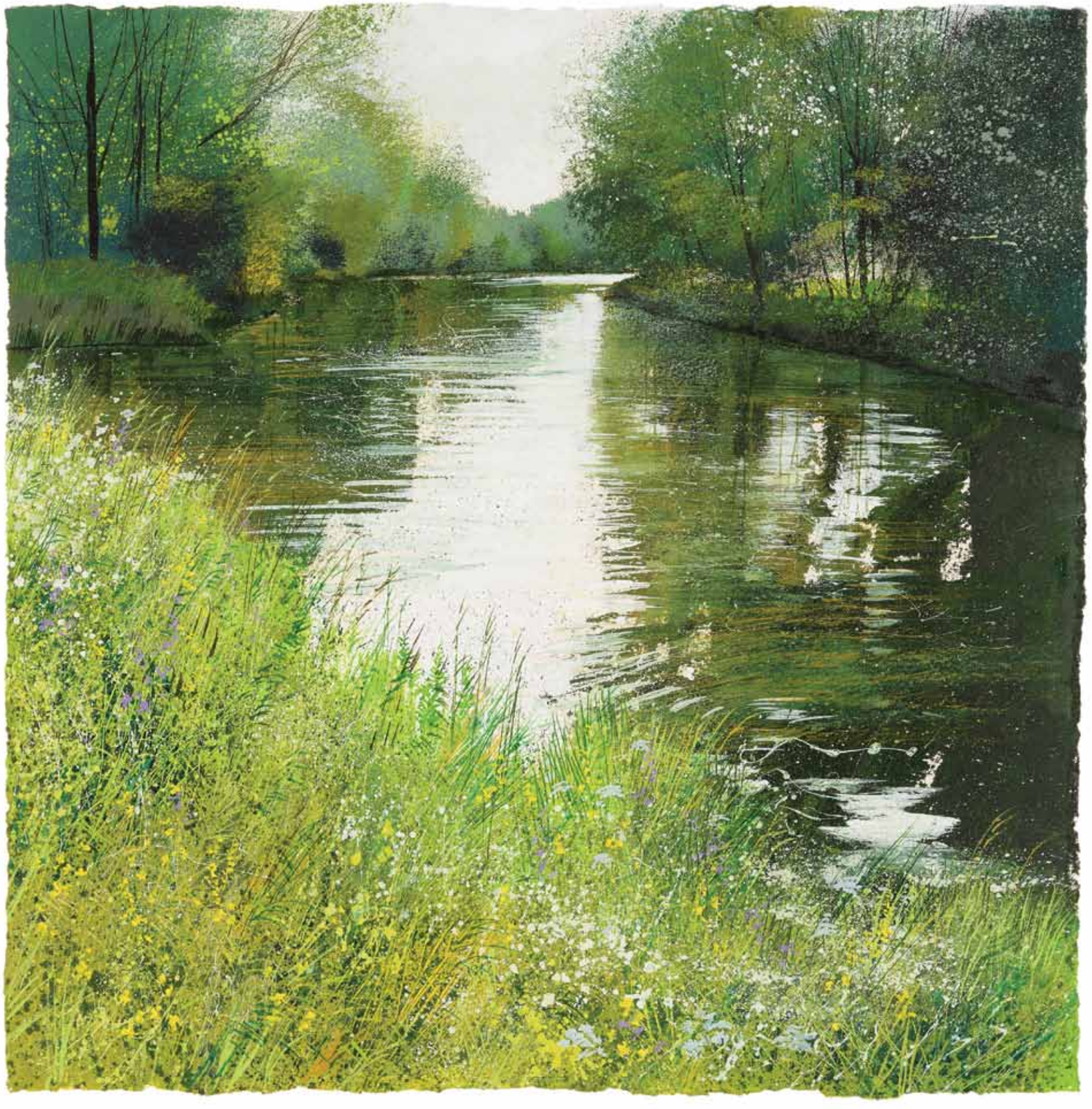


River Stour Reflections
(watercolor and ink, 15x15)

Throwing PAINT AROUND

THROUGH THE USE OF IDIOSYNCRATIC MARK-MAKING, **PAUL EVANS** CREATES FRESH, LUMINOUS LANDSCAPES.

