An Artist’s Refuge

‘An Artist’s Refuge’
11th January - 18th February 2024
Parndon Mill

Pardon Mill • Elizabeth Way • Harlow, Essex • CM20 2HP
Tel: 01279 426042 • Email: info@parndonmill.co.uk • **www.parndonmill.co.uk**
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Letter from the Curator

'An Artist's Refuge' is an exhibition that draws inspiration from the ethos of Parndon Mill and looks at the environments in which artists create.

As a creative in an ever changing world, the many challenges out there can feel daunting, sometimes overwhelming. There is so much available at our fingertips, that finding space and time to think can sometimes be hard.

Art itself is a refuge for many. It is a process and an outlet for the feelings and thoughts that can at times feel too much to understand. Through art, whether it's our own creative practice or someone else's work with which we connect, we can find a sense of calm and reassurance. For me, art itself is my refuge.

Parndon Mill inspired the concept for this exhibition. This beautiful location, and it's floors of artist's studios, holds a sense of calm creativity. It offers a space to reside in nature, and focus on ones creative practice, surrounded by a community of artists. It is the kind of space that many artists dream of having. For new and emerging artists particularly, finding their creative space can be hard. At times it can become less a physical space, and more of a mindset. It can be a space carved out amidst the business of the everyday; it can be an intention, a ritual, a lingering question in the back of ones mind; it can be a place found within.

This exhibition features work from new and emerging artists, including students, recent graduates and self taught artists, and includes work from some of Parndon's own newer residents. Each has been selected due to the way in which their work aligns with the concept, and helps tell the story of the exhibition. Each artist has written a brief statement of what 'An Artist's Refuge' means to them and their work. I have included these in this catalogue.

I hope that everyone can find their own refuge within the artworks shown here, and that each visitor to the exhibition can find a piece that means something to them.

Thank you for reading, and I hope you enjoy the exhibition.

Bethany Haysom

Anna Benari

For me, an artist's refuge is all about creative freedom—a powerful liberation that lets me turn everyday materials, often seen as scraps, into beautiful artworks. This keeps me motivated, driving a passion that pushes me to keep going with my art. I steer clear of strict rules and predefined boxes, choosing instead to see my art as refreshingly distinctive and wonderfully unconventional. I often choose to work with scrap material as it is a reminder of the value found in overlooked places and a commitment to maintaining a connection with the raw, authentic struggles of artistic beginnings.

Brian Knott

A detached getaway, a place to disconnect in order to engage. A locale to set down thought, a catalyst to create.

Circle Yuen

Ten years ago, I faced the challenges of family reorganization and felt helpless, especially when it came to explaining it to my little girl. But Babette Cole's "Two of Everything," brought a precious smile to her face. Later, I began collecting true stories, transforming them into 32 pages that tackle gender-based violence and family restructuring.

As an illustrator, I wholeheartedly believe in the power of graphic narratives to capture unspeakable moments and transform traumas. Imagine if the artwork were paper ships, we can experience the pleasures and sorrows as we sail on the river of life with one another.

Emilia Symis

A space where an artist feels comfortable to create freely without pressure, judgement or expectation. A space where they can make art that they want to make, rather than art that they think others want to see. I think it is as much a mental state as well as a physical space. When I was a student I remember feeling like I had to paint in a certain way to be taken seriously but then I learnt that if I paint what I truly want to then my art will always be more successful. That realisation made me more comfortable to create freely.

Gemma Smale

A safe space to create and a place to belong, somewhere comfortable, calm and a place to make without worry.

Jessie Cuadra

My artist's refuge is a feeling of serenity. A moment in my practice where I flow, when the elements align, the canvas calls for the colours riding on confident brushstrokes, and the paintings resolve with ease.

The physical space is light, spacious, safe. With luck one day it will overlook the forest and will be flooded with sunlight, but for now, tidy, clean, and mine will do.

Joe Barfield

I lay on the grass with my eyes shut trying to visualise the crucial part of a design, the idea is soon to be poorly recorded on a scrap of paper which I will mislay the following day.

I think an artist's refuge is a state of mind.
It accommodates freedom of expression, originality and a sense of purpose.

It tends to feel like un-centred clay on a potters wheel, smells like a sulphur glaze and tastes like a cold cup of tea.
The workspace might look a state, but it makes the same sound as an efficient engine.
Spending too much time here seems not to have consequence.

