



The 2 naïve artists carrying on a Plymouth tradition made famous by Beryl Cook

Plymouth's reputation as a naïve art centre of Britain started with Beryl Cook and her wonderful, larger than life Barbican characters.

The tradition has been continued by Brian Pollard and his bright, colourful paintings of the city's iconic landmarks and views.

Now, there's a new generation of naïve artists joining him to put Plymouth back on the map as a nationally renowned city for naïve art.

One of the new generation is Arth Lawr, who can often be found in Brian's Plymouth studio, discussing the colours, balance and rhythm of paintings: "We talk about things that everyone else would think is boring, like 'what shade of yellow is that?' and 'how many times did you paint that bit to get that brightness of colour?'" said Arth.

The point is, they get on like a house on fire and Brian has been generous in sharing his knowledge with Arth.

Now, Brian – whose work is known internationally – is doing something he's never done before. He's holding a joint exhibition. He and Arth will be exhibiting 60 acrylic paintings in '2 Naïve in Plymouth', which runs from 20 March to 8 April at the Royal William Yard's Ocean Studios.

Look at Brian and Arth's paintings and you'll see some of the best-known buildings and views in Plymouth: Smeaton's Tower, The Hoe, The Sound, Tinside Lido, Wembury, the Mew Stone, Plymouth Gin Distillery, The Barbican, The Mayflower Steps, and, of course, The Dolphin pub, where Brian would often meet Beryl for a drink and a chat. All unmistakable landmarks, and all given the 'naïve' touch.

Their work differs from Beryl Cook's in one big way, however: "Beryl focused on people, she wasn't interested in the background so much," said Brian. "She painted the figures very big, so she didn't have to paint the background. Whereas I'm more interested in the background, not the people. The people just happen to fit in with the work."

Brian has been creating his trademark colourful paintings for 40 years, while Arth has been painting for the past 20 years. In fact, he'd only just been born when Brian was working on his first piece.

Both artists are drawn back time and again to their favourite places in the South West, and Plymouth in particular: "Plymouth is a great place to paint, there are so many places that lend themselves to be painted," said Brian.

"Just look at The Hoe. I paint this view so many times because I think it is *the* greatest sea view of any city in England. The South West in general, but the Plymouth seascapes especially, are a great stimulus."

The artists met a couple of years ago when Arth asked if he could pop by Brian's studio for a chat: "I was inspired by Brian through his intensity of colour, which was something I wanted to get across in my own work," said Arth. "Brian has helped me loads over the last couple of years to refine my own style.

"One of the reasons I love this style so much is that it's quirky," he added. "You have the luxury of being able to exaggerate the bits you want, so you're not tied by reality. If you want to make something bigger than it really is, you just do that – and it works. We shape things the way we want to see them."

It's why you'll see elements added to their paintings. In Arth's case, it's usually a cat. With Brian, it's often hot air balloons: "The aim is to bring fun into the paintings," said Brian. "You can get away with almost anything, within reason.

"But although the word naïve is true in the style, it isn't in the way the paintings are actually done," he added. "The idea is to get the viewer focused on the picture. There's something there, usually in the middle, that takes your eye straight away. It might be the cat, it might be Smeaton's Tower, and then your eye spreads out and you notice lots of other things. So the paintings are quite carefully composed."

Brian hasn't had a major exhibition in over a decade because as soon as he finishes a painting, it's sold. For this exhibition, he has held 30 paintings back.

The pair have done two paintings together for promotional posters for the exhibition. While Brian focused on the backgrounds, Arth did for foregrounds. This was another new experience for Brian: "I've done around 1,800 paintings, and this is the first time I've done a painting with another artist. Arth started on one and I started the other and we'd keep on swapping them."

With the former Royal Navy building's big grey stone walls, Arth says Ocean Studios is the perfect exhibiting space for their work: "When people walk in, there will be an explosion of colour right down that wall. It's just going to be one big visual blast."

For Brian, the exhibition is also making a statement: "Beryl Cook put Plymouth on the map as a naïve art centre in Britain. With the exhibition, we're saying 'let's get Plymouth back on that map'. There are a lot of newer naïve painters emerging and I think it's important that we try and carry on the tradition."

2 Naïve in Plymouth: Exhibition by Brian Pollard and Arth Lawr

Ocean Studios, Royal William Yard, Plymouth

20 March to 8 April

www.arthlawr.co.uk

www.brianpollard.co.uk

www.oceanstudios.org.uk