

# Inspirational art

*Andy Gallon steps inside artist Anita Bowerman's Harrogate gallery*

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**B**race yourself for an explosion of brilliant colour. Anita's distinctive paintings, bright and beautiful portrayals of Yorkshire's scenery and wildlife, are the perfect antidote to winter blues. In the company of Anita, who overflows with ideas and enthusiasm, it is easy to forget the season's long, dark, cold days. She moves from painting to painting, displaying for inspection their eye-catching elements. Each, it seems, comes with a story – of, say, the day's weather, of the people encountered or, during one of many trips to the coast, of almost being cut off by the tide at Staithes. "I was there all night," she smiles. "Someone had to rescue me."

The tales are told with relish as Anita points out the exquisite detail in her work – a pair of touching blue tits, perhaps, or a watchful hare, or a pocket of attractive wildflowers. "I

like adding details, as many natural things as possible. I can spend hours doing it."

Anita's love of the countryside and animals, reflected strongly in her work, stems from a childhood on what were then the green fringes of Leeds. Painting throughout school, she lived at Adel until the age of 16, then at Calverley before, aged 19, going to Newcastle Polytechnic – not to study art, which she considered. Rather, a three-year Higher National Diploma (HND) in retailing and business studies. "I used my creativity in a business way, with the end goal being a [fashion] buyer." Retailing was Anita's blood because she helped out in a nearly-new shop run by her mum, Pat. Dad Michael, an engineer, had a car business, which also encompassed retailing.

After graduation, Anita moved to London and worked as assistant designer at Burberry, then as fashion buyer at House of Fraser and Liberty. It brought her into contact with society photographer Lord Lichfield and a number of suppliers – then small, now revered worldwide – including Bill Amberg, LK Bennett, Graeme Ellidson, Anya Hindmarch and Stephen Jones. All the while, Anita painted, purely as a hobby. She attended art night classes for seven years and her tutor, a contemporary artist, suggested she become a professional. "Retailing was a fabulous career and I loved it, but I decided that's what I wanted and had to do. I've never looked back. It was a bold step, but it worked."

Twenty years ago, Anita's husband, Peter, whom she met in London and supported



*Cherry Blossom Tree Spectacle*



*Anita Bowerman at her Dove Tree Art Gallery, Harrogate*

her change of direction, was offered a job in Yorkshire. Initially, she had a home studio and then, in 2011, Anita moved into a 19th century coach house in the centre of Harrogate; she lives on the outskirts. After refurbishment in the French atelier style, the building's ground floor became her gallery, the first floor her studio. "It's a nice space to be in," she says.

When painting, Anita works in water-based media, principally watercolour, acrylic and gouache: "It's very immediate. It dries instantly. I tip water onto the painting, then let it dry. You couldn't do that with oil paint. You'd have to wait two days, then go back and do a bit more on it. It just doesn't work for me. I like the way the colours blend."

When asked to explain her use of striking colour, Anita says: "I've always loved colour. That's probably why I love fashion. I've

never been drawn to darker colours. I paint how I feel. Some of my colours come from the south of France. That's why they're vibrant – you can imagine Monet painting with some of these colours. I seem to use the same colour combination. They're all different but, in a way, they all match."

Anita paints outside mostly, in all seasons, although she prefers the fleeting glories of spring and autumn. "I absorb the atmosphere and the colours. The colours are a lot more vibrant. The colour changes, but the way I paint in that second, that moment, is what I put on the canvas or the watercolour paper. It's not flat. There are shadows. I can just see what I'm painting. It might be an old-fashioned way of doing it, but I like it."

Her paintings take in many popular Yorkshire locations, notably the Dales (especially



Wharfedale) and the coast. Closer to home, Almscliffe Crag, RHS Harlow Carr (where Anita was the 2018-19 artist in residence) and Harrogate's Stray and Valley Gardens are favoured.

Last autumn, Anita based herself for a week in Filey ("Everybody loves Filey," she says), where she spent childhood holidays: "The changing light on the coast appeals to me. When it's a beautiful day, you can't get better than the East Coast. It lifts you up."

Having painted Runswick Bay and Staithes a number of times, Anita is turning her attention to Bridlington, Filey, Robin Hood's Bay, Scarborough and Whitby. Also, on her to-do list are Brimham Rocks, Fewston reservoir and Swaledale – "Picturesque places people like going."

Capturing another spring is something Anita is looking forward to. You'll find her on The Stray, in Harrogate, painting cherry blossom trees. Don't be reticent about interrupting – she enjoys a chat with onlookers: "People tell me things. I hear lots of life."

"Spring is a busy season. You've got the crocuses, followed by the daffodils, followed by the cherry blossom, followed by the



*Autumn colours, the Tea Rooms at Valley Gardens, Harrogate*

bluebells... all in a month. I like spring because I love the colours. I'm more drawn to those colours than at any other time of year. I find people like cheering up. When they buy a painting, they prefer to look at a summery, warm scene than a cold, chilly one. Customers tell me my paintings are like a breath of fresh air."

In recent years, Anita has developed an unusual technique, creating superb textures by employing twigs, leaves, moss, pebbles or feathers rather than a brush. "I use things I find on the ground. It works for me; not in all paintings, but in some." Experimentation is part of Anita's artistic DNA. She is always keen to try something new. In addition to paintings, she produces paper cuts (again, astonishingly detailed thanks to a fine blade and a steady hand), some of which have been transformed into stainless steel sculptures. "I did think about designing dresses," she says. "Some of my patterns would work well on fabric. I could easily do scarves, but I just haven't had the time."



*Anita works with natural items, such as fern and moss, as well as paint*



*Staithe, a View from the Harbour*

Anita works with charities, including Yorkshire Air Ambulance. “It’s a bonus. I like to share my art and help others.” Since 2016, she has produced Christmas cards for the air ambulance. The 2021 version was the latest of three to feature *Dalesman* columnist Amanda Owen, the Yorkshire Shepherdess, and her large family. The partnership has led to Anita and Amanda developing a range of bone china mugs. Each carries an Owen family scene from their Whitsundale farm, painted by Anita and brimming with little details.

Anita’s journey to becoming a professional artist might have been slightly unorthodox, but she does not regret the road taken. “I have friends who went to art college and they’re not painting now. They’re not doing

anything creative. The way I did it was probably the hard way, but I’ve got all that commercial experience behind me. London and my previous career in fashion seem a million miles away, but I’m still using colour and design.”

What of Anita’s stories? Here’s a good one: “A lady found me painting, next to a river with my dog, Poppy, doing snowdrops, near Fountains Abbey. ‘Come onto my field,’ she said. ‘It’s private but, if you sit there, that’s where Turner painted’. He did a sketch from the exact spot of Fountains Abbey when he was doing a tour of Yorkshire. I sat there, in this exclusive spot, and I thought, ‘This is amazing. Turner sat here and painted the same view.’” 🐾

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For more, visit [anitabowerman.co.uk](http://anitabowerman.co.uk). Anita hosts the next of her regular open studio events at Dove Tree Art Gallery, Back Granville Road, Harrogate, on February 12-13 (10am-5pm) and March 24-27 (11am-4pm).