



Anne Shingleton
Light on White



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October 18th – November 8th 2009



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THE WILDLIFE ART GALLERY

in association with the Jane Neville Gallery

The morning light was shimmering on the Fleet Lagoon, an area of shallow water protected behind the eighteen mile long shingle bank of Chesil Beach. It was mid-May; Anne and I had come to this part of the West Dorset coast to visit the Swannery at Abbotsbury. Within this protective tidal habitat lives one of the largest colonies of free flying mute swans in the British Isles.

On her regular visits to Abbotsbury, from her home in Italy, Anne has been observing, drawing and making colour studies of the swans. This chosen subject matter has enabled her to extend her painterly obsession with colour and light, following years of working under Italian skies.

I came across Anne's work over thirty years ago, when we exhibited her expressive etchings of local landscapes and wildlife in Poole Museum. Later in Italy, I witnessed her developing mastery of oil paint and pastel acquired through her study of classical techniques in the studio of Nerina Simi. Her naturalistic painting style relies upon a rigorous foundation of observational drawing, the sensitive handling of colour and her ability to express through paint her passion for the animal world, a world which is woven into the fabric of Anne's daily living. Years of modelling clay and wax for her bronze sculptures are shown in her confident ability to render form and to reveal surfaces with clarity and sensitivity. Her return to painting demonstrates a mature vision; grounded in years of dedication to mastering her medium.

She engages us directly with the beauty of the natural world, while drawing us into the day to day existence of the swans. In the company of Anne's swans we tread the same earth; we recognise life's shared realities. Her paintings are thoroughly personal and contemporary, and make a unique and enduring contribution to British Art.

The morning we came, we were able to wander outside the public pathways among the nesting sites constructed on raised mounds within the wetland margins. Watchful pens sitting on their eggs and protective cobs kept an eye on our movements. They seemed at ease as I left Anne sitting among them; setting up her easel, laying out her oil paints and primed wood panels. As I looked back there was Anne, hat batted down on her head seemingly oblivious to the steady offshore breeze, absorbed in that moment of light, colour and the activity of swans. On my return, we wandered further into the cover of the reed beds, among webbed prints in the mud and downy feathers discarded from preening. As we walked, Anne discussed her time amongst the swans amid the changing rays of light. Her meticulous studies gathered on site have provided the foundation for months of work in the studio and the resolution of compositions alongside the slow building of layers of fluid oil paint. As the light changed her ability to deconstruct the colour white, which is the blending of all colours, became apparent. I saw through Anne's eyes the richness of light upon white, in all its modes of transparency, luminosity and reflection. Swans became the canvas upon which the colour white was literally transformed into the meaning of light.

Annette Ratuszniak

Curator



My beloved theme of sunlight continues in this, my latest exhibition, with two slight differences: I have focused on a single subject matter – the swan – and have created the larger works in the studio. This method of working requires not only a clear image in my head before I put brush to canvas but also an enormous amount of preliminary work – as will be seen from the number of studies on show! Studio work, as opposed to *plein air* painting, depends on a strong visual memory but also gives the opportunity to concentrate in greater depth on the composition and to refine the more sophisticated techniques used in oil painting.

Although the swan and the effects of sunlight on its feathers is ever-present, each painting is different, going beyond the superficial image of this magnificent creature to portray it as it really lives. I was drawn to the swan not only because, with its brilliant white and elegant plumage, it has always held a fascination for me but also because the only managed colony of mute swans in the world is in my home county of Dorset. Most of my studies were made at the Abbotsbury Swannery, which shelters up to 150 nesting pairs and at times up to 600 free-flying swans. My thanks go to all who make me so welcome on my visits to the reserve.

Surprisingly, increasing familiarity with the subject matter – in this case, the swan – continues to reveal ever greater possibilities for me: the more I do, the more I want to do! Thus, this body of work on the mute swan represents the beginning of a very personal journey as well as my own vision of these magnificent birds and I hope that you will share my appreciation of their undoubted beauty.

Anne Shingleton
September 2009





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Light on White

I have lived in Italy since 1980, which has given me plenty of opportunity to study and think about sunlight. The temperature, on average higher than in my native England, allows more frequent out of door study and work. One year I painted landscapes outside every day that had sun, even through the winter. A wide brimmed hat shades my face and a white umbrella keeps the sun off my canvas, and more importantly, my palette. Another advantage of where I live in Tuscany is that there is little wind; anyone who's ever had the wet canvas land butter-side down will understand the frustrations involved with plein-air painting on a blustery day.