It feels like progress.

Laura Bracey Curry

A refuge is about space for me, finding and creating a sense of place within my work. Observing landscapes and familiar spaces through mark making and colour. The act of making, specifically drawing, is a chance to document and archive. Capturing small moments. Grass in bright sunlight, a freshly planted flowerbed, the path through a park or trees on a hill. To see and attempt to capture these moments.

Laura is a recent graduate of Camberwell College of Arts, born and based in Harlow, Essex. She works with mark-making, mainly across drawing, printmaking and painting. Her work documents everyday scenes and gradual changes through the lens of landscape. Using mark-making, colour and tone to capture these familiar spaces. Observed gradually and eventually drawn. These drawings then become postcards, prints, books or simply drawings.

Luke Fairhead

An artist's refuge to me is a place to escape from the noise of everyday life. It could be a physical space but for many who don't have that luxury it instead becomes a state of mind. A quiet and inviting place where our thoughts can come and go freely with no interruptions or interference from the outside world. Where we can build our own worlds and create our own stories.

Luke Fairhead is a North London based Illustrator that goes by the name of 'Soft Shock'. When he's not busy working on client commissions or on site painting murals he likes to spend his remaining time creating abstract and alternative worlds with weird and wonderful characters, some of which he turns into limited edition prints. "These places and characters I create are a means of solitude for me. They enable me to step outside the increasingly inhospitable and dystopian world we live in and instead concentrate on building an alternate world of hope and wonder."

Nicholas Nunn

An Artist Refuge means to me, a place where I am allowed to pursue creative thoughts and actions without distraction. A place where reasoning and explanation is not necessary as to why I should be devoting time to my need to create.
Several times I have found myself homeless, during such times the notion of being creative was hammered right down to the bottom of my needs.
A Place dedicated solely to providing shelter and space for creative needs, giving it, for the first time, protection from whatever else may be happening in my life.
It is a place where I can talk to other Artists and find inspiration, validation and encouragement.

My creative practice consists of drawing and painting on paper, wood or canvas substrates. I try to explore the less literal aspects of figurative subjects such as movement, emotion and thought with the physicality of my chosen medium as much a means of reaching the desired outcome as is the subject matter.
I enjoy using Indian Ink, Oil paint,Charcoal and other mediums to make expressive marks with elements of chance and randomness to compliment the more deliberate and controlled elements of the work .

Rosa Kelly

I painted this piece in the shed on my dad's allotment. I was interested in it because of the way he has collected lots of little trinkets, photos and notes and pinned them up around the shed. There are photos of me when I was younger, indecipherable lines of writing and things he has dug up on the allotment such as old clay pipes. This, for me, represents an artist's refuge because it is a calm space in which you can collect and curate things that are important to you and inspire you. In a way it feels to me like a physical extension of a mental creative space. It was not only a refuge for him but also for me when I painted this picture. I was struggling to find a good space to create and the shed allowed me to be isolated but also close to the outside world and nature, which was just through the window.

Sarah Strachen

The provocation 'An Artist's Refuge' conjures thoughts of Parndon Mill's function as an artists' studio space which for me operates as a kind of 'vessel'. The studio in this sense offers an opening to explore emptiness and presence, form and formlessness, being and non-being. It's a space for 'middle knowledge' (Weisman, 1972), a sort of knowing and not-knowing, revealing the potential to occupy space while simultaneously being occupied by space, it embodies something and nothing. In my transdisciplinary practice I continue to return to the vessel and its strangely familiar and familiarly strange affordances. The ceramic vessel is both culturally resonant but also deeply bound up in the hierarchy of art and craft, something which I spent much of my time exploring as a student in Fine Art.

Sarah Strachan is a transdisciplinary printmaker, painter and ceramicist. Her works, which often incorporate sound or moving-image, centre around environmental changes. Series like Becoming are sparked by deep conversations with people, as well as interactions with place, the land and its materials. Strachan's interest lies in how our perceptions of "being in, knowing and belonging to" the world affect our ecological awareness and thinking. Becoming is a series of intuitive ceramic sculptures inspired by research into European native oysters, invasive slipper limpets and the role of touch in their transition from male to female.

