

Scenes in a striking style

There's a bold, distinctive look to artist Peter Luty's work

BY BEN WEST

You can spot a picture by Peter Luty at 100 yards. A bold, distinctive style pervades all his work. As well as creating striking scenes depicting local landmarks such as the Millenium Dome (featured this issue on our cover), the Thames Barrier, Flamsteed House in Greenwich Park, and the Thames at Greenwich Power Station, he goes further afield to capture his take on such architectural creations as The Shard, the London Eye and the Millenium Bridge. There are further works encompassing landscapes in such countries as Spain, Italy and Morocco.

Born and educated in Yorkshire, the locally-based painter and printmaker began his professional career as an architect - which may help explain why he principally now concentrates on the representation and interpretation of buildings, old and new. He received his architectural degree from Edinburgh University and worked in Cambridge and London before setting up his own architectural practice in Greenwich in 1980, where he lived for many years. His studio remains in south east London.

"When I studied the history of English architecture for my art A-level we used to draw comparative plans of cathedrals like Chartres and Salisbury, and I remember doing a coloured elevation of Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire - I'm still doing the same thing really," he says. "As an architect I drew technical drawings - plans, elevations and



sections - all the time. I drew them using traditional drafting instruments, I'd given up being a practising architect by the time the computer age really kicked in. Sometimes, particularly with elevations, it was necessary to draw something that the client could relate to more easily than a technical drawing. I suppose I've just developed from there.

"I've always liked the sort of elevational drawings that Victorian architects used to produce - drawn on white paper and hand-coloured with watercolour or ink. There were some by Philip Webb (he of the Red House in Bexleyheath) on display in the V and A museum a couple of years ago which were very good. There is a lot of tremendous work to be inspired by - Palladio's elevations, Ruskin's details... Canaletto wasn't bad either!"

Today he creates woodcuts, linocuts, etchings and digital prints.

"Of course, when it came to woodcuts and linocuts, I had to adopt a different approach," he says. "You simply can't get the same detail in a linocut that you can in a watercolour. It became necessary to simplify my approach and concentrate on the essence of the building.

"Deciding upon whether to do a woodcut, linocut, etching or digital print for a particular subject depends on the building and what I'm trying to get across. A cut in lino has a sharp edge which I find suits the strong, simple shapes of Art Deco buildings.

"I use MDF (a fibreboard) for the plate of some prints. The edge of MDF tends the break away a bit when it is cut, giving a softer edge more suited to older buildings.

"I could do a linocut of the elevation of Gaudi's Casa Batllo but the result would be very different from the digital drawing I did of it. Digital work can give you a range of different textures compared to watercolour, for instance, and might be more suitable for certain types of buildings.

"Having said all that, in the end there are no hard and fast rules. I choose the building and the medium because I think the final image will work.

"My days depend upon where I'm at with a project. I might be in my studio, drawing or cutting a new plate or I might be painting. I might be in my print room printing (and trying to avoid getting ink everywhere - a perennial problem), I might be working on the computer, I might be framing, or hanging an



exhibition, out and about looking at buildings and photographing and drawing them. My days are very varied and always fascinating - occasionally they're very frustrating when things aren't going right."

The buildings in his paintings, drawings and original prints are exemplars of their type: some major buildings by modern or historic architects, some simple vernacular buildings of unknown provenance.

Peter is interested in the formal geometry of architectural elevations, in spaces, shapes and forms, in the textures of building materials, the effects of light and colour, in how buildings change over their lifetime and in how they relate to other buildings and their surroundings through reflection, shadow and pattern.

"Sometimes I will have an idea that I might want to express and look for a suitable building, sometimes I see a building and think it would make an excellent painting or print. I've become quite interested of late in Art Deco as a subject. It started when I saw the wonderful Deco Hotel in Galle, Sri Lanka and thought it would make a good linocut. I wanted a companion piece for it and thought the Hoover Building on the Great West Road would be good, so I went back to study the Hoover Building in greater detail and work out how I could depict it using the same format as the Deco Hotel."

Examples of Peter's work are on display at the gallery of the Greenwich Printmakers Association, which he also chairs.

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