



SUNBEAMS

HUGO JONES

Interview by Sophie Castle

Ahead of his first solo show at Beside the Wave, I travelled to Penzance to meet Hugo Jones and discuss his Cornish landscapes. From fantastical digital drawings to delicate etchings of the Helford, the journey to this collection of oil paintings has been a contemporary path laced in traditional habitual training.

Hugo's studio is a small, tidy work bench with a selection of works neatly tacked to the wall. One work-in-progress is perched on a small easel, a glass palette sits beside it with just two small mounds of paint. A dribble of turpentine half-fills a jar lid and upon it balances a single paintbrush. "I like this size of brush. I sometimes opt for a slightly smaller one, but I usually just use this. I never like using the large brushes really." These smaller brushes clearly offer Hugo more control when painting his delicate and precise landscapes. From Sennen to the Pandora Inn, this new collection offers a variety of Cornish scenes perfectly captured in Hugo's traditional and perfected style.

The drawers below his desk are filled with studies ranging from portraits to landscapes and oil paintings to etchings. Hugo often uses the work of old masters to copy from and perfect his technique. A traditional form of learning for an artist dedicated to mastering his craft. It is a grounding experience becoming acquainted with Hugo's ritualistic approach to being an artist. So often I think we romanticise the idea of an artist as a chaotic creative with an innate ability to translate thought to canvas. Hugo clearly has an intuitive eye and natural gift but he is also diligent and methodical ensuring he dedicates an allotted time to his art each day. The process of creating one of the works you will see in his current exhibition is extensive and meticulous. Hugo begins by sketching the landscape en plain air. Several quick studies are drawn in a grid formation to identify the best composition before translating that into a larger colour study. Trails of notes are beside these rough yet skilful drawings, outlining ideas, as well as the occasional note to himself 'DON'T RUSH THE SKY'.

Hugo is so seamlessly prepared for his paintings, given the countless sketches, that he is often able to paint from memory. This, I believe, is the reason so many of his paintings have such emotional depth. They depict the landscape with accuracy, an innate understanding that has been formed through countless fifteen-mile hikes along the coast, but they also offer a dream-like lustfulness. Hugo's adoration for the Cornish landscape is clear from his tireless and obsessive method but the beauty in these works is not from their detailed efforts to depict a well-known location but rather Hugo's ability to capture how the view makes you feel. Terracotta red and yellow ochre is juxtaposed by emerald green and cobalt blue, giving the works a surrealist warmth invading a cool landscape. This dreamlike play of light and warmth is a continuous theme for Hugo and maybe due to his fascination with the unconscious mind. When inspecting Hugo's brimming sketchbook, I came across a dip pen drawing of a wounded bull, the looser, circular marks were reminiscent of Rembrandt's sketches. Hugo explained he had become fascinated with drawing his bizarre and fantastical dreams to aid in interpreting their meaning. Through his studious dedication to draughtsmanship, these drawings felt as though they could have been executed from life. A similar appreciation for his current collection.





As we discuss his process and innumerable works within the studio, it becomes clear just how passionate Hugo is for his practice, a warmth radiates as he explains just how much of his life is dedicated to working. Hugo has a gentle charisma, after offering me a cup of tea he begins to talk about his work with a few jokes interspersed for some light relief, often pausing to let the work speak for itself. Hugo needs to create, his need is imbedded deep within his character and so he doesn't explain his immense commitment to art with inordinate gravitas but rather a modest explanation as if it were a common devotion. Persistently striving to become better, in constant competition with himself. "You get out what you put in" he says with a tender glimmer of pride.

Each painting is mapped out on a primed piece of wood. Hugo begins by layering burnt sienna in delicate marks along the patchwork landscape. As other layers begin to build, the warm bronze hue radiates beneath to create the sense of a scorching sun glowing beyond the horizon. Even the initial layers are delicate and yet offer a gentle suggestion of texture. Taking inspiration from Frank Brangwyn, Nikolai Fechin and the old Russian Masters it is no surprise Hugo is adept in this multi-layered approach that inevitably creates a wealth of depth.

"I often think about the passing of time whilst I paint." Hugo's paintings create the sense of time lapsing with sweeping clouds warping the blue skies and the play of sunlight streaming across the land below. This distinct movement within the collection is an impressive element, given the tight and precise style of Hugo's work. Inspired by the vast battle paintings, from the Napoleonic melees to Paul Nash, Hugo aims to recreate the same awe inducing response on a vastly smaller scale. A skill he initially gained through digital drawings of imagined landscapes, the sort you may see in an epically animated blockbuster. Once again, the depiction of light is so expertly rendered, as it highlights the imagined scene with a myriad of textures, it's as if Hugo has drawn it from life. This is the level of proficiency that is gained only through rigorous practice and training.

