

FOUR REAL

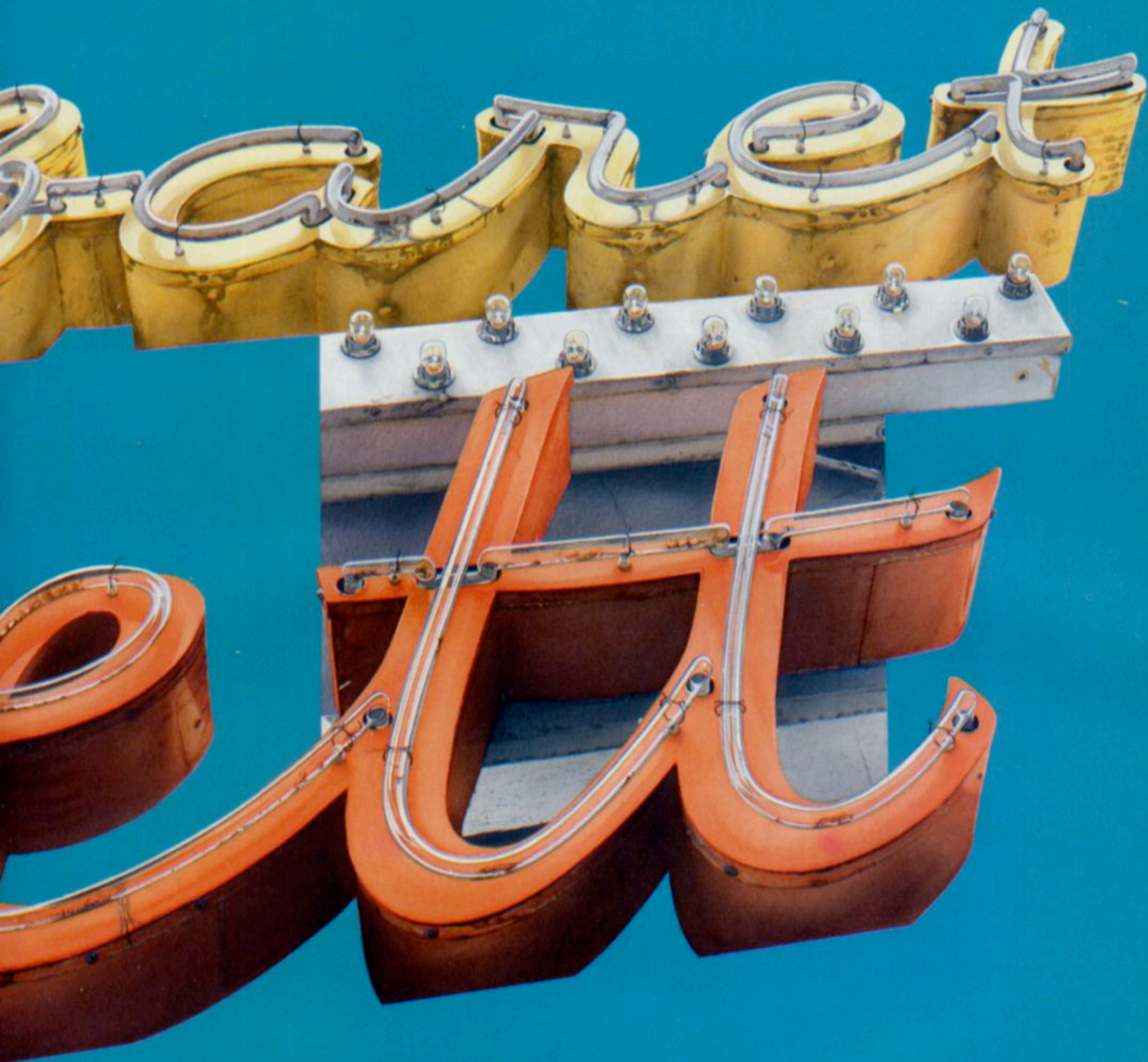
The Art of the Real is a new collective, comprised of four members of the UK's leading watercolour societies. As they embark on a series of exhibitions spanning three continents, the group reveal how they picked up tips from touring rock bands

If you've ever dreamt of forming a band and touring the world, you will know how tempting it is to imagine a glamorous lifestyle away from humdrum daily routines; a world in which your talents are recognised by a global audience.

