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February/March 2003

Le magazine par des artistes pour les artistes • Das Magazin für Künstler zusammengestellt von Künstlern  
La revista por artistas, para artistas • La rivista degli artisti per gli artisti • 匯集藝術家而成的藝術家雜誌  
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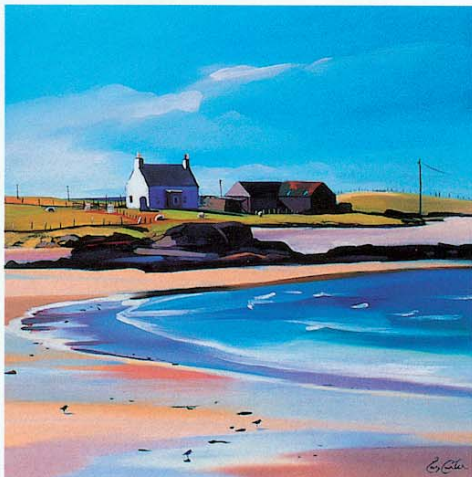
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UK £3.95 Canada CAN\$8.95 USA \$5.95



# Colour makes the picture

Working in the studio allows land and seascape painter **Pam Carter** a chance to find the abstract qualities and underlying structures of the scene.



**The Farm, Tiree, oil, 76 x 76cm (30 x 30'')**

A small farm holding overlooks a beautiful sandy bay. Tiree is part of a group of islands to the west of Scotland.

**Sunset over Talisker Bay, oil, 46 x 51cm (18 x 20'')**



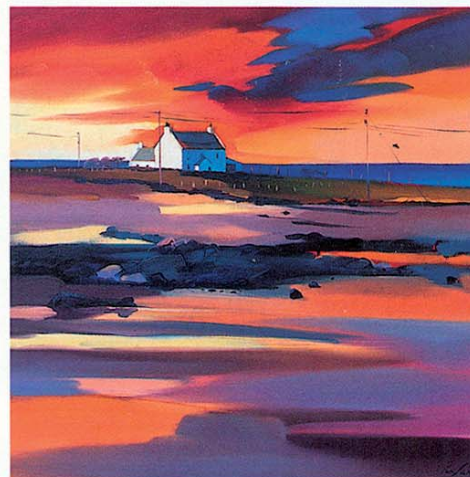
**P**ainting for me is not about capturing a scene with complete accuracy. It is about creating a visual sensation and a pleasing image. I want to make the onlooker feel that they have been there before and experienced that very day. I do base my work on literal places but I interpret them with abstract elements, allowing the paint to work for me.

My inspiration is found in the Scottish landscape and seascape. I love the changing light sequences and the resultant colours. A trip to the outer islands with their magnificent beaches or to the East Coast harbours can give a myriad ideas for paintings. These ideas are recorded, nurtured, developed and then finally processed into paintings. But I find that in order to keep these ideas fresh, I work on several canvases at one time in the studio. Working in oils lends itself to this method.

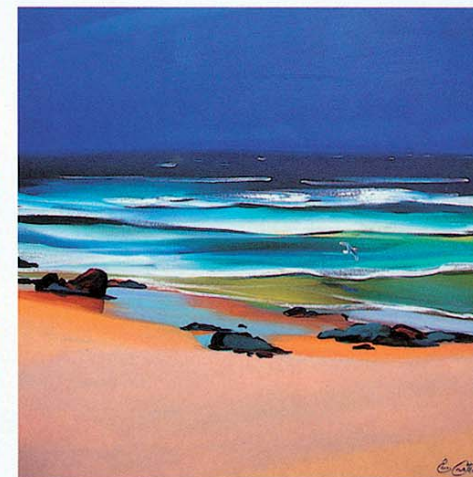
## Working in the studio

My method of painting in various stages means that the luxury and joy of working from life is not possible. I worked from life for 10 years or so until I realised it was so impractical and quite frustrating. I was either