Claude Monet (1840 -1926) and his Spanish contemporary Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923), both plein-air painters, have been my main sources for how to tackle painting sunlit subjects. Monet was a superb colourist and really understood light. One of the ways in which he dealt with the problem of the sunlight moving over his subject was to stay in the same spot and when the light changed he just picked up a new canvas and started a different painting; these became known as his Series Paintings. This way, he was able to capture the light and atmosphere of a particular moment. He could study those subtle changes in colour and tone without worrying too much about the drawing and composition that had already been resolved on the previous canvas. This is a very good exercise and one soon learns that sunlit subjects are really only paintable for about half an hour. So with a bit of memorising one can extend it to an hour in a single sitting, because the sunlight moves around much more quickly than one thinks so it is better to come back the next day, as Monet did, and continue in that same half hour again, hoping that the weather hasn't changed. One soon learns to work quickly.

Joaquín Sorolla loved painting on the beach. He even managed to work on big canvases on site. In the few

photographs of him working it's possible to see that even he had a problem with the wind, since he built a windbreak around him on three sides and his canvases were tied down from all corners. Sorolla was able to work very fast since he was familiar with his subject. He developed a habit of making small oil studies from life, on little panels, often of cardboard, measuring about 20 x 25 cm. These studies, sometimes just a few brushstrokes, served as notes of tone, colour and composition for bigger canvases, and these also helped him commit his subject to memory. My similar habit of making *bozzetti*, small oil studies on nut veneered wooden panels, from life are essential for my bigger paintings developed in the studio. These have become my main references and they have a freshness about them that I try to keep in the bigger works.

The main thing to remember when painting sunlit subjects outside is that there is always more than one source of light, unlike ideal studio conditions where only north light prevails. If the sun is very strong there will be warm reflected light bouncing back onto the subject from the ground, from other surfaces and therefore from many different directions. If the sunlight is weaker, as when the sun is low in the sky, the cool light from the sky above may have much the same intensity as the sun's light. Thus the subject would be lit by a direct, yellow light from the side and a diffuse, blue light from above, resulting in cool cast shadows; cool, that is, in comparison to the warmer sunlit areas. Everything that is bathed in sunlight is usually slightly yellow, and all that which is in the shade is usually cooler, or bluer in colour. One must also remember that water in the atmosphere affects light passing through it. The more moisture in the air, the more diffuse the light and the hazier the scene.

Lastly, one must remember sunlight passes through objects, often in the most painterly of ways. One only has to visualise sun passing through leaves, grapes,



rabbit's ears or butterfly wings to comprehend this. Translucency gives an impression of vitality, shows the quality of the substance illuminated and awakens emotions in the viewer.

My inspiration starts with an emotional reaction to a particular image. I believe the desire to repeat that emotion is the first step in the creative process. It generally arises from a particular lighting on a subject that holds some deep meaning for me. I love the way light reflects off surfaces, like off the straw onto the belly of a ruminating cow; or the pink glow of light through a kitten's ears or the blue sky light being reflected off a swan's back. This passion or desire, sparked off by often the most fleeting of images, can sometimes take years to mature into a clear vision. The passion inside me has to be pure and strong enough to sustain this particular vision for the duration of the creative process, which, too, can take years. How this all works is a great mystery to me. All I know is that these are natural forces working and I have to work with them at their own pace and respect them.

My aim is to get my pictures to sing, to make them look as if they were made effortlessly, and to convey a sense of the spirit of a living creature at one with its

own world. But these strong emotions behind my work do not eliminate the need for a great deal of thinking and planning before starting a painting. Often I will spend ages arranging the lighting and my position in relation to the subject and the light, especially if I'm working indoors. I can't remember who said it, but it's true, a comfortable chair in one's studio is a very important piece of equipment!

There are many other things to consider too, especially when dealing with animals. One day I turned up at a local farm in the countryside outside Florence to work on a magnificent male turkey I'd seen the week before, only to find that it was in the pot that day! Even with domestic animals, it's important to be well informed apparently.

I tend to work on a body of work that spans at least a year so that I get to know a subject very well, and let the possibilities of new ideas reveal themselves as the work progresses. There is so much that one commits to memory, the anatomy and proportions, characteristic poses and movements, colours and textures. For initial drawings I use charcoal, pencils and pastels on tinted paper. I like to prepare my own canvases with rabbit-skin glue and gesso. This gives me the exact amount of absorbency that I like for working with oil paints. Acrylics have never appealed to me, probably because the tone changes as it dries, and watercolour doesn't suit me, because I like to work from dark to light and make the lights opaque, although I think watercolour is a beautiful medium.

People ask me why I like to paint white animals. It is surprising how many animals are white, so many wild and domestic bird species, cats, cows, horses, lambs. White animals give me the opportunity to develop my interest in colour and tonal balance and give me more scope to be painterly. This is because anything white reflects the colour of the light falling on it. The subject will show warm and cool colours through its changing planes. So many painters have placed something white in their landscapes or interiors exactly for this reason. Women in flowing white dresses have mostly filled the

bill here. I prefer white animals. A black cat in a coalhole would give me few opportunities to be painterly! I find the process of painting difficult enough and like to have as many conditions under my control as possible. Also the added advantage of being able to choose what time of day and the direction and quality of illumination means that I prefer to choose the tame animals in the back yard, or semi-domesticated wildfowl or animals accessible in a reserve.