Art of the Real is a new collective borne of similar thinking – the difference being that rather than picking up guitars and fantasising of stadium tours, this group of four artists are plotting global domination via a series of exhibitions. More surprising still, this isn't a quartet of disaffected teenagers, but four established painters who are each members of the UK's leading watercolour societies. So the question is, what drove them to do it?

The origins of Art of the Real began in 2010, when Shropshire-based watercolourist David Poxon chanced upon the work of Angus McEwan. The Scottish artist's textured urban scenes bore a distinct resemblance to David's own paintings of old industrial subject matter. "I thought, I wonder if he's copying me?" says David, only half-jokingly. "I'll track him down and interrogate him." In the end, he settled for sending an admiring email and the pair immediately hit it off. "We struck up a friendship of like-minded admiration. Each of us had got to a certain plateau in our art careers where we're in the two best societies for watercolour painting in the UK, but thought where do we go next?"

ABOVE David Poxon RI,
12111 Zetor Crystal,
watercolour on paper,
46x66cm

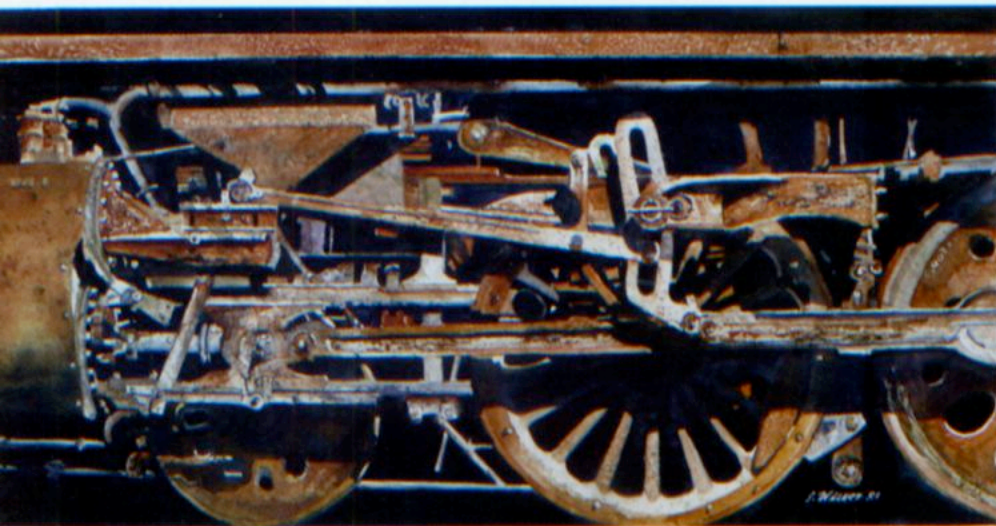


The idea of exhibiting together appealed to both artists. "When David and I first started talking about this as a possibility, I thought it would be quite exciting to be involved with like-minded individuals with similar goals, ideas and thoughts on art," says Angus. "Over the years, I have formed or been part of small collectives, as well as larger art societies such as the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Watercolours and the International Guild of Realism. There is, however, something to be said for having a small group though. Decisions can be made quickly and ideas can be acted upon without having the obligatory committee meeting and consulting your membership every time you want to do something."

Nevertheless, both artists decided to invite one extra person each into the group. David asked fellow Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colour member Sandra Walker; Angus called on his Royal Watercolour Society colleague Denis Ryan.

Each of the artists has their own distinct style, yet each also has themes or subjects in common: rich textures, decaying machinery and man-made environments, all rendered in a graphic and almost photorealistic treatment of watercolour. "There was a great appeal to working with a group of artists whom I not only admired, but whose styles and aims were in concert with mine," says Sandra.

ABOVE Denis Ryan RWS, *Ett Cabaret Berlin*, watercolour and acrylic on paper, 50x50cm



“We got all these replies from America: ‘The Royal Watercolour Society? Have you met the Queen?!’”

