

# Front Cover Artist



Name: **Gavin Mundy**  
 Age: **37**  
 Lives: **Surrey**  
 Medium: **Acrylic**  
 Cover Picture: **Hot Pebble**

## Did drawing and painting always come naturally to you?

I don't know if I was particularly good when I first used a pencil but I have always enjoyed drawing. The more I did the more I wanted to do and the better I got. The feeling of figuring out a problem and that 'Aha!' moment must have been greater than the feeling of not getting it right. Sketching and drawing held my interests for a long time and this background helped ease my way into painting. I 'just' had to add the techniques of paint application and colour mixing.

Painting did make me consider an object in context, so I was no longer just doing a horse but also the sky, trees, fence and grass around it, a whole new world opened up to me.

## You mainly use acrylic – why does it work for you?

I have tried various mediums over the years and acrylic just seems to have the qualities I like, including the drying time, flexibility, opacity and the finish. Having said that I do occasionally dabble in pastels, oil and digital art.

## There is an amazing variety of work on your website, do you have a favourite subject?

Oddly the subject of a painting is not necessarily the thing I paint – the effects of light, texture, colour or pattern are often what attract me to try something. For instance 'Train Wheels' was not done



△ 'Hot Pebble', acrylic, 35.5x28cm, on this issue's front cover

because I'm interested in trains but I was caught by how multiple separate components were 'grimed up' so much it looked like it was made of one mass of metal. It was symmetrical and the variety of colours hidden within it was intriguing and I could see that the way parts overlapped others would make for an interesting depths effect. Another reason for the variety is that my favourite subject matter changes. I sometimes do a few similar things for a while before

moving on. The final element is just to have a break: once I've done something technical, precise and straight, I might feel the need to do something organic or fluffy!

Ultimately all paintings are just paint applied to a surface with something and I don't feel subject matter changes that, it's just placing the paint appropriately.



## Where did you come up with the idea for Hot Pebble?

I was doodling ideas in my sketchbook, thinking up compositions for some kind of pebble still life and it popped into my head. I hadn't finished shading a sketch a certain way and it looked like a glowing stone. The internal and external light problem and the different stone textures and colours appealed to me.

△ 'Thames Rescue', acrylic, 40.5x30.5cm



△ 'Great Horned Owl', acrylic, 25x20cm



△ 'Scoot', acrylic, 40.5x30.5cm



△ 'Snowbound Spaceship', acrylic, 30.5x25cm



△ 'Taiko Drummer', acrylic, 30.5x61cm

## How long did it take you?

The idea appeared and sketches fine-tuned it, then there was finding the right stones and some research, which all took time. I think I did most of it over a weekend, with the odd bit of fine-tuning during the following week. I tend to do paintings that way and don't like lingering on one too long.

## How did you create the amazing sense of heat and the glow from the middle pebble?

The illusion took a bit of working out and trial and error but I looked at various glowing things, toys and hot heating elements, whatever I could think of that might help. I worked out the final details in the process of painting. A lot of the effect is the shadow of that pebble being bright red, and the red illumination on the neighbouring pebbles, especially in the shadow areas, which I basically made up, but were where experience told me they should fall. The difficult part was finding the balance on the lit side - of being both externally illuminated and internally glowing. Even subtle things like scratches being glow red and not just dark pebble colour all add to the effect.

I also had to bear in mind that these pebbles have a translucent quality – you could equate the surface to back-lit translucent glass. Details and blemishes on the outside will be sharp marks whereas other softer details are discernible a little further inside the stone.

## When and how do you work best?

I prefer to work in daylight but do paint in artificial light as there isn't always a choice. I paint at various times of day.

Depending on what I'm working on I may work from photos and sketches and the real thing when I can and sometimes I might make up stuff. I often work it out, let it build up inside then suddenly do the painting in a short time. You could liken it to a creative sneeze!

## How important do you feel art is as a means of communication?

Very. Painting is my way of appreciating things around me. When you paint something people look at it like the artist did and maybe think, actually rusty dirty train wheels are interesting!

