



Sue Gay, Painter Catalogue 2025



A reflective perspective

When we came to Cotmore it was with fresh energy, but it has taken me a while to find the time and space to get back to painting. Almost a decade and a half in fact. So I'm showing for the first time in Devon with mostly new work that draws inspiration from a lifetime of influences. The subjects are an homage to medieval masters telling traditional stories including the Creation and the Flood. But in style my work is entirely contemporary, originating from layers of fluid pigment transferred via glass, giving an intuitive, unforced character.

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07968 969193



Sue Gay, 2025

The 'Origins' series



An unconventional evolution

I trained as a scientist, taking my tutorials in the very rooms occupied by Charles Darwin during his time at Christ's College Cambridge. My PhD focused on the fossil remains of reptiles that are hundreds of millions of years old, and my craft skills were refined through the making of meticulous illustrations of bones and anatomy. Currently, I'm revisiting the passion of my younger self with mischievous work that explores iconic medieval portrayals of biblical stories through the medium of Darwin's words from 'The Origin of Species.'

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The Shaping of Adam

Oil pastel and ink over acrylic wash, 2025

This small painting is one of an ongoing series based on the *Egerton Genesis*, a manuscript created by an unidentified medieval master during the late fourteenth century. It shows God creating Adam from earth. Among the words from Darwin to be found within it are ‘*Nothing at first can appear more difficult to believe than that the more complex organs and instincts should have been perfected, not by means superior to, though analogous with, human reason, but by the accumulation of innumerable slight variations, each good for the individual possessor. Nevertheless, this difficulty, though appearing to our imagination insuperably great, cannot be considered real if we admit the following propositions, namely,— that gradations in the perfection of any organ or instinct, which we may consider, either do now exist or could have existed, each good of its kind,— that all organs and instincts are, in ever so slight a degree, variable,— and, lastly, that there is a struggle for existence leading to the preservation of each profitable deviation of structure or instinct. The truth of these propositions cannot, I think, be disputed.*’



Unframed. Paper size 24x32cm. £100

The Seventh Day

Oil pastel and ink over acrylic wash, 2025

In this painting, God is taking a rest from his labours in a sunny spot. *'It is interesting to contemplate a tangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent upon each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us ... Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone circling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved.'*



Unframed. Paper size 24x32cm. £100

Adam and Eve (cartoon for Eden I)

Charcoal on watercolour paper, 2023

This image is freely adapted from Cranach the Elder's 1526 Adam and Eve masterpiece.



Unframed. Paper size 76x56cm. £200

Eden I

Oil pastel over acrylic wash, 2024

A tapestry of writing uses many passages of text from Darwin. Some of the more legible quotes read: *'To suppose that the eye, with all its inimitable contrivances for adjusting the focus to different distances, for admitting different amounts of light, and for the correction of spherical and chromatic aberration, could have been formed by natural selection, seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest degree ... How have all those exquisite adaptations of one part of the organisation to another part, and to the conditions of life, and of one organic being to another being, been perfected? ... We see beautiful adaptations everywhere and in every part of the organic world.'*