By Ani Kodjabasheva

The secret to Paul Evans' approach to color lies in "looseness"—using free gestures and a measure of chance to build up an image. In his landscape *River Stour Reflections* (opposite), watercolor combines with ink to convey the luscious riverbank vegetation and the water's glossy surface over weeds growing in the shallows. Looking closer reveals that the mass of leaves and the rippled, languid river are composed of a dizzying range of mark-making techniques.

Relatively few of the image's details are painted with precision brushwork. Instead, tree leaves are dabbed on with a dry or wet brush; at some point, around the outer edges of the sheet, the wet dabs turn into droplets as the "leaves" are simply spattered on. In the foreground, wild white blossoms are depicted via a spray of white ink. Blobs mix with trails of color that track the brush's movements through the air. In the river itself, the shine on the water's surface is all white ink—smeared, tracked across the sheet and splattered. Greens and ochres are applied on the water with visible long brushstrokes, or dabbed on in defined areas. It's characteristic of Evans' technique that colors aren't mixed. Even in the thickly applied underpaint, areas of different greens clash, rather than blend. The bold juxtaposition of marks on the surface creates a buzzing energy. The fact that the white on the river has cracked in places only seems to add still another pattern to the painting's complexity.

DRIP DROP

Stallington Wood (below), a recent piece that also incorporates acrylic, is a quicker, even more direct example of Evans' approach. Sometimes, he adds finer details over loosely depicted vegetation—for example, a few precise daisies over the mass of color in *Prospect Cottage, Dungeness* (opposite). In *Stallington Wood*, however, the image is achieved almost entirely through spraying and splattering of paint. The bursts of color are barely held together by the taut branches and trunks of the trees. Against the flat, monochrome background of the forest floor and the transparent yellow of the sky, color is scattered freely. Leaves are made up of superimposed layers of marks in varying shades of green; the flowers underneath are a dense mass of purple. No color bleeds into another. The edge of the flower field is marked with a simple band of purple applied with a dry brush, and the light hitting the sides of the tree trunks is but a thin line of beige done in a single stroke.

OPPOSITE
Prospect Cottage, Dungeness
(watercolor and ink, 24x30)

BELOW
Stallington Wood
(watercolor and ink, 22x24)

The marks' varying sizes create a sense of depth and perspective, with the largest and boldest reserved for the foreground. Where we would normally expect the painting to resolve itself into clearer detail, Evans confronts us with the boldest splashes of color yet—lime green blobs clashing with the purple, and black acrylic adding a thicker texture as well as color contrast.

Even in seascapes, Evans likes to introduce color complexity via contrasting marks: in the middle distance in *Littlestone Light* (page 16), for example, specks of black paint are scattered among the dots of glinting white.

How is this done? "Literally, you lay the thing down on the ground and just chuck paint in different ways to build up lots of mark-making," Evans says. "You're getting blobs, you're getting flicks, you're getting one color against another color. Yet it all makes sense, this field of calculated chaos. It's random in some ways, but controlled in other ways." Evans isolates the colors that predominate in the scene and then literally throws them together, mimicking the abundance of nature. When we step back, the layered marks come together into forest flowers or shifting light over the mottled surface of the sea.

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Evans' art is a response to his practice of plein air painting. "Nature has all the answers," he says. Sometimes, even errors made when using his gestural painting technique—such as an out-of-place splotch of color—can serve as a reminder of the time he spent capturing the scene. "Even mistakes can be nice reminders of the fun you had while learning something," says Evans. "Those special days resonate in your memory and stay in your psyche so that you can inject some of those methods into stuff when you're working in studio."

From his days back in art college, Evans has kept up a practice of walking in nature, and he continues to do so in the rural area around his home in Suffolk, England. In college, evenings and weekends were spent outside: "I always drew and painted out on the hills and the downs." On Monday morning, he would come into school with material to be reviewed by two supportive teachers—artists Robert Tavener and Trevor Kemp. "With their encouragement, I stuck at it," says the artist. He learned by doing, and still does. "You must never give up the learning side of painting if you want to keep a freshness about your work," he says.

"You must never give up the learning side of painting if you want to keep a freshness about your work."

