

CULTURE
 ©
 ART/CORNWALL
**School
 holiday**

Learning to paint is surely a life-improving skill? We head to southwest England in search of good light and a fresh mental landscape.

By Robert Bound
 Photography Joel Redman

How do you do teach art? Do you show or tell? “Neither,” says Faye Dobinson between life-drawing classes. “You teach people to look.” Dobinson’s mock horror at the thought of a heavy-handed approach and a right and wrong way to paint (and to teach it) have got her not-so-young charges looking – and looking well.

On a fresh Wednesday in May, clean Cornish sunbeams stream through Palladian windows into the school’s main classroom. Pupils sketch their way out of their pre-class tightness, let their hair down and relax into the painting day. Sheets of thick paper are laid on paint-spattered floorboards, charcoals and crayons are taped to bamboo canes and our model stretches away her own morning stiffness, shaking her locks out of a ponytail. The marks are scratchy and

Previous page: (1) Tools of the trade (2) Faye Dobinson and our model

This spread: (1) Sasha and Henry Garfit (2) Newlyn in May (3) Photography class on the beach (4) The results (5) Taking aim (6) New light through old windows (7) Sketching but not sketchy

imprecise and, according to Dobinson, the exercise is “all about taking away that last vestige of control, to allow people to relax enough to see”. The results aren’t meant to be results and will be thrown in the bin but they’re striking; a triptych of accidental abstract expressionism. Then off come the clothes, up go the easels and out comes the paint. Watching art happen is mesmerising.

The Newlyn School of Art is named after its town, a bold little promontory west of Penzance that clings to the cliffs. It is more stoic than chocolate-box and works in fishing (a bit), tourism (quite a bit) and art (a lot). The school was set up in 2011 by Henry Garfit, an art-school-trained former auction-house man who wanted to come to the source of a lot of the art that he loved: Cornwall. “We’re lucky to have such dramatic landscapes and to always have had such a pool of talent here,” he says of the western-most bit of the UK where Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth came in the early and mid-20th century and founded the St Ives School.

That town up the road is famous, has a Tate gallery and is a traffic jam of smocks, berets and clattering easels. There was also a Newlyn School, founded around the earlier work of Stanhope Forbes. Really, Newlyn’s the original Cornish art town. And Garfit’s school is a triple whammy: it’s an art school, a style of work and the building itself was a primary school, built with local granite, in 1878. Enough. Let’s go painting.

Now, you can paint anywhere. You can do a Turner in a car park if you use your head but really you come to this part of the world for the landscape. Cornwall’s got picturesque villages such as Mousehole (pronounced “mauwzul”), drama at the Bedruthan Steps (like an Old Testament illustration) and wild beauty in the Isles of Scilly.



“People love the scenery and gardens but they’ll also paint broken nets. I hope I teach people to keep their eyes open for any old rubbish”

The most scenic Scilly is Tresco and the Newlyn School will take you and your paintbrushes there for a few days of relaxing tutelage with Amanda Hoskin, a Cornish artist and a master of landscapes. Board an eight-seater prop-plane from Land’s End Airport for the 15-minute hop to St Mary’s then sling your easel in a boat for the transfer to New Grimsby, Tresco’s scenic little port. Next it’s a tractor for your bags and a golf cart for your legs if the island’s square mile of fields, beaches and sandy tracks are too much for your artistic temperament. Then sea breeze, gulls on the wing calling across the bay and silence. It feels painterly.

It sounds churlish but Tresco is so pointedly picturesque that it runs the risk of everyone painting the same lovely nature, like photographing the Eiffel Tower. Why bother? “Oh no,” says Hoskin, finishing with her beachcombing class of outdoor watercolourists. “People love the scenery and the gardens but they’ll also paint broken nets and the boat sheds. I hope I teach people to keep their eyes open for any old rubbish.”



Hoskin's hiding her light under a scenic bushel: her students are turning out confident work, finding shades of grey and green and blue in the sea and beginning to build an impression of a landscape rather than slavishly sticking to every puff of cloud and every whinnying white horse in the surf. But Wendy's got stuck and her painting isn't balanced. "I'm happy but I wish that island wasn't there," she says. Quick as a flash, Hoskin says with a smile: "Well, it's a painting, move the island." Sage advice, Hoskin.

This is a bite of the wisdom and holiday humour of the 30-odd tutors at The Newlyn School of Art. The day before, Garfit had said that he'd founded the place "with the desire for artists to share their practice and their process", which is no homily: it's the thing. There's nothing from a book or a blackboard or an "In 1896..." in sight. It's all about artists telling other artists how they make their work: tips are practical and aesthetic, advice is physical and philosophical, and there is something of communicating the habit of art.