Framed size 75x55cm. Gold & glass frame. £400

Adam and Eve

Charcoal and ink on watercolour paper, 2025

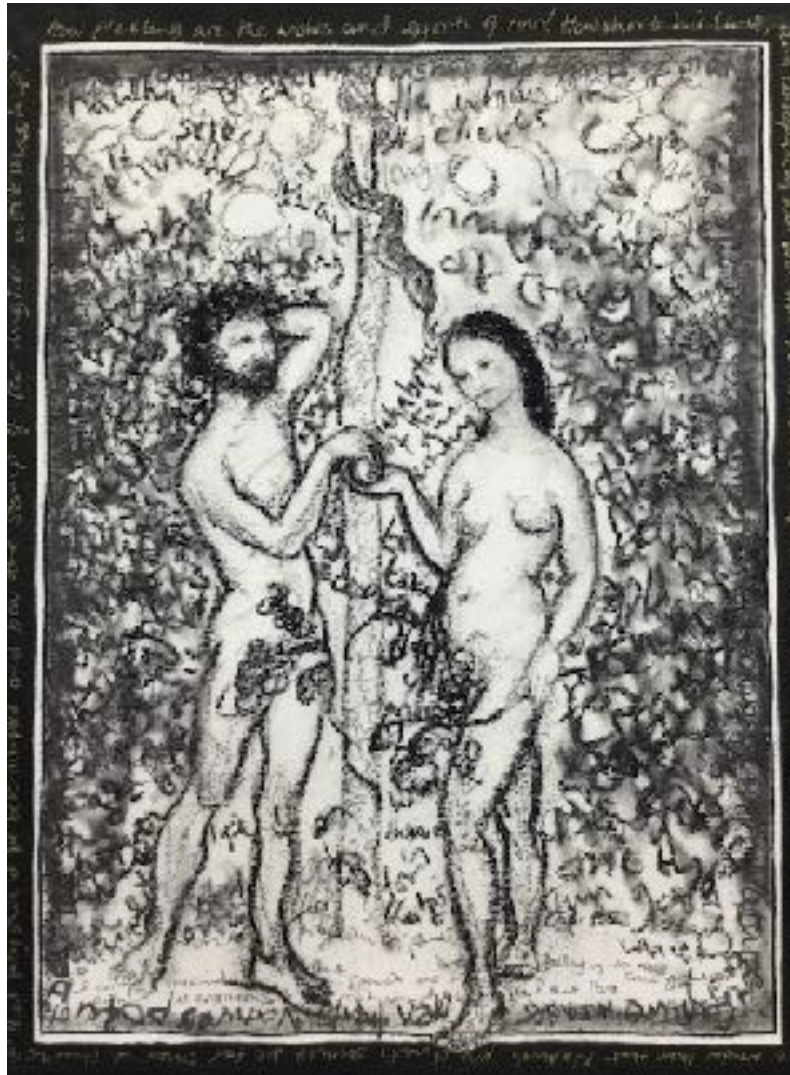


The charcoal drawing is largely made with writing, but only isolated words are legible. The keynote quote from Darwin is *'I am convinced that natural selection has been the most important, but not the exclusive, means of change.'*

Framed size 45x64cm. Gold & glass frame. £300

Adam and Eve II

Charcoal and ink on watercolour paper, 2025



The charcoal drawing is largely made with writing. The surrounding quote from Darwin is *'How fleeting are the wishes and efforts of man! How short his time and consequently how poor will be his results compared with those accumulated by Nature. Can we wonder then that Nature's products should be far truer in their character, that they should be better adapted and bear the stamp of far higher workmanship?'*

Framed size 55x65cm. Silvered black and glazed frame. £250

Eden II

Oil pastel over acrylic wash, 2024



A tapestry of writing uses many passages from Darwin; only isolated words are legible.

Framed size 45x64cm. Oak & glass frame. £350

Eden III

Oil pastel over acrylic wash, 2024



A tapestry of writing uses many passages from Darwin; only isolated words are legible. The painting has evolved through layers of overwriting; some of the stages are shown below.

Framed size 45x64cm. Oak & glass frame. £350



Rising of the Ark

Oil pastel over acrylic wash, 2024



This painting draws inspiration from a 1556 fresco by Aurelio Luini. The tapestry of writing uses many passages from Darwin and the painting has evolved through many layers; some of the stages are shown below.