Preserving that freshness can often mean working quickly. "Plein air work puts you on the spot. It's instant. You've got to make rapid decisions," Evans says. One of his favorite subjects to paint is snow, mainly because it's so fleeting. He also loves capturing the colors of a full moon, as in the incandescent fields of *Harvest Field, Hamsey* (opposite). The artist is pursuing an economy of means so he can capture living landscapes and let them emerge on the page. "I've always tried to think of ways of getting things down quickly, without being too finicky," he says. "If there's a highly detailed foreground of weeds and nettles, for example, you can get a handful of pencils, bind them together and draw with 12 pencils at a time." In doing so, Evans captures the plants' vitality, the direction of their growth and the general pattern.

In *Winter Teazles* (page 18) the spiky plants are depicted with flat stalks and flower heads, thin bristles and protruding needles, like silhouettes against the gray winter day or specimens preserved in a herbarium. The sky is stained; line patterns, like in an etching, mark the rugged landscape.

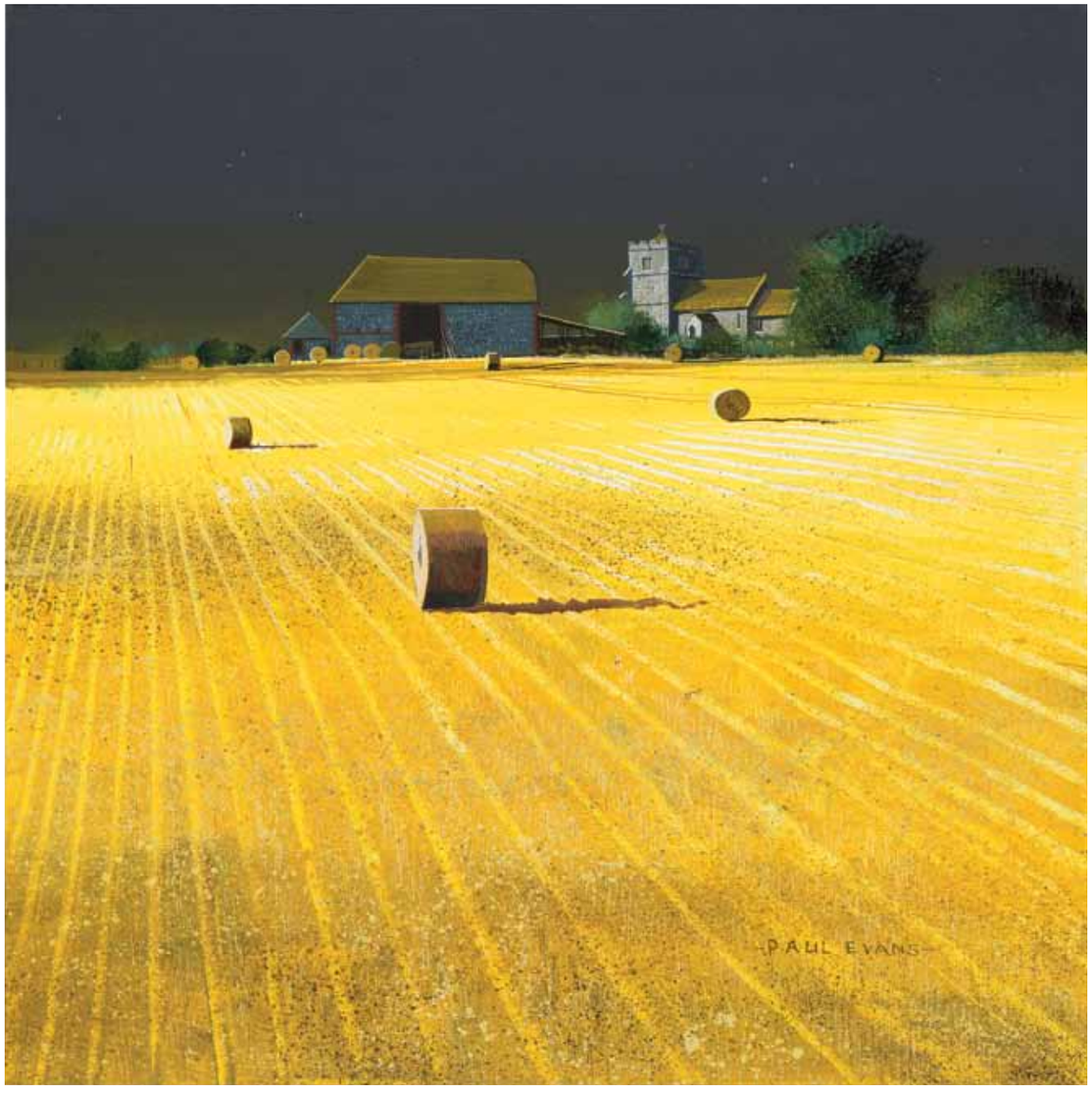
OPPOSITE
Littlestone Light (watercolor and ink, 22x24)

