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painting cornwall

Andrew Tozer talks
to **John Swinfield**

In the artistic colonies which are scattered around Britain's seaboard, Andrew Tozer, 32, is acknowledged as a talent in the ascendency. He hails from Falmouth, Cornwall, and took a foundation course at Falmouth School of Art & Design. It was followed by a creditable First in his BA in Illustration at the University of Westminster, and an MA in Communication Design at Central St. Martins School, London.

Throughout his studying he continued to paint. "I'd always be going off to places like Richmond Park and Kew Gardens and be painting all the time. Nobody really knew about it. It was almost as a private pleasure. I knew at the end of the course what I didn't want to be... and that was something too academic and cerebral.

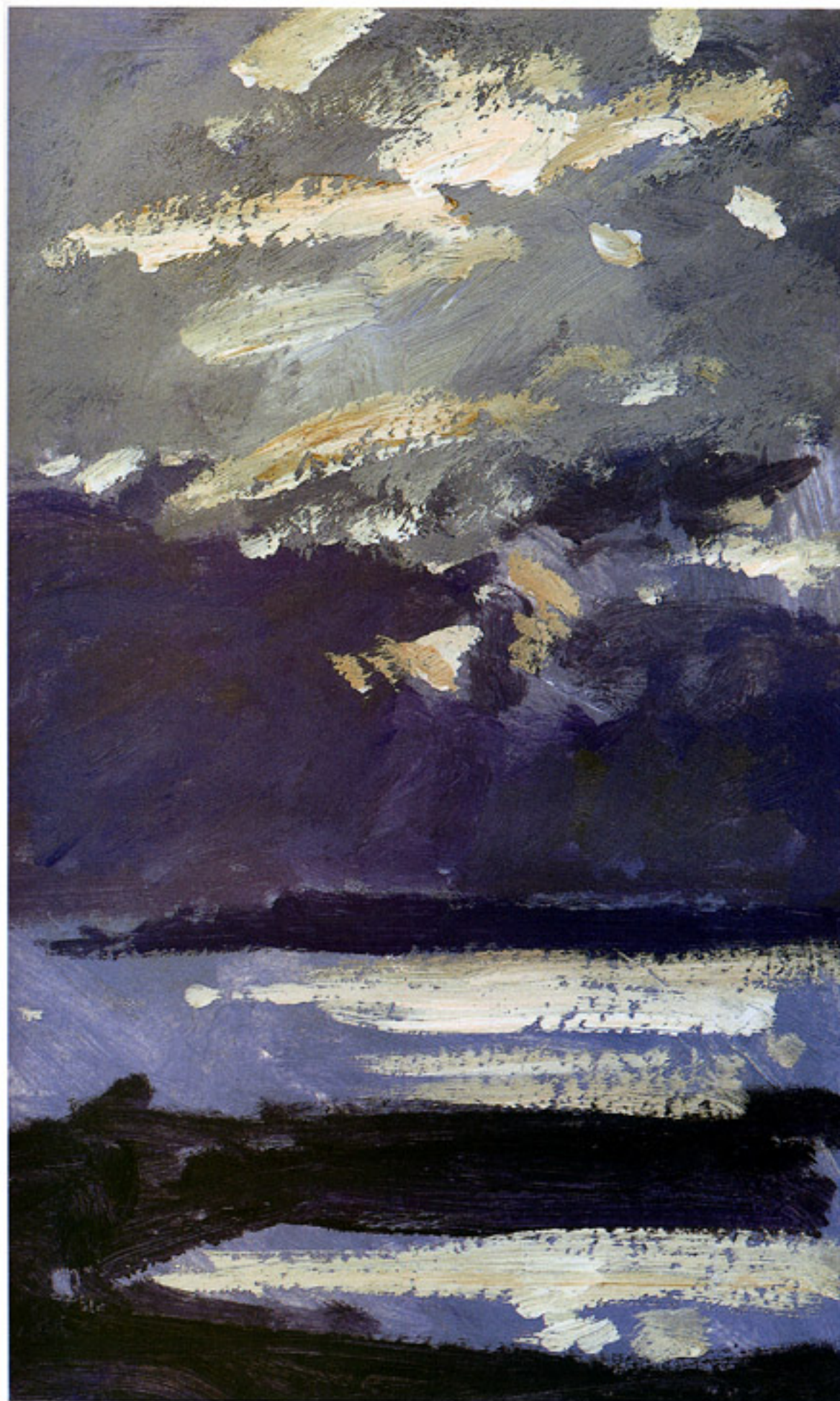
"So I asked myself what I really enjoyed doing, and it was working outside, painting outdoors. I suppose, really, it's become something of a lost art."