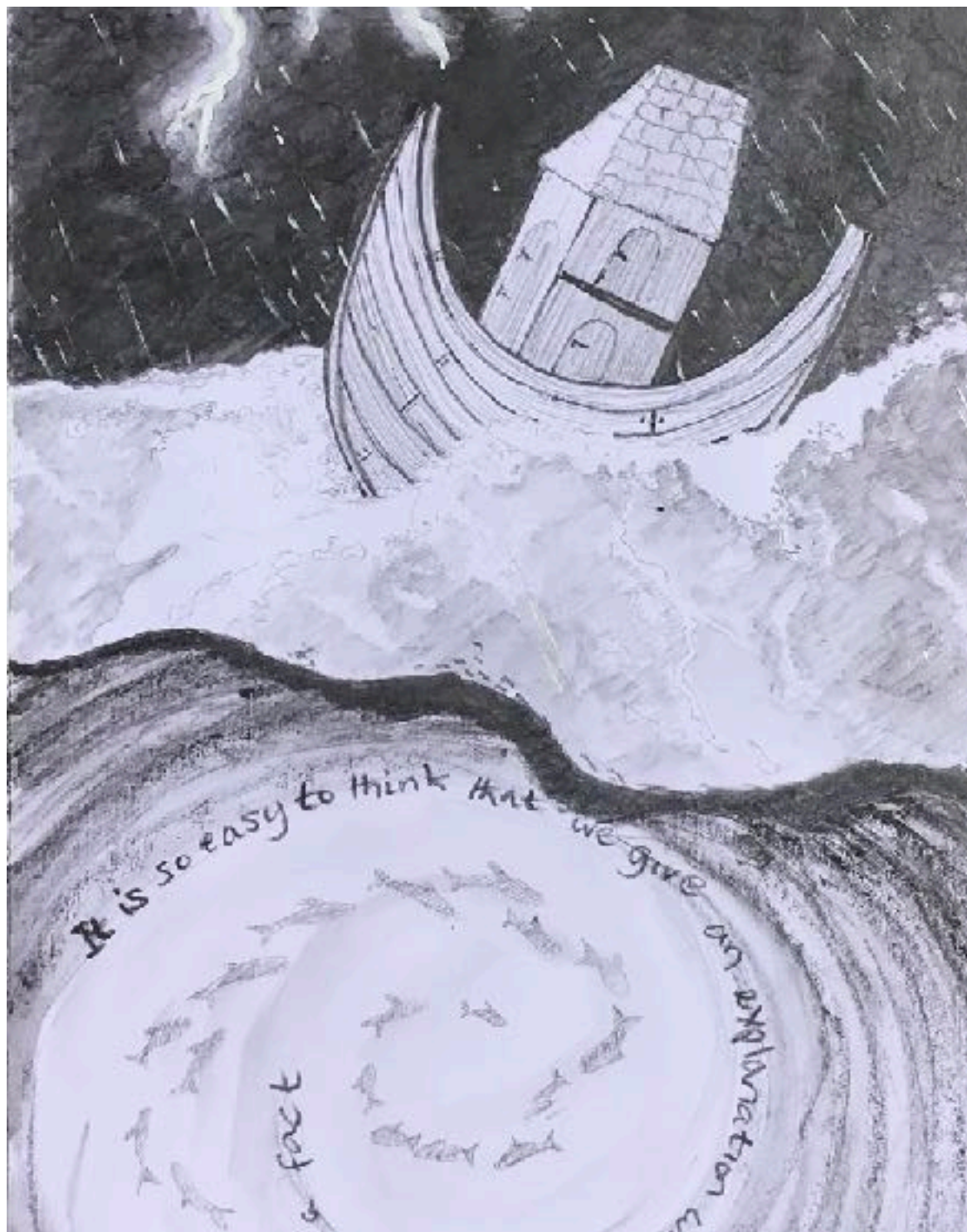
Framed size 68x90cm. Oak with acrylic glazing. £500



The Ark Rides the Deluge

Water-soluble graphite, 2025

Darwin's text reads: *'It is so easy to think that we give an explanation when we only restate a fact.'*