In my younger days I found a stammer quite hard and exhausting to deal with at times, and I think art was an escape, and a way of communicating that I could do fluently. I also work with autistic children and drawing comes in very handy. I often draw pictures to explain things or describe a sequence of events. Or even draw things to entice them to interact and speak. I've drawn innumerable cars and trains and just recently speckled frogs, radiators, radios, a polar bear, a trike, and Father Christmas. It keeps me well practised, and the kids get pictures really well - just my kind of audience!

## Do you work with and get inspiration from other artists?

Getting inspired is easy, it's narrowing things down and deciding what one thing to paint next that I find hard. I am inspired by other artists I meet or know, both in the real world and online, and will be exhibiting with the wonderful members of the Worple Art Group on April 27th in Wimbledon. Everyday life throws up things, not to mention artworks by artists past and present.

▽ 'Train Wheels', acrylic, 15x40.5cm



You can enjoy more of Gavin's artwork at [www.saa.co.uk/art/mundyart](http://www.saa.co.uk/art/mundyart) or at [www.mundyart.co.uk](http://www.mundyart.co.uk)

## Ask Our Expert!



SAA PA **Steve Williams** is a mine of useful information about art techniques and products, and here he suggests some solutions to your artistic dilemmas

**Q** *Is it necessary to prime the board/canvas before using water based oils, and if so what should I use? Can these water based oils be used in exactly the same way as oil based, for instance, using a palette knife?*  
 Jane Doriano

**A** Canvases are generally coated with a product similar to gesso, which in effect seals the surface, so you can paint directly onto it without priming. With a board it depends on the surface: if it's MDF then it must be primed otherwise the oils will sink in, possibly causing the paint to dry out too much. Two or three coats of gesso would give an ideal surface to paint on.

The Winsor & Newton Artisan products are not strictly water based oils, but water thinnable oils, and there is a difference. A 'water based' product would probably be based upon acrylic resins or emulsions, whereas water thinnable oils have been treated by a process called saponification, which is generally the process used for making soap. In a nutshell, the oil binder is reacted with a strong alkali, which then allows the oil binder to be thinned with water.

Water thinnable oils work just like conventional oil paints, and you will certainly be able to use the product with both brushes and palette knives, but you have the advantage of washing out your brushes and knives with water. The paint is, as its name suggests, thinnable with water, making it a good starting point for anyone keen to have a go at oils.

As a final point, although brushes may be washed out with water, it is good practice to wash your brushes thoroughly in warm soapy water then rinse them with clean water, as there may be deposits of oil which could build up on bristles.

**Q** *I am fairly new to watercolours and am looking for tips on painting big dramatic clouds. Any suggestions?*  
 Margaret Murray

**A** I run demonstrations and workshops in both watercolour and acrylic and I love busy skies! We are all different, but my way of approaching a sky as you describe would be to firstly ensure that you stretch your paper; there's nothing worse than trying to lay a smooth wash and have a ripple leave a darker patch, probably leading to a cauliflower! After I've stretched my paper, I wet the sky area down to the horizon line if it's either a landscape or seascape. Then with a fairly strong mixture of Cobalt Blue, I randomly lay in areas of the sky I want to be blue, leaving plenty of white paper. Into the Cobalt Blue on the paper, I then lay in some areas with Burnt Umber, and let that spread into both the blue and the white areas of paper.

I sometimes use a dab of kitchen towel to lift out the odd cloud, but I much prefer to use what I call the 'paint magnet', which is a clean brush, dipped in clean water and squeezed out between finger and thumb. You then use this to mould in the clouds, and it really is a paint magnet, because it sucks paint from the still wet paper, and I find it easier to shape clouds like this. As with anything we try, have a go, then another go, and you'll get better and better!

If you have a question for Steve, please email [expert@saa.co.uk](mailto:expert@saa.co.uk) or write to Head Office marking your envelope 'Ask our Expert'