

Artists of Devon and Cornwall - Drawn to London



Tin Roof Barn on Dartmoor, by Sally O'Neill

Drawn to London

Royal Opera Arcade Gallery, Pall Mall, London SW1

22 -27 Oct

www.roa-galleria.com

Artists have always been drawn to the Tamar Valley, ever since JMW Turner ‘discovered’ it in the early years of the 19th century. Turner wrote: “I have never seen so many natural beauties in such a limited spot as I have seen here.” Today, the valley is home to a diverse community of artists, 160 of them members of the Drawn to the Valley artists’ collective. The group, set up in 2003, has artists working in all formats. They hold annual Open Studios and exhibitions together and support each other in their individual projects.

Now, for the first time, the collective is showing its work in the capital, with the ‘Drawn to London’ exhibition at the Royal Opera Arcade Gallery in Pall Mall on 22-27 October.

Anyone who knows this part of the country will know how divisive the River Tamar can be. Cornwall on one side, Devon on the other, the river is literally a border line. It’s often a dividing line, too, separating “them” on one side of the river and “us” on the other.

But not for the artists of Drawn to the Valley. For them, the River Tamar is the natural artery that brings them together. The artists all live and work in a narrow stretch within a few miles either side of the River Tamar, taking in town, country and coast, from Plymouth at the southern end to north east Cornwall and north west Devon at the top.

The exhibition in London makes good a promise made by Drawn to the Valley back in 2003: “It’s in our constitution that we will help spread the word of the valley’s natural beauty at every opportunity,” said chair Iain Grant. “Taking an exhibition to London will hopefully do that. “This is something we’ve wanted to do for some time. It will introduce the work of our artists to a new audience.

“I think it’s quite different for a region to take an exhibition to London and it’s certainly unusual for a collective to have such diversity in terms of formats,” he added. “We cover pretty much everything, 2D and 3D, ceramicists, mosaic artists, metal artists, printmakers, mixed media and painters. And the styles are equally diverse – representational, abstract, contemporary.

“The Tamar Valley is a very tranquil place to live, but it’s artistically vibrant. The light is just fabulous for those artists who take their inspiration from their natural surroundings in the Tamar Valley.”

Such as Sally O’Neill, who’s one of the 36 artists exhibiting in London. Sally’s studio is a converted cowshed at her home in Coryton on the Devon side of the Tamar. To get here from the nearest town, Tavistock, you drive past the famous Dartmoor landmark, Brentor, down hedge-lined country lanes and past fields of sheep.



New Lambs Near Brentor, by Sally O'Neill

These are the scenes Sally often finds herself painting: "I love it here in winter when you can see the trees in their skeletal forms. That must be my architectural background, looking at the form and structure of everything. In winter, you can see the history in the hedgerows and the range of colours and textures of the moor."

Sally usually works in acrylics, but for the London exhibition, she is also returning to pen and ink drawing, with some large black and white pieces of Dartmoor: "Again, this reflects my architectural past. I often do very bright, almost naïve paintings. But the black and white brings out the sheer drama of the Dartmoor landscape."