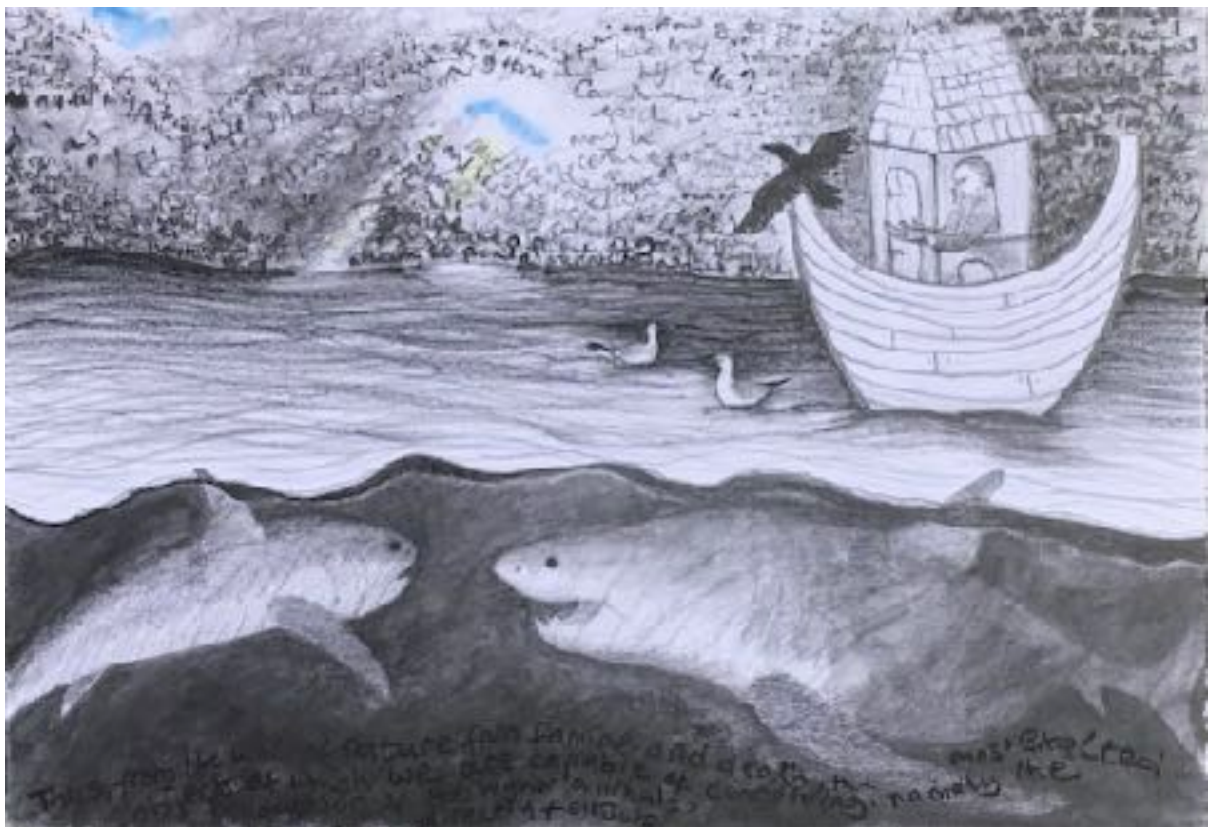
Framed size 45x64cm, oak & glass frame. £250

Noah releases a raven

Water-soluble graphite with acrylic wash, 2025

Darwin's text reads: *'Of the species now living very few will transmit progeny of any kind to a far distant futurity; for the manner in which all organic beings are grouped, shows that the greater number of species in each genus, and all the species in many genera, have left no descendants, but have become utterly extinct. We can so far take a prophetic glance into futurity as to foretell that it will be the common and widely spread species, belonging to the larger and dominant groups within each class, which will ultimately prevail and procreate new and dominant species. As all the living forms of life are the lineal descendants of those which lived long before the Cambrian epoch, we may feel certain that the ordinary succession by generation has never once been broken, and that no cataclysm has desolated the whole world. Hence, we may look with some confidence to a secure future of great length. And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection.'*

Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows.'



Framed size 64x45 cm, oak & glass frame. £250



The dove returns with a branch

Water-soluble graphite with acrylic wash, 2025

Darwin's text reads: *'Although much remains obscure, and will long remain obscure, I can entertain no doubt, after the most deliberate study and dispassionate judgment of which I am capable, that the view which most naturalists until recently entertained, and which I formerly entertained—namely, that each species has been independently created—is erroneous. I am fully convinced that species are not immutable; but that those belonging to what are called the same genera are lineal descendants of some other and generally extinct species, in the same manner as the acknowledged varieties of any one species are the descendants of that species. Furthermore, I am convinced that natural selection has been the most important, but not the exclusive, means of modification.'*

Several eminent naturalists seem no more startled at a miraculous act of creation than at an ordinary birth. The day will come when this will be given as a curious illustration of the blindness of preconceived opinion. Do they believe that at each supposed act of creation one individual or many were produced?'