With the membership settled upon, the four set about organising a first exhibition. Prior to taking up painting full time, David had worked in the music industry, arranging world tours for major rock bands (“There was a short life expectancy in that world,” he says, drily), so he was well schooled in handling the logistical side of things. “That’s where my years of blagging came in handy. In the music industry, you’ve just got to keep knocking at the door. Loads of times you are told to go away but sooner or later someone lets you in because they are fed up with you banging on the door. In this case, I didn’t have to bang very hard because one look at the work and these galleries were interested. But we still

ABOVE Sandra Walker RI,
The 3:10, watercolour on
paper, 35x71cm

had to knock on the door and say, ‘we will come to your gallery, pool our resources and deliver a show that will be something different for you and it could be a big success.’”

With their reputations already well established in the UK, the four artists looked for a new audience and David suggested pitching the Art of the Real concept to galleries in America. Denis for one was shocked by the response: “We started getting all these replies: ‘Gee, we love you British artists... The Royal Watercolour Society? Have you met the Queen?!’”

Shows were eventually booked in New York, Texas and South Carolina, starting in the latter on 6 April. Arrangements for exhibitions in the UK followed and when David mentioned the concept to a gallery who had previously shown his work in Shanghai, a Chinese leg of the tour was added, too. Quite whether Art of the Real gathers the momentum of Bob Dylan’s Never-Ending Tour remains to be seen, but the plan at this stage is to carry on indefinitely. Each of the seven exhibitions will require an average of 10 paintings each from all four artists. “What’s not sold in Charleston will then be flight crated back up and moved to the next show in Texas and we’ll top them up from the UK,” explains David.

However, if all the works sell out in the initial exhibitions, the four artists might have a job on their hands to keep up with demand. “There is a huge commitment to making sure the work is produced on time with a high degree of quality,” says Angus. “I work better under pressure anyway and this touring exhibition has created a pressurised environment – I’m embracing the workload that comes with it.”

All four members have spent the last year working away on paintings for the tour, interspersed with periodic ‘meetings’ at David’s home in Shropshire

MEET THE BAND!

Introducing the four members of the globe-trotting Art of the Real collective...



Angus McEwan ARWS

A graduate of Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, Dundee-born Angus is a member of the Royal Scottish Society of Painters in Watercolours, as well as an associate of the Royal Watercolour Society in England. An avid traveller, he has painted in countries including China, Venice, Morocco and beyond.



David Poxon RI

This former music business pro spent years touring the globe with high-profile rock bands and has brought his logistics expertise to the Art of the Real project. Now based in Shropshire, his detailed watercolours explore the textures of rusting machinery.



Denis Ryan RWS

After years of working as a successful animator and illustrator, London-based Denis has turned his attentions to painting full time in recent years. Inspired by photorealist art, his paintings of cityscapes, reflections and neon signs earned him membership to the Royal Watercolour Society in 2008.



Sandra Walker RI

By all accounts the shyest member of the group, US-born Sandra more than holds her own at the easel. A winner of the *Sunday Times* Watercolour competition, her photorealistic depictions of urban life are collected by the likes of author John LeCarré and Baroness Thatcher.



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("Parties, really"), during which time they share techniques, firm up plans and develop friendships. "When you are painting, you're doing it on your own, lost in your own space and time," he explains. "It's a lovely way to spend your time but it's actually quite lonely. Painters are not usually good mixers but fortunately the people in this group are quite sociable and we all get on great. Having those little dos has given everyone else the confidence to get down and do it. We're all inspiring each other to produce better."

Sandra agrees: "Knowing I am part of a group hasn't affected my approach, but it does place a certain responsibility on me to produce my best work so as to not let the side down. And working with artists who are also friends means there is no sense of competition, but a unanimous desire for success for all of us."

So regardless of whether Art of the Real manages to crack America or not, the group have relished the challenge of making things happen on their own terms. "One of the most exciting things to come out of the last year is realising what you are capable of if you just push yourself and go for it," says Denis. "All my friends paint or design and we are always moaning about this or that not happening but nobody ever does anything about it. I'm guilty of that, but now I'm thinking you *can* do it if you push yourself and take a chance."

David puts it more succinctly: "There's a big leap between thinking about doing something and actually having the balls to do it, basically."

The UK leg of the Art of the Real tour begins at Thompson's Gallery, Aldeburgh, Suffolk on 7 April. For more details, visit www.art-of-the-real.blogspot.com

ABOVE Angus McEwan ARWS, *Out of Steam*, watercolour on paper, 35x48cm