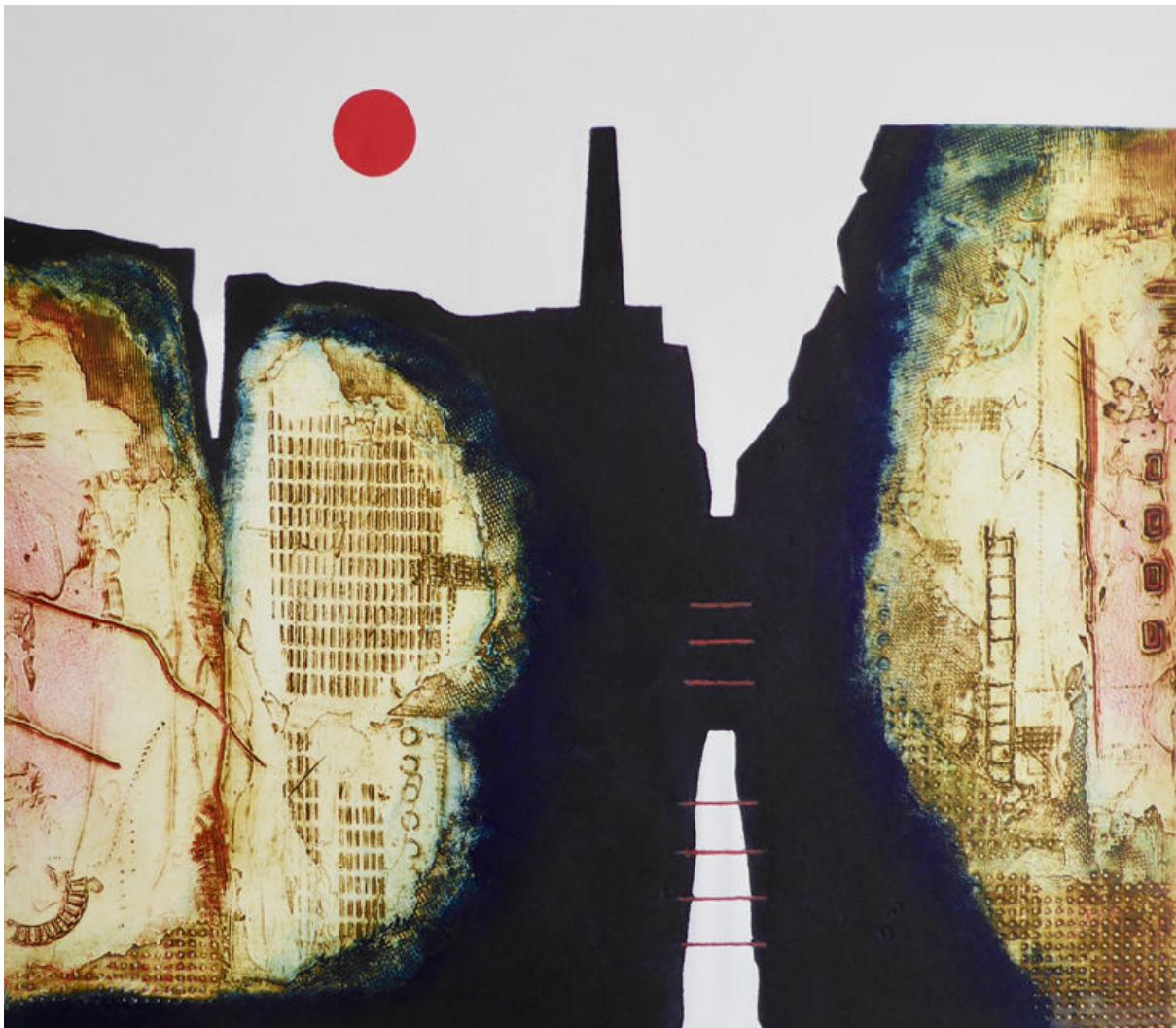
The rise and rise of Drawn to the Valley reflects the wider regeneration of the Tamar Valley, a sometimes-forgotten part of the British Isles despite its inspirational beauty. The Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is part of a World Heritage Site, recognising its mining heritage – a major source of inspiration for contemporary printmaker Charlotte Sainsbury, who lives at the 'bottom' end of the valley in Cornwall.



Viaduct, by Charlotte Sainsbury

Charlotte presents an abstract view of the area around her home in Millbrook and has a particular passion for relics. She initially trained as a ceramicist and for 25 years worked in ceramic restoration, repairing priceless Ming and ancient Chinese and Arabic pieces for clients. Also possessing an MA in printmaking, Charlotte now focuses on this medium.

When it comes to inspiration, Charlotte is spoilt for choice: “I like man-made structures imposed on the environment, especially if they’re falling apart! I love the viaducts, the tin mines, the industrial heritage of Cornwall. Combine that with the natural environment that we have here, and we’ve got the best of both worlds.”



Fractured Seam, by Charlotte Sainsbury

From her studio high up on a steep hill, you can see down to Cremyll, another major source of inspiration: “I walk down to the estuary all the time. There are three boatyards on the route, great for seeing boats that need repairing!”

Like Sally, she’s creating pieces specially for the London event: “It’s exciting for us to take an exhibition up there,” said Charlotte. “It’s a chance to show them what this part of the country has got.” www.drawntothevalley.co.uk