Framed size 45x64 cm, oak & glass frame. £250

Riding the Deluge

Oil pastel and ink pencil over acrylic wash, 2025

Darwin's text reads: *'The day will come when this will be given as a curious illustration of the blindness of preconceived opinion. These authors seem no more startled at a miraculous act of creation than at an ordinary birth. But do they really believe that at innumerable periods in the earth's history certain elemental atoms have been commanded suddenly to flash into living tissues? Do they believe that at each supposed act of creation one individual or many were produced? Were all the infinitely numerous kinds of animals and plants created as eggs or seed, or as full grown? and in the case of mammals, were they created bearing the false marks of nourishment from the mother's womb?'*



Unframed. Paper size 56x76cm. £300

Release of the Raven

Oil pastel and ink pencil over acrylic wash, 2025

The storms of the Deluge have abated, but many dangers are still lurking in the depths. Noah's raven will return disappointed from the search for dry land. Darwin's text reads: *'To my mind, it accords better with what we know of the laws impressed on matter by the Creator, that the production and extinction of the past and present inhabitants of the world, should have been due to secondary causes, like those determine the birth and death of the individual. We can so far take a prophetic glance into futurity as to foretell that it will be the common and widely spread species, belonging to the larger and dominant groups within each class, which will ultimately prevail and procreate new and dominant species.'*

Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows.'

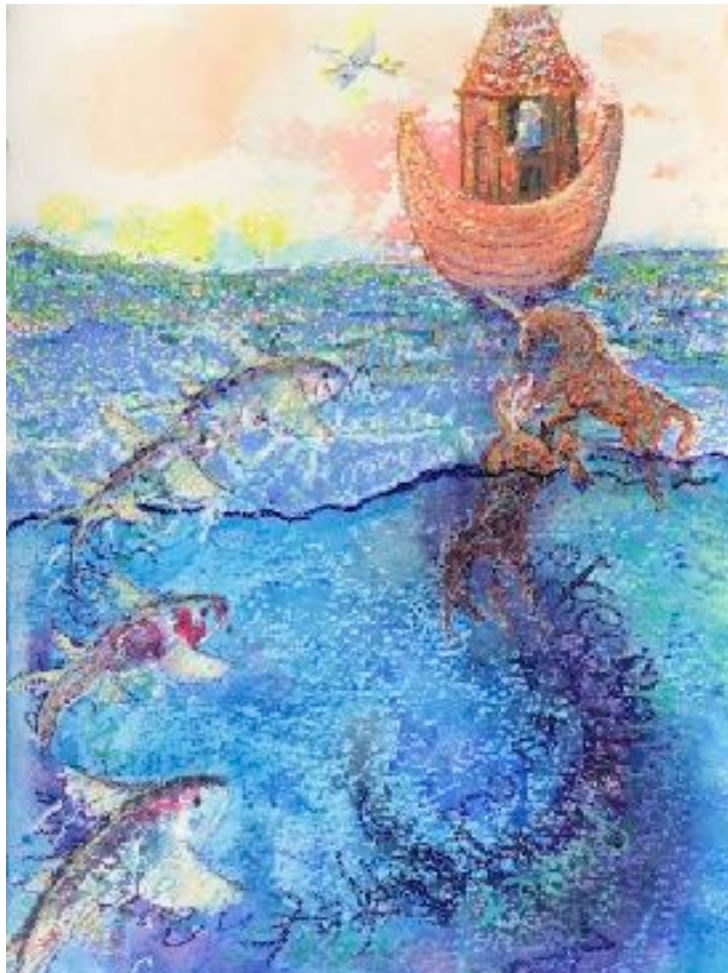


Work in progress. Paper size 76x56cm.

Return of the Dove

Acrylic with ink pencil and oil pastel, 2025

Among Darwin's words lost and found within the layers is the passage: *'Although much remains obscure, and will long remain obscure, I can entertain no doubt, after the most deliberate study and dispassionate judgment of which I am capable, that the view which most naturalists until recently entertained, and which I formerly entertained—namely, that each species has been independently created—is erroneous. I am fully convinced that species are not immutable; but that those belonging to what are called the same genera are lineal descendants of some other and generally extinct species, in the same manner as the acknowledged varieties of any one species are the descendants of that species. Furthermore, I am convinced that natural selection has been the most important, but not the exclusive, means of modification.'*