Thomas Lawes

For me, an artists refuge is rarely a physical place especially as an artist i find myself making art anywhere i can, but i find the times where i feel safe as an artist is in the conversations I have with people about creating art, more often around a cup of tea at a table.

Xinyi Bi

An Artist's Refuge' to me represents a sanctuary of unbound creativity, a place where the external world's hustle fades and allows a deep connection with my inner self and nature. It's where the intimate bond and poetic expression found in 'Platero and I' come to life, enabling true artistic expression.

Xinyi Bi's series of drawings were made for the prose poem "Platero and I", depicting the poet's Andalusian village. She wanted to express the poet's affection for the little donkey Platero, with the orderly passage of life, death and seasons.

Xinyi Bi is an illustrator and designer based in Cambridge. Holding a BA in Visual Communication Design from the China Academy of Art, she's made notable strides in the publishing and editorial sectors. Having completed her MA in Children's Book Illustration at the Cambridge School of Art, Xinyi intertwines narratives with metaphors in her unique style. Her primary research interests include the application of artistic language in children's picture books and exploring art through multidisciplinary mediums. Her artwork embodies a profound connection with nature and the world around us, marked by imagination and a dedication to impactful artistry.

Xinyue Peng

As an artist, my refuge unfolds within my inner world. The year spent navigating the intricacies of life in a foreign land was marked by heightened undulations in both my daily experiences and emotional landscape. It was during this period that I gradually came to recognize the paramount significance of fostering a resilient and stable inner world.

Within this spiritual world, I engage in profound self-reflection, contemplating the essence of my genuine needs and meticulously examining the tapestry of my current possessions. Moreover, I confront the solitary sojourns inherent in life, journeys that demand a solitary traversal. The cohabitation with my inner world becomes synonymous with achieving a harmonious relationship with myself.

This harmonious coexistence not only facilitates introspection but also serves as a wellspring of inspiration for my artistic pursuits. It provides me with the serenity needed to excavate the depths of my emotions and experiences during the creative process, allowing my artwork to reflects the profound layers of my being.

Zhiqian Lin

I think 'An Artist's Refuge' signifies a place of innovative, enjoyable, and delightful creation for me. It's a space where there's enough freedom for exploration and experimentation. Like in my piece 'Fantasy Museum,' I have amalgamated the inspiration I derive from art museums and insects. Through creating a space that disrupts traditional perspectives, is fragmented, and multidimensional, it lets the viewers experience the joy found within the artwork.

List of Works

Anna Benari
A Naked Portrait on Disrupted Ground
Acrylic paint on broken shelf

Unplayed Resonance
Acrylic paint on used vinyl

Brian Knott
Untitled 2
Acrylic

Untitled 3
Acrylic

Whitehouse
Acrylic

Circle Yuen
The Unspeakable 1
Milk Carton Drypoint printmaking

Emilia Symis
Azure
Acrylic on canvas

Ostara
Acrylic on canvas

Solis
Acrylic on canvas

Gemma Smale
Dimpled vessel large
Stonewash ash glaze

Dimpled vessel small
Stonewash ash glaze

Marbled Vessel
Red stoneware high fired to 1250

Gemma Smale
Natural Rhythms
Woodfired stoneware

Unearth
Stoneware clay, Nuka glaze with horsechestnut and pine ash, hot fired to 1250

Jessie Cuadra
Landscape #1, #2, #3, #4, #5
Oil on Board

Joe Barfield
Lamp 1, 2, 3, 4
Ceramic - stoneware

Laura Bracey Curry
Bright afternoon
Coloured pencil on paper

Foliage
Coloured pencil on paper

Tulips
Monoprint on paper

Luke Fairhead
Cabin Head
Screen Print

Cottage Core
Screen Print

Nicholas Nunn
15 minutes
Oil

Rosa Kelly
Allotment Shed
Oil on wood

Sarah Strachen
Becoming VI, VII, X
Handbuilt stoneware ceramic sculpture

Thomas Lawes
A Conversation And Tea
Quilt mounted on wooden frame

Discussion With Me
Quilt mounted on wooden frame

Recommendation
Quilt mounted on wooden frame

Xinyi Bi
Angelus!
Giclee Print

Chill's
Giclee Print

The Sawhorse
Giclee Print

Xinyue Peng
Lover
Ceramic

Zhiqian Lin
Fantasy Museum 1, 2
Giclee Print