BELOW
Harvest Field, Hamsey (watercolor and ink, 12x12)

Despite the painting's large size, it creates an air of an almost accidental imprint on the page.

"I try to adapt different methods and make up ways of doing stuff that just come to you when you're out," Evans says. Even his choice of equipment is idiosyncratic, yet practical. He uses a fishing umbrella to work in hostile weather, and he transports his selection of media in a wheelbarrow: "I can just wheel it down the field. Everything goes in the wheelbarrow and it's dead easy."

Even in winter, Evans spends a lot of time on plein air work and aims to finish smaller paintings outside. During colder weather, he'll stay out about three hours working on a piece. "Any longer than that and you start to freeze , and painting the actual detail gets harder," he says. The artist might touch up the painting in the studio, refining details. "I've still got the true, strong essence of everything that



was put down outside," he says. In kinder weather, Evans can easily spend the whole day working outdoors.

ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

The artist picked up techniques from the various media he has studied since art school, including linocut, which may explain his instinct to isolate and juxtapose colors. Speaking of these kind of prints and their influence on his current work, Evans says, "There's a boldness in the way that you design the colors to go with one another. My printmaking is probably integrated into my psyche and coming out in my painting."

Evans' tendency to "throw paint around," as he calls it, may draw inspiration from Jackson Pollock (American; 1912–56) and other Abstract Expressionists; while he likely adopted the technique of building up an image from specks of contrasting colors from Georges Seurat (French; 1859–91), whose work he studied in art school. Evans combines Seurat's color sophistication with Pollock's immediacy. Even so, these artistic references aren't conscious or deliberate. They're pragmatic approaches that make sense when attempting to capture the moment—occurring not through imitation, but instinct.

LOOMING LARGE

Evans creates his biggest paintings in his studio in a converted barn: "I can tuck myself away in there if it's throwing down rain outside," he says. In that case, he works from a large number of reference drawings and paintings, created on site, while aiming to preserve the freshness of the encounter with nature. He'll again be "chucking things around" to create energetic marks on the paper, and he'll be, in his words, "Fighting against detail to try and keep things a little less complicated." Evans works on only one painting at a time. "My energy and the idea of that image I want to catch all go into that one painting," says the artist.

Over the years, Evans has amassed hundreds of drawings of places, along with many paintings and studies through all those changing elements. After 50 years of practice, he knows his favorite places intimately. Yet when he's working, experience supersedes memory. ***WA***

Ani Kodjabasheva (anikodjabasheva.com) enjoys writing about fine art and education.

ABOVE
Morning Light
(watercolor and ink, 24x30)

OPPOSITE
Winter Teazles
(watercolor and ink, 24x30)

Meet the Artist

Paul Evans (paulevans-artist.co.uk) works in a variety of media, including watercolor, ink and acrylics. He also enjoys making etchings and linocuts. In 1988, Evans established his first gallery in Alfriston, East Sussex, England, before moving to Suffolk, England, in 1992. He then opened Lavenham Contemporary Gallery, selling his books, cards, prints and original paintings. Evans' paintings have been shown in a number of exhibitions, and his work has been reproduced commercially as the featured artwork for greetings cards, calendars and limited-edition prints by several large publishers, including Aquarelle, Kingsmead Publications, Royle Publications and Royal Doulton. His work has been acquired by collectors worldwide, and he has a large and loyal following closer to home.