**Cottage at Dusk, oil, 76 x 76cm (30 x 30'')**



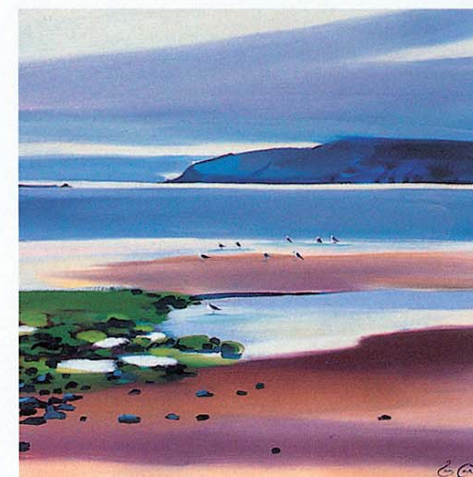
**Big Sea, Swainbost, oil, 76 x 76cm (30 x 30'')**



lecturing during daylight hours or the weather changed the scene so quickly that the painting had to be finished from memory anyway. Don't get me wrong; I strongly believe we all need to do our "apprentice years" in the field to learn what it can offer. Working from life, as in going into the field or site, enables us to be expressive and immediate before these larger-than-life scenes. But it also means losing out on a number of benefits.

Now I only begin the process on location. My ideas for my work are loosely based on my photographs, my sketches and my inspiration from being at the scene. I make special trips to find my subject matter and while there take hundreds of photographs from all angles. I often go back in different times of day or weather conditions. I make assessments then and there about composition, lighting, contrasts, abstractions and colour.

Once in the studio, I draw on all of this information to truly "make" pictures. Working in the studio over several stages allows me to consider the composition to a greater extent, build up the quality of paint, be totally expressive and find the abstract qualities and



**Gulls on Singing Sands, Eigg, oil, 66 x 66cm (26 x 26'')**

The island of Eigg has a beautiful isolated beach called the "singing sands". It overlooks the Island of Rum. The gulls are among the few inhabitants that live there.

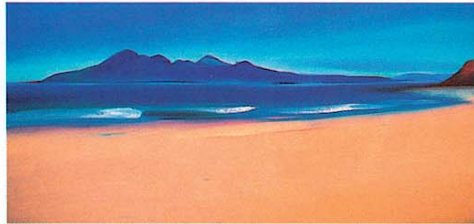
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## Art in the making “Light Rum, Pan”



### 1 Drawing with paint

After the coating of under-colour dried, I used Prussian Blue and a sable brush to draw in my initial ideas.



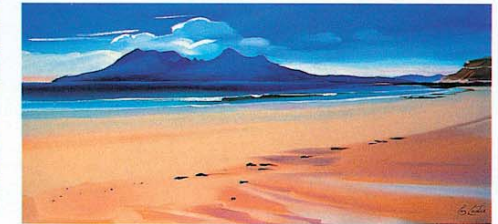
### 2 Unifying the shapes

In my loose block-in, I put touches of blue in the buff-coloured sand to tie the painting together.



### 3 Correcting the drawing

Returning to the drawing, I made minor corrections to the large shapes.



### 4 Added dramatic detail

In the final stages, I pushed the value contrast between the island/water and beach, and then added detail to all areas of “Light Rum, Pan” (oil, 46 x 102cm or 18 x 40”).

## Art in the making “Hamlet, Balephuill, Pan”



### 1 Building up paint

Here, I started with two layers of under-colours to build up the quality of paint. The initial drawing, done with paint, suggested the composition.



### 2 Blocking in loosely

Next, I loosely blocked in the painting, taking liberties with colour.



### 3 Refining drawing

Picking up a small round brush and dark paint again, I tightened up the drawing. In this case, I had clear corrections to make to my block-in.



### 4 Enhancing colour and light

I went over the painting once more, correcting colour, enhancing the lighting and putting more drama in the sky. The odd detail completed “Hamlet, Balephuill, Pan” (oil, 46 x 102cm or 18 x 40”).

## Northern Light and Daylight

When building my studio, I could not place my roof window to catch the north light. So unfortunately, I have to paint in south light. I just try to avoid times of direct sunlight. Being in Scotland, that's not too much of a problem! But as for painting in daylight, I quite often like to work at night. I don't use daylight bulbs, as the studio is adequately bright. I find these conditions perfectly acceptable to achieving the colour intensity needed for a painting that will only be

viewed indoors and in ordinary light.