His coastal pictures have a romance and a luminosity; they make one feel good. They are also reminiscent, to my mind, of Corot, the French landscape painter, whose work had a silvery, carefully toned feel.

One of Tozer's newer works – 'Golden Light & Strong Winds from Tresco' (pictured right) – caught my eye. I was surprised by how quickly it had been painted. "It probably took me about half an hour. It was the last

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"I love the creeks and the mud, especially in the winter and the autumn. My newer work is more muted. There are lots of ochres, greys, silvers, earth colours"



painting of the day – by then, I'm working faster and faster, there's a fluency; one has loosened up. It's only a small picture, about nine inches by five. It's vital to keep your pictures small if you're working outside. I never work bigger than about ten by twelve inches. I find you can be very unprecious if you keep the pictures small. I can really control the colours. I like the intimacy of a small canvas. A friend of mine works on a huge scale out of doors. They work very well for him. But I prefer to keep things on a smaller proportion."

He admits to many influences. "I enjoy Cotman and his strong sense of composition, and Thomas Girtin for the simplicity of his compositions.

"I'm a fan of Sisley, for the serenity, the stillness. Monet, of course, and Bonnard. I think Ken Howard, today, is up there with some of the finest painters. I'm rather taken by Seago, and my other heroes might include members of the Edwardian St. Ives School, painters like John Park and Dorothea Sharpe.

"I do a great deal of walking around the coast – it gives me a sense of well-being. I enjoy the ease of being outside and, of course, I am very fortunate...it's really fantastic that people seem to like and buy my paintings."

While he was still a child, at Truro School, he was inspired by his art teacher, David Heseltine. "He was amazing, tremendous. He liked drawing and painting from life. We were introduced, through him, to the likes of Bonnard and the Camden Group. He understood that when you teach people to draw you teach people to see – to see properly, to really see things."

Many of his studies, especially his earlier works, feature yachts and dinghies. "I wouldn't call myself a

sailor – I just pull a few ropes around – but I've often been out sailing. There is a romance about it, about boats and the sea generally. I suppose it must be the sense of escapism. You do feel it, of that there's no doubt, especially if you're living as close to the sea as I am."

Tozer's painting, 'Warm Light, St. Mawes' (inset, p22), "was a studio painting worked up from a small oil sketch and a few pen and ink drawings completed during a particularly hot morning at St. Mawes.

"Composition for me is everything. So with this particular painting I was sure to resolve it with charcoal first, before putting paint to canvas. I have in the past used grids to enlarge paintings but I now generally prefer to trust my eye, finding that the essential rhythms of the initial sketch are better maintained.

"I generally work alla prima when outside on a small scale. However, when I am in the studio I tend to work classically starting with thin, lean, turpsy layers before progressing to thick, oilier ones.

"I'm not a painter obsessed with paint brands, although I generally favour artists' quality Winsor & Newton oils – their richness of colour being superb. Titanium is my preferred white for its opaque, brilliant whiteness. For glazes and impastos I tend to use Lucas painting mediums. They must, however, be used with discretion, as I like to keep the painting process as simple and fuss-free as possible."

His studio at Penryn overlooks the English Channel, the sea being a mile away. The studio is in his old family home, his parents' farmhouse. His family has farmed in Cornwall since 1910. Water is a big draw. "The Penryn and Helford rivers are two favourite painting haunts. I can find pleasure in painting anything. Buyers might want something different to that which a painter would paint. For instance, I'd enjoy painting a scrapyards, but I wouldn't do it because you've got to make a living."

Does he make a living? "Oh yes, I'm earning about the same as a young doctor." He's 32, and his brother is a paediatrician, so he's got an idea of medical salaries. "I've been painting in London lately, Battersea power station, Whistler's Reach on the Thames near Cheyne Walk."

Much as he enjoys working in London, it's apparent he is still enchanted by Cornwall, like so many other painters now and in the past. "The quality of light is very special. Perhaps it's something to do with it being a narrow peninsula with light bouncing off both sides.

"Distances are reduced by a lot of the vapour in the air. It may be a hot sunny day in August but it can very quickly fog up – and the colours can be very moody and mysterious. I love the creeks and mud, especially in the winter and the autumn. My newer work is more muted. There are lots of ochres, greys, silvers, earth colours.

"Degraded colours seem to have a greater sense of mystery – perhaps it's all to do with the magic, the special qualities, the potency that is Cornwall... its character is so different to the rest of the west country."

Andrew Tozer is exhibiting at **Beside the Wave Gallery, Arwenack Street, Falmouth, Cornwall, 13-24 May. Tel 01326 211132 or email gallery@beside-the-wave.co.uk**