



DAY BOWMAN  
*Seaside Citadels*

daybowman.com  
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# DAY BOWMAN

## *Seaside Citadels*

1 – 12 June 2021

PRIVATE VIEW  
Wednesday 2 June 6 – 9 pm

ARTIST TALK  
Saturday 5 June 11 am – 12 noon  
Day Bowman in conversation with Jenny Blyth

POETRY READING  
Thursday 10 June 6 – 8.30 pm  
Sue Hubbard, Suzannah V. Evans and readings by Dominic Mafham

*Hubbard's poems have been read on Radio 3 and Radio 4 and she has contributed to many arts programmes including Kaleidoscope, Poetry Please, Night Waves and The Verb. Sue Hubbard's latest novel, Rainsongs, is published by Duckworth, Overlook Press US, Mercure de France, and Yilin Press China, and her fourth poetry collection, Swimming to Albania, is due from Salmon Press, Ireland, later this year.*

JAZZ EVENING  
Saturday 12 June 6 – 9 pm  
The Nick Sorensen / John Law duo

*"An extraordinary and empathetic musical relationship in which their sparring and relaxed candour in one another's company shine through" (Jazzwise).*

*"World class jazz pianist John Law joins the equally reputable saxophonist Nick Sorensen for some fresh interpretations of great tunes, with Thelonious Monk the bookies' favourite for the first number" (Venue Magazine).*

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## DAY BOWMAN

### *Seaside Citadels*

Our coastal boundaries appointed with castles and fortresses of old, protected us for hundreds of years against invaders from foreign lands. The geography of an island nation worked in our favour. Those citadels of stone that spangled cliff tops looking out across the seas, were long ago abandoned, but their ruins remain as reminders to us of past invaders and would-be victors. That sense of vulnerability has not been dispelled. Our borders are now politically fortified in a bid to control the complexities of global migration. The layering of history and politics, like the littoral shoreline of sand, sea and sky is constantly in flux.

Reflecting upon her life journey through a poetic response to the seashore, Bowman captures the play of light on wet sands, childhood memories and life challenges. She does not shy away from the contentious issues of global politics that underpin and impact our transient lives. All is captured in her beautiful paintings of *Fortresses* and *Seaside Citadels*.

Combining the fine art of drawing with that of painting comes naturally to her. Bowman's abstract expressionist paintings, in charcoal and conté over oil on canvas, are multi-layered - complex yet fluent, strident and charged, they intuitively balance the brittle notes of humanity against the fragility of endeavour.

Irrespective of geography, the catharsis of walking barefoot along the shoreline, is primal - the criss-cross of shallows, of incoming tides, erasing our sadnesses like footprints from *Plashy Places*. For Day Bowman, returning to the coastal landscape of her childhood, it is manna for the soul. As we release ourselves to the elements, we find a path to peace and healing.

*Jenny Blyth*  
*Carey Blyth Gallery, Oxford*

## *A process and always in-process: rebuilding the citadel of the self*

Last summer, Day Bowman visited a number of south-coast seaside towns, where she was repeatedly struck by the dilapidated shapes of abandoned citadel constructions: from castles to martello towers to the pill boxes of the second world war. They echoed the sandcastles of her childhood, growing up in the once fashionable, Edwardian seaside destination of Minehead, Somerset. Although much of her early work was concerned with the figure, after the tragic loss of her baby boy, Sam, and the sudden death of her husband, Michael, Bowman turned back to the ocean for solace, and her mixed-media, abstract paintings have since been largely concerned with the sea, the shore, and, in particular, that ‘edgeland’ where the two meet. With this new series of paintings, she says, she wanted to compare the coast of her childhood to the coast she perceives nowadays – and by this she means both the literal and metaphorical coast, especially in the wake of Brexit – as a barrier through which ‘we do not want to let people in’, the outline of a nation ‘that is pulling up the drawbridge’. More than ever, then, this series seems concerned with loss: loss of childhood; loss of a child; loss of a partner; loss of once solid structures (both physical – the seaside citadels; and metaphorical – the EU, a family unit); loss of identity; and, through the pandemic, loss of freedom, safety and certainty. As author and critic Sue Hubbard writes in her novel, *Rainsongs*, an elegiac tale about a woman, Martha, who travels to Co Kerry, Ireland – on the mainland, with a view out to the two steep and rocky Skellig Islands – to sort her husband’s things after his sudden death: ‘When there’s nothing left, there’s still the ocean and the sky.’ This is a story which resonates<sup>1</sup> uncannily with Bowman’s own experiences, since Martha also lost her son; as a novel, too, it is full of descriptive passages that could be paired perfectly with Bowman’s paintings. To this we shall return...