The greatest influence on my work has been Signorina Simi (1890-1987). In 1980, after 2 years at Bournemouth and Poole College of Art studying illustration I found myself on a train heading out to Florence to a small private school run by an Italian lady in her early nineties who was the only one teaching the classical method at that time. I was really fortunate to spend two years with her. Despite her age, she didn't miss a thing and was an excellent teacher. All of us who studied with her remember her most fondly. Basically, la Signorina taught us construction (how to draw accurately), chiaroscuro (tone/values or the black and whiteness) and later, colour and the basics of oil painting. We had life classes, working from the model, drawing with sharpened sticks of charcoal on off-white paper. The pose lasted for three hours every morning for two weeks. Portrait was studied for four afternoons a week. This pushed my skills in perception and painting to a higher level. Human and animal anatomy I studied by myself with the help of books, visits to the city collection of skeletons and to the Uffizi Gallery to study the drawings of Leonardo da Vinci – facsimiles of course! In Florence, the city of the Renaissance, I was able to pick up tips from artists and artisans on the materials and methods of the masters and experiment for myself.

Sometimes I think I must be mad to attempt to paint moving objects in changing lighting conditions. However, I remain tantalised and challenged by nature in all its beauty and enjoy learning more each day about the process of creating, so I reckon I better continue.





- 1 **Swan portrait**
13 × 20 cm
Oil
- 2 **Peace amongst the reeds**
40 × 50 cm
Oil
- 3 **April showers**
80 × 100 cm
Oil
- 4 **Study for 'April showers'**
34 × 43 cm
Oil



I couldn't believe it when this scene happened in front of my eyes – so theatrical, and oh, all so brief! Confirming my belief again that real life can be more exciting and bizarre than fiction or theatre, if only one opens one's senses to it all. It remained so strongly etched in my visual memory that I was able to paint it without too much reworking on my return to Italy.



5 **Preening**
45 × 75 cm
Oil

6 **Courtship in the water**
21 × 34 cm
Oil



I watched these two swans dance their nuptials. They elegantly bobbed and dipped their bright orange beaks in and out of the water, pressing their white chests gently against each other creating a heart-shaped space between them with their arched necks, close and caressing, totally absorbed in their intimate dance, oblivious to the outside world in their momentary, watery oasis of love.





7 **First cygnets of the year**
50 × 70 cm
Charcoal and chalk

Being the first hatched cygnets of this year, I presume they felt the cold more than the later hatched ones. What a shock suddenly to be exposed to chilly sea winds after spending over five weeks curled up in a weatherproof shell and warmed by the breast of the incubating mother. No wonder these lively youngsters wanted to climb onto their mother's back and nestle under her enveloping wings. Two successfully managed to climb aboard and she obligingly lifted her wing to let them do so. However the cosy ride didn't last long as she purposefully rose up in the water and gently spread her wings, sliding her young back down into the water again. The date of the first cygnets hatching in the Abbotsbury Swannery is traditionally taken as signalling the start of the English summer. This year was April 27th. They can hatch anywhere between mid April and mid May.





8 Pussy willow
45 x 75 cm
Oil

As the pussy willow blossoms from cygnet grey to lemon yellow the pen sits diligently for about 35 days incubating her eggs in the nest lined with her breast feathers. The cob meanwhile stays nearby to defend his partner, nest, eggs and territory.



The composition of this painting is largely based on the presence of the swan's cast shadow being visible on the bottom of the lake from a high viewpoint. The crystal-clear mountain waters of Lake Annecy in France allowed so much light to penetrate to the sandy lakebed that the blue sky was hardly reflected by the water surface and the swan seemed to be held up by nothing. Whereas the muddy, shallower and more turbulent waters of Poole Park (see image no. 31), revealed more reflected sky. The changing patterns of ripples on the water's surface created different designs of refracted light on the lakebeds in each case.

- 9 **Study for 'Lake Annecy waters'**
29 × 37 cm
Oil
- 10 **Lake Annecy waters**
80 × 100 cm
Oil





S. H. 2002



- 11 Cob dabbling I
17 x 26 cm
Oil

- 12 Cob dabbling II
25 x 35 cm
Charcoal and chalk





Shingleton
2009
April



I am often asked if I am afraid of being attacked by an aggressive male swan whilst working in the reserve. The males do show threatening behaviour especially during the 35-day incubation period when their role is to protect their territory, but it is mainly directed at predators and other swans. As long as I moved quietly I could often work in close proximity and, after a while they seemed to accept me as an unthreatening presence. The breeding swans in the Abbotsbury colony, compared to those that regularly breed outside, are remarkable for the close proximity of the nest sites to one another, and also the swans' placidity when visitors walk amongst them. Swans have been kept at Abbotsbury since 1393 when the young birds provided a regular culinary treat for the mediaeval monks, and since then they seem to have naturally adapted to the restrictions of space in this protected environment - or maybe it's just the free lunch!