I believe that the results of painting outdoors are duller than painting indoors. I discovered this one summer when I decided to paint outdoors to catch some sunrays. I painted with what I thought was the usual intensity of colour. When I brought the painting back into the studio, the painting was positively dull. Needless to say, I completed the painting inside!



**Red Fishing Boat, oil, 66 x 66cm (26 x 26")**

This Icelandic boat often harbours at Isle Ornsay on the Isle of Skye.



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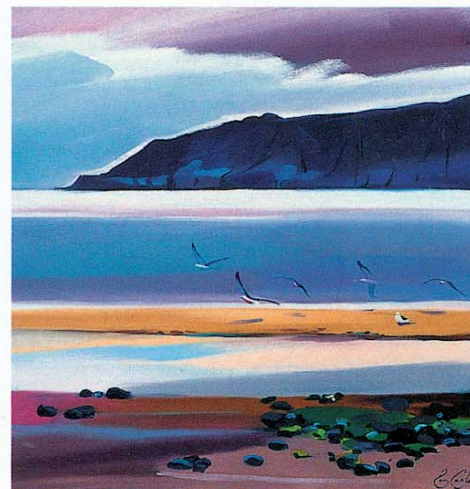
underlying structures of the scene. Colour will indeed be the making of the picture. A painting often turns out like an interior designer's schematic colour chart, relishing in blues or basking in greys and ochre. My gut feeling about these principles lets me recapture the mood or indeed create a new mood.

**Following my process**

Ideas are a vital element for the artist; the process and working habits are the other essentials. In preparation for a body of work, I arrange for 100 canvases of different sizes to be prepared for me. I usually use cotton duck canvas and acrylic primer. These bare canvases become my "sketchbook". I don't have time to stretch my own canvases anymore. The days of stretching one canvas and staying with one idea have long gone. It's not because I may have a deadline to produce 40 to 60 works for a solo show or because I need to make a living but because the more I paint, the more obsessed I become. I need to produce more to satisfy my soul.

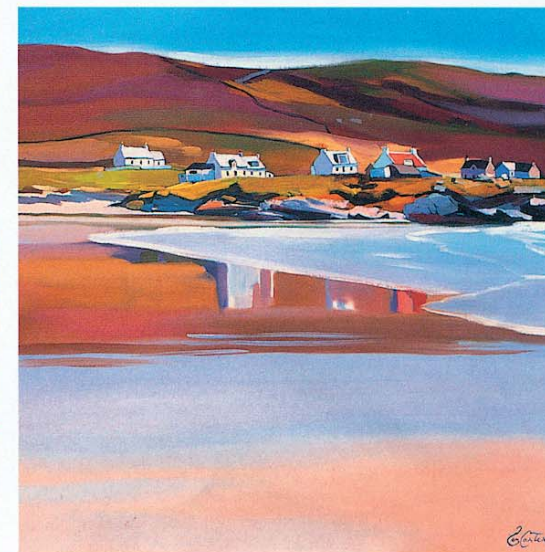
**Flight on Eigg, oil, 66 x 66cm (26 x 26")**

I translate the mist over the islands with a range of subtle colours.



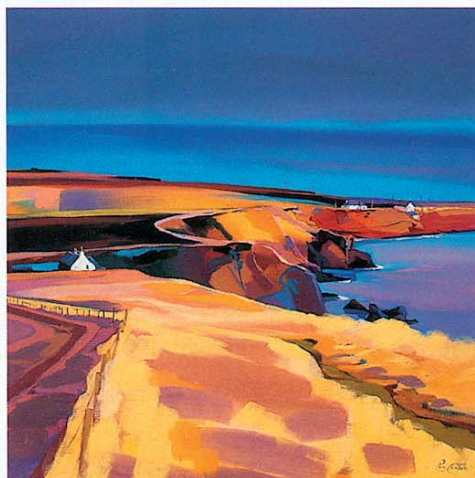
**The Row Reflections, Balephuil, Tiree, oil, 76 x 76cm (30 x 30")**

Wet sands reflect the little cottages perched on the cliff. This type of painting takes a long time due to the detail involved.