In three days dabblers can go from sketching mice to painting lions. Artists with an existing practice, semi-professionals or good old Sunday painters can hone, polish and look at their work in a different light. Watching brushstrokes become a picture is rewarding. It's satisfying to watch learning.

What do people talk about when they're painting? What questions do they ask? It's not like getting your hair cut; there's not a lot of "Going anywhere nice on your holidays?" Faye Dobinson talked about "bringing out the confidence to make that



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(1) Boat to Tresco (2) Crayons (3) Painting teacher Amanda Hoskin (4) Every picture tells a story (5) Caspar David Friedrich eat your heart out (6) Hop to Tresco in 15 minutes



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"So often explaining how you do something makes you do it better next time. It's like therapy"

first mark on a piece of paper", and students ask good, straightforward questions quickly and with a certain confidence dressed up in coy clothing. "How do I give it depth without making it dark?"; "How can I make her look friendly without painting a smile?" And the Cartesian: "The sea isn't still but my painting is."

On the beaches, in the gardens, on the clifftops and in and around the school itself people talk about what they're doing, how they're doing it, compliment good work, offer advice and make each other tea – it's collegiate. When people go to the pub in the evening it's all beer and bonhomie but school hours possess the low, rich hum of industry and improvement. If only the art school ran the country.

So what do the artists get out of it? Well, art is a fickle breadwinner and for most of the artist-tutors the fact that their often vital second job is teaching other people to do what they do is not only profitable and sane but can have the useful side-effect of making them better artists too. "I haven't stopped learning from doing this," says Dobinson. "So often, explaining how you do something makes you do it better next time. It's like therapy or something." So much of art is in the head, so letting it out of your mouth can feel very good.

The next morning is a pea-souper on the island and a test for the imaginations and colour palettes of our budding artists. There may be a lot of greys and whites and pale blues and greens. But maybe not – these are artists not reporters, after all. Is there not an ochre in the mist? We leave the artists to immortalise Tresco's

(1) Focus (2) Life drawing warm-up
(3) Artist Mark Jenkin (4) Even the easels
are a work of art (5) High and dry
(6) Tutor Faye Dobinson

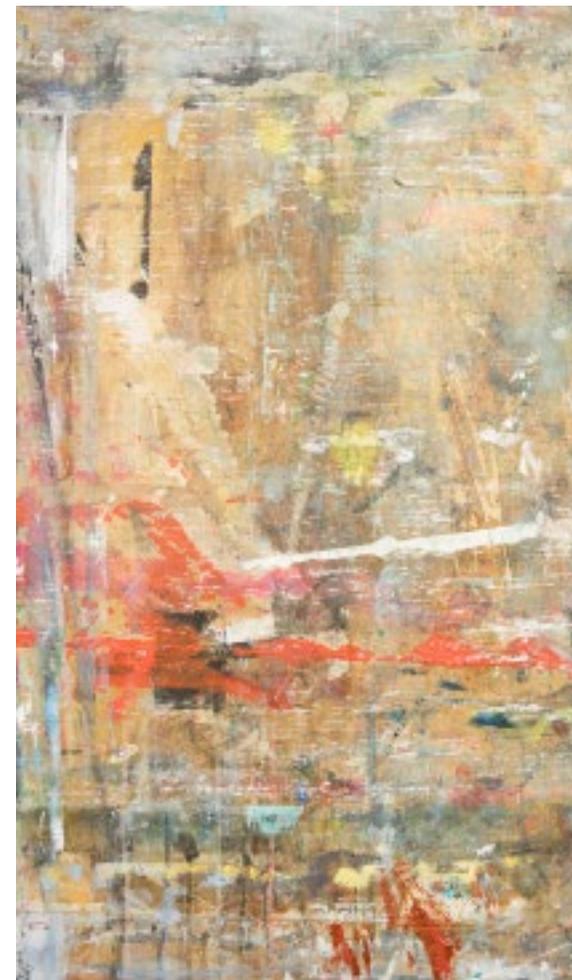
Abbey Garden, a semi-tropical Gulf Stream marvel. Silence settles over the sketchbooks and another day of making the actual impressionistic begins.

Back in Newlyn, which now seems like Manhattan after the silent wilds of the Scillies, we visit the artists who take studios in the school. Jessica Cooper, Sarah Ball and Mark Jenkin are two painters and a film-maker, respectively, who inject an extra dynamism into proceedings.