For as long as she can remember, Bowman has seen the sand as her canvas, and her canvas as the sand. Again, this brings with it a sense of loss, since nothing built or drawn on the beach survives the destruction of the indiscriminatory incoming tide. In this way, Bowman, with her ‘image of a great wave washing over the world,’<sup>2</sup> conjures up the cosmological thesis of Thales of Miletus (a pre-Socratic philosopher – deemed by Aristotle to be the *first* philosopher in the Greek tradition), which holds that the nature of *all* matter is a single material substance: namely, water. For Bowman, too, water is about ‘birth, healing and regeneration’.<sup>3</sup> As she layers up her palimpsestic works, it is frequently an icy cold blue of water that is laid down first, along with golden sand and white spume, before she starts to work more graphically, drawing, as the surrealists would have it, automatically, without, or, perhaps better said, pre-thought, and certainly pre-linguistically, albeit with the marks frequently resembling some ancient form of calligraphy. As artist and writer Deanna Petherbridge

asserts: ‘Drawing needs to be reaffirmed as intelligent practice, which is as much about thinking, seeing and interrogating as inventing and which communicates as intensely with others as it refers to the affective self’.<sup>4</sup>

Another novel close to Bowman’s heart, especially in relation to the loss and longing of this series, is Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, and this evocative passage could just as easily speak of a Bowman canvas:

‘First, the pulse of colour flooded the bay with blue, and the heart expanded with it and the body swam, only the next instant to be checked and chilled by the prickly blackness on the ruffled waves. Then, up behind the great black rock, almost everything spurted irregularly, so that one had to watch for it and it was a delight when it came, a fountain of white water; and then, while one waited for that, one watched, on the pale semi-circular beach, wave after wave shedding again and again smoothly a film of mother-of-pearl.’<sup>5</sup>

Circles – complete or otherwise – are the primary form of Bowman’s graphism and comprise a universal symbol with extensive meaning, ranging from notions of wholeness, perfection and timelessness, to the infinite and God. And yet Bowman’s marks go far beyond surface symbolism. She describes ‘working quickly, moving one to another, allowing a sense of play and random markmaking to tell the story’. This enables the process to defer concerns with outcomes and to allow for emergent, experimental image-making. ‘Through the use of oil paint, charcoal and conte, scribbles and erasures are a constant, and inevitably there is a discrepancy between the originating concept and emergent outcome.’ As Lambirth puts it, Bowman is ‘more involved with process than product,’<sup>6</sup> a practice artist Terry Rosenberg refers to as ‘ideational drawing’, which, he further defines as ‘a process and always in-process; thinking-in-action and action-as-thinking’.<sup>7</sup> It is, he continues, ‘a thinking space – not a space in which thought is represented but rather a space where thinking is presenced’.<sup>8</sup> This is echoed by the way in which Bowman’s ‘somewhat hectic sense of immediacy’ simultaneously carries with it ‘a dynamic of presence and *presentness*...’<sup>9</sup> and, again, in *Rainsongs*, by Martha’s response to Colm’s poetry: ‘When you describe the bleak moorland, the cliffs and bogs, you don’t, like Yeats, appear to be creating symbols but more like [the Victorian poet Gerard Manley] Hopkins to be revealing the essence of things’. So, too, Bowman’s works<sup>10</sup> are like a subconscious exploration of semiotics, revealing buried meaning and inner thought. ‘To relive the past we start with a few known facts,’ thinks Martha. ‘Then add texture and colour, so that like a child’s dot-to-dot drawing we arrive, if we’re lucky, at an approximate outline. Though often it’s not quite what we expect.’<sup>11</sup>

And what to expect, indeed, as we stand on the edge, unable to go back to what is lost, but with no idea what the new, unexpected, un-planned-for future – or, in pandemic speak, ‘the new normal’ – should look like. Bowman recalls, often, as a child, standing at the water’s edge, and feeling she was standing at the edge of her world. A note left behind by Brendan, Martha’s deceased husband, describes the Skelligs as: ‘Not just on the edge of a continent, but on the edge of human imagination,’<sup>12</sup> while Martha reflects that: ‘The wild [...] stripped everything away so that all that was left was an essential self’.<sup>13</sup> Just as the citadels, taken by Bowman as her starting point for these works, have eroded over time, so our essential self, stripped bare by this literal and metaphorical ‘standing on the edge’ and being weathered, might be understood to be our own citadel – our incarnate defensive core. As artist Tania Kovats puts it, in the publication to go with another exhibition in which Bowman took part: ‘A sense of place is a route to access a sense of self’.<sup>14</sup> And so it is that by touching the void and returning to find a grounded sense of place, we are able to incorporate loss, of all and any kind, into our lives and continue to move forward, rebuilding our damaged bastion – ‘a process and always in-process’.