**Experimentation, trial and error**

I can safely say that most of my painting method has developed through experimentation, trial and very often error. Through experimentation I have discovered the joy of juxtaposing colours to create visual impact. Through trial I have gained the confidence to work with a broad brush, creating wet-on-wet blends. The error or "happy accident" has taught me, amongst other things, to use strong and often contrasting under-colours. This came about during my art school days when I was frustrated with my greenish landscape painting. I attempted to destroy it by painting over it with Vermilion Red, but when I repainted the landscape, the greens sang against the contrasting red. All of this may well be textbook stuff but I have learned so much better through hands-on experience. It never fails to amaze me that I am still learning and still challenged. I still have not painted the painting that is somewhere deep in my soul. Hopefully I will continue to learn through experimentation, trial but not too many errors.

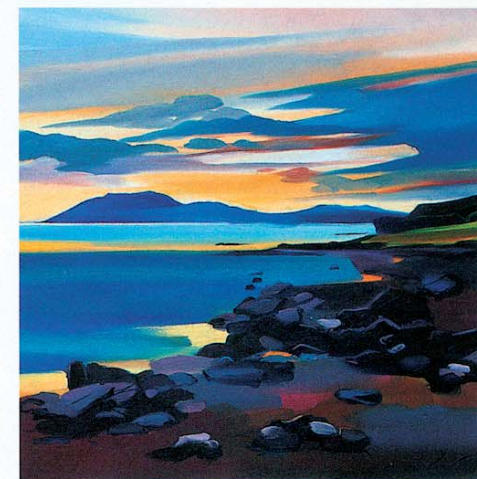


**Cliff Top Path, oil, 102 x 102cm (40 x 40")**

Larger work lends itself to blockwork and simplified structures.

As for the stages of my work, I begin with putting down my under-colours. In the early days, I would purposely place down contrasting colours based on the scene I was painting. Nowadays, I place whatever colour I have left on my palette (invariably grey, but I'll explain that later) to prepare the first coat. On my second approach to the canvas, I paint blocks of any colour again. At this stage, I still don't know what this painting will be and quite often it is these free marks that determine the mood of the painting.

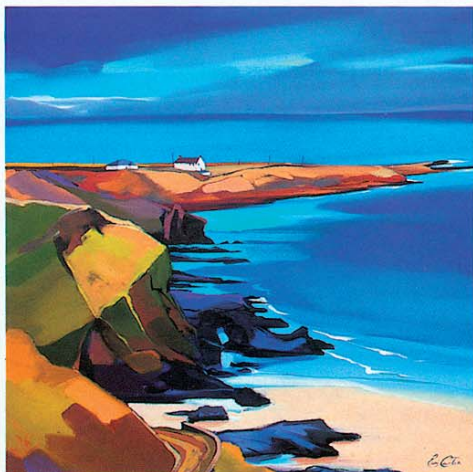
At stage three, after the paint has dried, I take Prussian Blue and draw my initial ideas with a sable brush. I like to use line in my work, and quite often I retain some of these drawing lines. Stage four is one of the most expressive. Here I block in the scene with a broad brush and take liberties with colour and lighting. I draw again at stage five, correcting composition if it needs it, defining some of the detail and making marks to remind me of the main blocks of the composition. Penultimately, I paint with full expression – wet-in-wet paint. The quality of paint by this time is very rich. The final stage, if necessary, is to touch up the odd line, white surf or orange chimney pot.



**Rum and Dusk Colours, oil, 66 x 66cm (26 x 26")**

I use colour sometimes to convey the haunting loneliness of a scene. This view of Rum is from Skye on the way to the ruined village of Bororaig, one of the many that found its fate at the hands of the Highland Clearances.

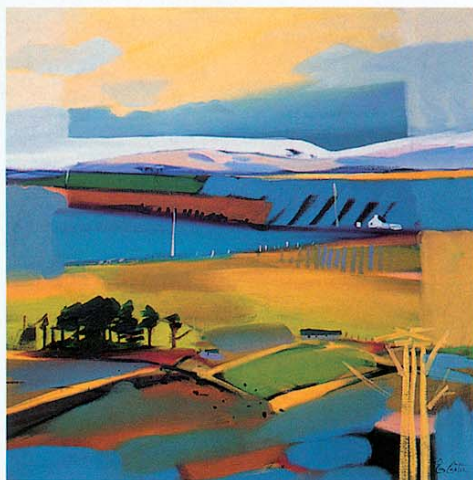
**Sunlit Peninsula, oil, 102 x 102cm (40 x 40")**