Cooper's abstractions of the natural take her to Los Angeles often enough for Newlyn to be a relief from the city. Ball's portraits – she has done refugees and is working on a series about concentration-camp guards – are far from the flora and fauna of the West Country. Jenkin makes films of walks inspired by psychogeography. About this, he says: "I showed my dad around the studio and he said he felt strange being here. I asked him why and he said, 'Well, I went to this school and this was the girls' half, which I wasn't allowed in, and it still feels like I shouldn't be.'" So many thoughts are thought under this roof. It is a school, after all.

The Newlyn School of Art does much for Newlyn and everywhere Garfit goes, he's known. Of course hoteliers, publicans and people who run B&Bs like that the school brings in dozens of hungry, thirsty artists who need a bed but there's also a certain civility and rarefied vibe that goes with an art school.

As Garfit and his wife Sasha help with washing brushes and administering to the little empire of studio space, artists' shows and the school itself, a hush finally descends within those old granite walls. "It's how I imagined it," says Henry. "I wanted it to feel like this." And all the hard work? "Well, you know it's been a good week if you have to repaint the ceiling." It seems that even the building sleeps contentedly at night having given succour to so many minds all day. Move the island indeed. — (M)



Back to school

Where we'd go to brush up our skills

Aside from our picturesque painting course in Cornwall, there's a world of self-improvement classes out there that aim to be a little more seductive than an evening course under fluorescent lights in an adult-education centre. We round up our pick of those that offer extra strings to the bow, blue skies and – if at all possible – quality of life guaranteed, all while conducted at a leisurely pace and with an eye on the approach of cocktail hour.

FOOD/PHOTOGRAPHY
Grantourismotravels

Southeast Asia
Grantourismotravels, founded by travel writer and photographer duo Lara Dunston and Terence Carter, organises learning holidays and bespoke culinary tours, as well as travel writing and photography trips to Cambodia and Vietnam.

"I've crafted itineraries for some of the world's best chefs and restaurateurs, cookbook writers and restaurant critics, as well as travellers for whom discovering a country's cuisine and culture is a way into its heart and soul," says Dunston. She's contributed to publications such as *The Guardian* and *Condé Nast Traveler China* and is currently working on a cookbook about Cambodia's culinary and architectural heritage – both of which are at risk. grantourismotravels.com

ARTS
Skyros
Greece & UK

Skyros, which has been around for 38 years, was Europe's first course-based holiday centre. With locations in Greece and the Isle of Wight, it offers a number of courses specialising in everything from writing to art, music, theatre, dance, windsurfing and yoga. Its Writers' Lab, regularly held in the hillside village of Skyros, has been taught by Booker and Pulitzer prize winners such as Hilary Mantel and James Kelman and has inspired critically acclaimed authors including Susan Elderkin and Emma Darwin. "In Atsitsa on Skyros, activities and courses are held outdoors on beautiful stone

terraces amid lush and colourful gardens and fruit trees," says Kate Tuffrey, who joined the Skyros team last year. "We offer more than 70 courses with professional facilitators and more than half of our participants return time and time again." skyros.com

ART APPRECIATION/COOKERY
Villa Lena

Italy
The Villa Lena Agriturismo and Art Foundation in Tuscany offers a different kind of learning experience. Here, in a converted farmhouse dating from the late 19th century, artists and chefs-in-residence teach daily art and cookery workshops. The idea behind the Tuscan villa, which was named after art consultant and co-founder Lena Evstafieva, was to unite music, art, entertainment, film and fashion in one place. Holidays here can be spent acquiring new art skills, exploring the neighbouring towns of Lucca, San Gimignano, Siena and Florence or learning to make fresh pasta and forage for truffles. villa-lena.it

LANGUAGE AND THE ARTS
GoLearnTo

Worldwide
This London-based learning holiday agency, founded by Vanessa Lensen in 2006, offers a series of holiday packages designed to help travellers learn a language or new skill – from cooking to surfing or painting – while discovering one of 29 destinations, such as Argentina, China or Australia. Its language courses pair travellers with a tutor, which makes for an immersive learning experience.

Besides French, German, Spanish, Japanese, Chinese, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, Italian and Arabic classes, GoLearnTo offers photography, art, dance, music, perfume-making, scuba-diving, surfing, sailing and culinary holidays. According to Lensen, what GoLearnTo can provide "is an antidote to the way our lives are at the moment – you're always connected to your phone or your iPad, and you don't really switch off when you're on holiday anymore". — MSS golearn.to