Anna McNay, April 2021  
Editor and Curator

1 Sue Hubbard, *Rainsongs* (Duckworth, London: 2019), p47

2 Andrew Lambirth, ‘Day Bowman: OrientaEng the Spirit’, in *Day Bowman: The Compass Series* (Jeremiah PublicaEons, 2003), p8

3 Lambirth (2003), p8

4 Deanna Petherbridge, *The Primacy of Drawing* (Yale University Press: 2010), p432

5 Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (first edition 1927, reprint Penguin Books Ltd: 1971), p24

6 Lambirth (2003), p8

7 Terry Rosenberg, ‘New Beginnings and Monstrous births: Notes towards an appreciaEon of ideaEonal Drawing’, in Steve Garner (ed), *Writing on Drawing: essays on drawing practice and research* (Intellect Books: 2012), pp109-124, p109

8 Rosenberg (2012), p109

9 Mel Gooding, ‘Strange Places: A Foreword’, in *The Urban Wastelands Project* (Jeremiah Publications: 2011), p2

10 Hubbard (2019), p175

11 Hubbard (2019), p75

12 Hubbard (2019), p47

13 Hubbard (2019), p44

14 Tania Kovats, ‘Make a Mark’, in *Drawing on Dorset* (Dorset Visual Arts: 2019), p3



**Fortress 2.** Oil, charcoal and conte on canvas, 140 x 150 x 3 cm



*Fortress 7. Oil, charcoal and conte on canvas, 140 x 150 x 3 cm*



*Citadel 3. Oil, charcoal and conte on canvas, 172 x 200 x 3 cm*





*Fortress 5. Oil, charcoal and conte on canvas, 140 x 150 x 3 cm*





*Citadel 4. Oil, charcoal and conte on canvas, 172 x 200 x 3 cm*







*Study 2 Citadel Series. Household paint, charcoal and graphite on cartridge paper, 40 x 40 cm*



*Study 5 Citadel Series. Household paint, charcoal and graphite on cartridge paper, 40 x 40 cm*





*Study 6 Fortress Series. Oil and charcoal on canvas, 40 x 50 x 4 cm*



*Study 7 Fortress Series. Oil and charcoal on canvas, 40 x 50 x 4 cm*





**Study 11 Fortress Series.** Oil and charcoal on canvas, 40 x 50 x 4 cm



**Study 10 Fortress Series.** Oil and charcoal on canvas, 40 x 50 x 4 cm



**Study 8 Citadel Series.** Household paint, charcoal and graphite on cartridge paper, 40 x 40 cm



**Study 17 Citadel Series.** Household paint, charcoal and graphite on cartridge paper, 40 x 40 cm



**DAY BOWMAN** – 1980 Graduate of London University and Chelsea College of Art

#### RECENT SELECTED ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS

2020 Plashy Places: Carey Blyth Gallery Oxford

2019 Tearing up the Rule Book, Westminster Reference Library London & Atelier Melusine France

2012 Olympic Commission for giant hoardings at Weymouth Railway Station.

2012 The Urban Wastelands Project (see curated exhibitions)

2006 WaterZones Art First, London

2006 'WaterZones', Karin Sanders Fine Art. New York. USA

2005 Paint Art First London

#### RECENT SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2021 Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolours, Mall Galleries London

2021 Being with Trees, curated by The Arborealists for Bermondsey Project Space

2020 International group exhibition of Romanian and British painters at the Palace of Culture Iasi, Romania

2020 Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolours, Mall Galleries London. Winner of the Winsor and Newton Product Prize

2020 Future Now Aesthetica Art Prize, York Art Gallery

2020 Journey, Migration and the Sea Open Exhibition: Southampton City Art Gallery

2020 Wells Art Contemporary International Open Exhibition 2020

2020 Royal West of England Academy 168th Open 2020

2020 Linden Hall Studio Winter Show 20/21

2019 Norwich Cathedral: Contemporary British Painting, 34 Painters

2019 Group exhibition of painting at Bermondsey Project Space

2019 44AD Gallery, Bath Open 2019

2019 Inaugural Summer Open at ARB Gallery, University of Cambridge

2019 Winner of the Anima Mundi Painting Prize, Venice Biennale 2019

2019 Drawing on Dorset: touring group exhibition selected by Professor Anita Taylor and Tania Kovats celebrating drawing in Dorset