13 Study for 'The Dispute'

26 x 34 cm

Oil

14 Composition study for
'The Dispute'

50 x 65 cm

Oil





Shirley
2008







15 The Dispute
130 × 160 cm
Oil



16 Study for
'Defending the nest'
16 × 29 cm
Oil

17 Defending the nest
45 × 75 cm
Oil



When a nesting pair feel threatened, the pen cowers down on her eggs, whereas the cob hisses loudly, spreads his wings and makes himself look as menacing as possible. In particular they raise their neck feathers – a sort of bottle-brush effect – and lower their heads onto their breasts creating a squashed 'S' shape with their necks. This dramatic pose full of aggressive tension, back-lit here by the sun, with its strong crossing diagonals and the interplay of reflected sunlight between the two birds, suggested a painting that I couldn't wait to get onto the canvas.





Springer
2019



18 Cuckoo swan
70 × 55 cm
Oil

19 Study II for 'Cuckoo swan'
15 × 20 cm
Oil



Female swans without a home of their own sometimes move into someone else's! This particular pen was determined to sit tight despite the vain attempts to oust her by the cob. He finally gave up and, together with the dispossessed female, moved back in as well and they waited for the right moment/opportunity to reclaim their rightful property.



20 Cob backlit in the reeds
25 × 20 cm
Oil

21 The intruder
40 × 65 cm
Oil





22 Cob in the swannery reeds
24 x 26 cm
Oil

23 Study notes from the swannery
23 x 25 cm
Oil

24 Nesting in the reed bed
55 x 70 cm
Oil







Shingler
2009



- 25 Nesting under the Oak tree
50 × 60 cm
Oil
- 26 Study for 'Nesting under the Oak trees'
20 × 25 cm
Oil
- 27 Dappled sun on sitting pen
16 × 29 cm
Oil

I love it when nature itself presents me with a view of adjacent, complementary colours of the same tone and feel compelled to use this combination whilst trying to make it function as a painting. In this case, the turquoise on the back of the 'white' swan, an effect of the sun filtering through the canopy of leaves, is accentuated by the apricot of the sunlit reeds in the background whilst a ray of sunlight breaking through the foliage will reflect warmly back on the swan's belly.



28 **Nestkeeping**
45 × 75
Oil

29 **Composition study for 'Nestkeeping'**
15 × 28 cm
Oil

30 **Study for 'Nestkeeping'**
20 × 27 cm
Oil

It seemed to me that the male was standing beside his mate doing nothing whilst the pen, distinguished from the male by the smaller black knob on the beak, was doing all the work putting all the reeds in the right place to create their nest! Earlier in my career, when I did a lot of etching, I was influenced strongly by the great 18th century Japanese masters such as Hokusai and



Hiroshige, and this occasionally spills over into my paintings, particularly with regard to spacial relationships and colour. I especially love their use of areas of dark, velvety blue in the upper half of a picture which sets off the detail and luminosity in a lighter foreground, as can be seen in Nestkeeping.





31 Poole Park waters
80 × 100 cm
Oil

32 Relieved of his turn
65 × 40 cm
Oil





33 Settling onto the eggs
25 x 35 cm
Charcoal and chalk

Settling onto
the eggs - forward swing held
away from body

Sh



A Canada Goose
came too close

11:30 AM under
the trees

34 A goose too near
25 x 35 cm
Charcoal and chalk

THE trees are in their autumn beauty,
The woodland paths are dry,
Under the October twilight the water
Mirrors a still sky;
Upon the brimming water among the stones
Are nine-and-fifty Swans.

The nineteenth autumn has come upon me
Since I first made my count;
I saw, before I had well finished,
All suddenly mount
And scatter wheeling in great broken rings
Upon their clamorous wings.

I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,
And now my heart is sore.
All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,
The first time on this shore,
The bell-beat of their wings above my head,
Trod with a lighter tread.

Unwearied still, lover by lover,
They paddle in the cold
Companionable streams or climb the air;
Their hearts have not grown old;
Passion or conquest, wander where they will,
Attend upon them still.

But now they drift on the still water,
Mysterious, beautiful;
Among what rushes will they build,
By what lake's edge or pool
Delight men's eyes when I awake some day
To find they have flown away?

William Butler Yeats 1865-1935
The Wild Swans at Coole



35 Young pair
60 × 50 cm
Oil

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The Jane Neville Gallery

wildlifeartgallery.com

Shingleton
2009