### Recycling my palette

I pre-mix 30 to 40 colours and tints at one time. This exercise usually takes about two hours. Each colour is mixed with medium and is placed in lines of progressing colours and tints. I call this the factory work. Is this not how we were taught to paint at school? We could see all our colours and were able to make informed decisions of which to use. Pre-mixing my colours also enables me to see the subtle difference of colours and colour relationships and may explain how I manage to keep my colours so fresh. This method may not work if you only paint one painting at a time because you go through a huge amount of paint. In my case, though, nothing gets wasted.

I said I would explain why my first under-colour ends up grey. Every so often, I scrape down my palette (I am a very clean and methodical worker) and place the old colour in a jar along with medium and white spirit. The colours melt down to grey. When I pour off the white spirit, I have a wonderful creamy base colour.



**Landscape, oil, 91 x 91cm (36 x 36")**

Sometimes my paintings take on a language of abstract elements.

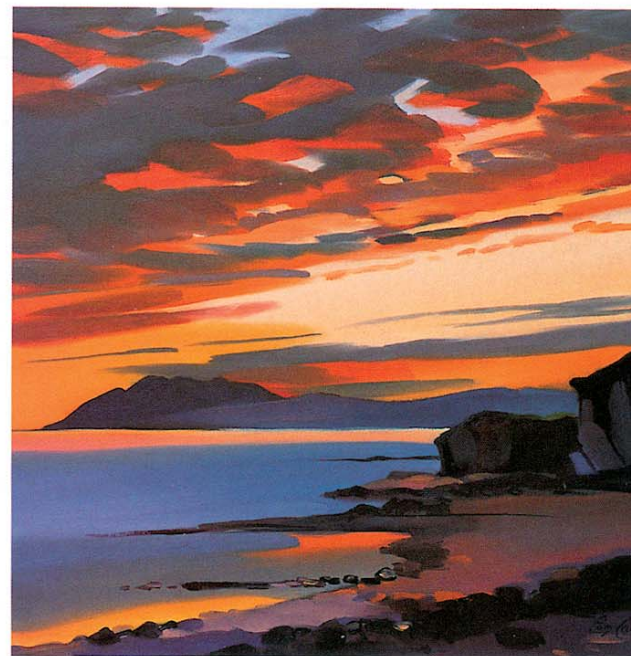


**Snow Scene, oil, 61 x 91cm (24 x 36")**

This framing effect creates pictures within pictures. The neutrality of the whites is brought to life with flashes of colour.

**Sunset over Rum, oil, 66 x 66cm (26 x 26")**

My sunset paintings give me an opportunity to work in a completely different range of colours.



### Making pictures

As I said before, inspired as I am by the landscape and seascape of my home, I much prefer to work in my studio rather than on location. This arrangement allows me to combine all of the expression and sensation I feel in the field with the more carefully considered concepts of composition, structure, lighting, paint quality and more. It's picture making at its finest, resulting in paintings that convey the mood I'm after. □

**“Colour will indeed be the making of the picture.”**



### About the artist

Pam Carter was born in East Africa to an Austrian mother and Scottish father. The family moved to Glasgow when she was 13, and after graduating from Glasgow School of Art in the 70s, she became a teacher. Pam worked in schools and colleges, including Falkirk College. At the same time, she was determined to continue painting and held at least one solo exhibition a year.

In 1988, decided to concentrate more on her painting. She had a number of successful shows, and by 1995 and won several awards. Her work was published in limited edition prints throughout Britain.

She exhibits in major galleries in Britain including Glasgow (Centre Gallery), Edinburgh (Colours and Stenton Galleries), Aberdeen (Gallery Heinzel), Harrogate (Walker Galleries) and London (Ainscough Contemporary Art and The Richmondhill Gallery). She exhibits in July at Gallery An Talla Dearg on the Isle of Skye. Two favourite country Galleries include The Green Gallery, Aberfoyle and The Morven Gallery on the Isle of Lewis. In the USA, Chetwynd Stapleton Gallery in Portland, Oregon shows her work.

Visit her web site,  
[www.pamcarter.com](http://www.pamcarter.com)