2019 Salon 11 at The Old Lock Up Gallery Derbyshire: Group exhibition of six women painters

2019 The Westmorland Landscape Competition: Open exhibition celebrating landscape

2019 The 167 Royal West of England Academy: Annual Open exhibition

2019 Wales Contemporary Art Prize: First Prize Winner. The Waterfront Gallery Milford Haven and Mall Galleries London

2018/19 Linden Hall Studio Winter Show

2018 Future Now celebrates 100 artists selected for the Aesthetica Art Prize. York Art Gallery 2018

2018 Flux Art Fair: works selected and curated by Lisa Gray for Chelsea College of Art 2018.

2018 Getting Away! Arthouse 1 Bermondsey and Quay Arts IOW

2017 Edgelands (see curated exhibitions)

2017 Studio 1.1 Gallery, London

2017 Anything Goes? Art Bermondsey Summer Salon

2017 Contemporary Masters from Britain - 4 Museum China Tour

The Yantai Art Museum, Yantai ; Jaingsu Arts and Crafts Museum, Artall, Nanjing; Jiangsu Art Museum ; Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts

2016 Columbia Threadneedle Prize

2016 ING Discerning Eye, Mall Galleries London

2016 Contemporary British Painting at Quay Arts IOW

2013 Nord Art, Germany

#### CURATED EXHIBITIONS

2018 Getting Away! Arthouse 1 Bermondsey and Quay Arts IOW

2016/17 Edgelands a UK touring exhibition: APT Gallery, Deptford, London; The Crypt, St. Marylebone Parish Church; Aberystwyth Arts Centre, Wales; Hartlepool Art Gallery; ARB Cambridge University

2011/12 The Urban Wastelands Project: Kelly Ross Fine Art; Quay Arts IOW; Black Swan Arts; Atkinson Gallery

#### PRIZES, AWARDS AND COLLECTIONS

2020 Winsor and Newton Product Prize: Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolours

2019 First Prize: Anima Mundi International Painting Prize 2019

2019 First Prize: Bath Arts Open 2019

2019 First Prize: Wales Contemporary 2019

2012 Olympic Commission 2012: hoardings for Weymouth Railway Station

#### RECENT REVIEWS AND PUBLICATIONS

2021 <https://beingwithtrees.weebly.com/gallery-images.html>

2021 <https://floatingcircle-2021rwa.org/2021/03/13/friends-are-showing-artworks-at-the-rwa-168-open-part-2/>

2020 <https://www.sober-magazine.com/#/new-page-65/>

2020 FLUX Review Interview: <https://www.thefluxreview.com/interview-day-bowman/>

2020 Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolours Blog: [https://www.mallgalleries.org.uk/about-us/blog/exhibition-tour-with-tony-hunt-ri?fbclid=IwAR27g6F8XKa\\_3C8bm84JydM1GLLe2oRV3MZvAMTasGis1kTy-LYfuYJLanM](https://www.mallgalleries.org.uk/about-us/blog/exhibition-tour-with-tony-hunt-ri?fbclid=IwAR27g6F8XKa_3C8bm84JydM1GLLe2oRV3MZvAMTasGis1kTy-LYfuYJLanM)

2020 Oxford Times: Plashy Place exhibition at Carey Blyth

2019 <https://www.artlyst.com/reviews/tearing-rule-book-paintings-day-bowman-atelier-melusine/Conversation-between-John-Stephens-and-Day-Bowman-at-Galerie-Melusine-France.-Sept.-2019>

2019 <http://www.allaboutshipping.co.uk/2019/11/06/wales-contemporary-winners-at-the-mall-galleries-london/Coverage-of-Day-Bowman's-winning-painting-for-Wales-Contemporary-2019>.

2019 Tomout Blog: <https://tomoutblog.wordpress.com/2019/04/11/all-at-sea-day-bowman-tearing-up-the-rule-book-westminster-reference-library-/comment-page-1/?u>

2018 BBC News South East coverage of Winter Group Show at Linden Hall Studios

2017 Art Reveal Magazine.com (full interview)

2017 FAD Magazine Top 6 exhibitions to see this week: coverage of Anything Goes at Art Bermondsey Project Space

2017 Online magazine review of Anything Goes at Art Bermondsey Project Space

2017 Online magazine review of Edgelands touring exhibition

2017 Wordpress coverage of Edgelands touring exhibition on the ARB Cambridge website

2017 Review of Contemporary Masters from Britain: 80 British Painters of the 21st century. A tour of 4 Chinese Art Museums 2017/18.

#### COLLECTIONS

St Vincent and the Grenadines Government Art Collection.

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Philip Morris Inc.

Hilton Hotel Group

Dorset County Hospital: installation of hoardings on external entrance tower

British Dental Association

The Priseman Seabrook Collection

Yantai Art Museum China