Hugo's painting style appears to be informed a lot by his approach to drawing and vice versa, his drawings are rather painterly. It's these transitional skills that make his process invariably streamlined. Surrounded by both portrait and landscape studies in his studio, it is clear Hugo will master any subject he puts his mind to. The paintings before you in this exhibition are the outcome of countless previous works, tireless attempts, and innumerable hours of practice. Undoubtedly, Hugo's practice will only continue to develop and evolve as his skills become even more remarkable.





Daffodil fields, Crean

Oil on Board, 50 x 80cm, 2022 - £1895

Last of the Daffodil harvest, deep reds of the ploughed fields. The blues of the hills and the cloud shadows, heat haze in the distance.



Clouds, from Scorrier

Oil on Board, 36cm x 26cm, 2020 - £275

Strong easterly wind, big cloud mass approaching. Hills glowing blue in the distance.



Evening Cloud, Prussia Cove

Oil on Board, 30cm x 30cm, 2022 -
£375 (Unframed)

Last of the light over the fields as
the sun catches the tips of the
clouds, fields turn a deep red in the
twilight.



Storm Sunset, Kelynack

Oil on Board, 30 x 30cm, 2022 - £425

Fast moving clouds, sun breaking through in between downpours. Everything was sodden, glinting in the evening light.



Old Coastguard Hut, Sennen

Oil on Board, 42 x 59.4cm, 2022 - £1495

The wind was rushing in from the sea, the cloud rearing up over the horizon and being punctuated by the deep blue of the sky. Colourful wisps of cloud set against the deep blues and greens of the ocean.



Waves over Cowloe, Sennen

Oil on Board, 40 x 40cm, 2022 - £575

The green of sea churning into the cove cooling the rocks baked amber by the sun, clouds billow and streak in from the horizon.



St Ives, from Gwithian

Oil on Board, 42 x 59.4cm, 2022 - £1,495

The water rippling and folding in the foreground, sky beginning to turn green as the sun sets. Lights of St Ives nestled against the blue hills.



Autumn Trees, Trelowarren

Oil on Board, 30 x 50cm, 2022 - £575

Wind blowing through the trees, branches shifting and swaying. Sunlight hitting the grass, deep blue shadows.



Sennen, Evening

Oil on Board, 30 x 50cm, 2022 - £575

Glowing red cliffs, the deep turquoise of the waves. The pinks and purples showing through the sand and the shallows.



Carn Galver, Windy Evening

Oil on Board, 42 x 59.4cm, 2022 - £1495

Wind rushing around, clouds rearing up behind the stone formations. Heather and grass shifting with the gusts.



Clouds, Sancreed Beacon

Oil on Board, 30 x 40cm, 2022 - £450

The sun had just broken through, dappling light over the patchwork quilt of the fields. The clouds were moving quickly, breaking over the hills in the distance.



Rainbow, Pandora Inn

Oil on Board, 42 x 59.4cm, 2022 - £1495

I wanted to capture the shape of the sun beams as they shimmer off the edge of the rainbow. Illuminated pine trees shining against the deep blue of the clouds, and the array of colours through the water of the estuary.



Clouds, over to St Buryan, Sacreed Beacon

Oil on Board, 30 x 40cm, 2022 - £450

Sitting in the cloud shadow, sketching the glowing fields. The sea mist was starting to shimmer up the valley as the clouds above started to burn off above me.



Evening Glow, Devoran

Oil on Board, 30 x 42cm, 2022 - £595

Primordial glow over the mud flats, river birds calling in the distance.



Evening light, from Carn Galver

Oil on Board, 42 x 59.4cm, 2022 - £1495

The colours of the moorland, shifting and moving as the last of the sunlight catches the heather.
The stone walls cast like a net over the landscape, as the clouds rush in from the sea.



Storm, Bosigran

Oil on Board, 42 x 59.4cm, 2022 - £1495

The sea looked fragile, like glass about to be shattered. Birds retreating to the cliffs as the clouds begin to roll in from the ocean.



Evening Clouds, Rinsey

Oil on Board, 23cm x 30cm, 2022 - £175 (Unframed)



Hugo spent his formative years in Cornwall before completing an Illustration degree at Brighton University in 2014. He enjoyed drawing from an early age, as well as a love for being outside; something that has continued into adulthood.

Draughtsmanship is important part of his practice, and time away from painting is spent working on ways to improve drawing fundamentals - usually through anatomy and cast studies. Influences include Nikolai Fechin, Frank Brangwyn, Paul Nash and many of the old Russian masters.