Unframed. Paper size 56x76cm. £450

Disembarkation I

Charcoal on watercolour paper, 2025

Darwin's text reads: *'When I view all beings not as special creations, but as the lineal descendants of some few beings which lived long before the first bed of the Cambrian system was deposited, they seem to me to become ennobled... And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection... It is interesting to contemplate a tangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent upon each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us... There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone circling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved.'*



Unframed. Paper size 56x76cm. £300

Disembarkation II

Acrylic with ink pencil, 2025

Darwin's text reads: *'When I view all beings not as special creations, but as the lineal descendants of some few beings which lived long before the first bed of the Cambrian system was deposited, they seem to me to become ennobled... And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection... It is interesting to contemplate a tangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent upon each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us... There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone circling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved.'*



Unframed. Paper size 56x76cm. £300



Sue Gay, 2025

The Chanticleer story



A vain cockerel and a trickster fox

This collection of small paintings illuminates a favourite from Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, in which Chanticleer, a cockerel famed for his voice, dreams of an encounter with a strange and frightening beast. His wife Pertelote dismisses his fright but, the following day, Chanticleer meets a fox. Flattered into crowing, he stretches up, closes his eyes and is — of course — seized. The whole farmyard gives chase, prompting Chanticleer to advise the fox to tease his pursuers, so enabling the cockerel's escape.

The originals are not for sale, but a selection of cards is available.

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Chanticleer Card Designs

With matching cards





Sue Gay, 2025 Retrospective



A developing story

On leaving academia, I had a substantial career combining words and pictures to create medical educational materials. Latterly, I worked freelance from Exeter, which provided night-time opportunities for learning in the life studio, sculpture and ceramics. Subsequently we moved to Hertfordshire, where I established a small business as a painting practitioner and teacher. I exhibited regularly and participated in Hertfordshire Open Studios on several occasions. A small selection of work from this period is included in the current show.

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The Times Are Tidy

Mixed media, 2009

This self portrait was painted using a shaving mirror. Fish and children are entangled in tattered strands of hair. The surrounding text is from Sylvia Plath:

*'(There's) no career in the venture
Of riding against the lizard*

...

*But the children are better for it
The cow milk's cream an inch thick.'*



Canvas size 90x90cm. NFS

She Tells Her Love

Mixed media, 2010

This painting of one of my children sleeping in the early morning was the winner of the John Goss award for Best in Show at Hertford Art Society. Other winners of this award have often been members of at least one of the Royal Institutes. The words are those of the poet Robert Graves *'She tells her love while half asleep'*.



Silver and glass frame, framed size 52x52cm. NFS

Restoration at Sainte Chapelle, Paris

Two versions, 2008

Light falling through or onto a surface is a theme I often return to. Here, I was struck by the subtle play of light on the protective sheet hanging from the ceiling, as much as by the sunshine through the wonderful stained glass windows.



Acrylic on canvas, 90x90cm. *NFS*



Acrylic on tracing paper, framed size 36x37cm. *NFS*

Sanctus, Notre Dame

Mixed media, 2009

This small corner was filled with dancing light and multiple reflections. I enjoy the translucency of colour on tracing paper and, as here, sometimes incorporate collaged gauze or chiffon. The words are those of the Roman Rite: *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth. Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua. Hosanna in excelsis. Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini. Hosanna in excelsis.*



Canvas size 44x60cm. NFS

Girl With Red Background

Oil on paper, 2007

I love the glide of oil paint over primed and stretched paper. There's a freedom that allows a small amount of paint to do a lot of lifting very quickly.



Framed size 55x77cm. *NFS*

Darkling

Acrylic on canvas, 2011

I rarely paint a 'pure' landscape, generally preferring places defined by the people who inhabit the spaces. But, browsing through some sketches on a particularly horrible winter's day, I found one that encapsulated a glimpse of hope that the sun would return. For me, the brilliance of the new grass on a slantingly-lit late afternoon hilltop against the darkling sky perfectly channeled Thomas Hardy's evocation of a thrush heralding a spring of which there is little or sign yet:

*'And Winter's dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day*

...

*The ancient pulse of germ and birth
Was shrunken hard and dry*

...

*So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things.'*



Canvas size 50x77cm. NFS

Moonlit Apples

Mixed media incorporating tracing paper, 2010

I found one of my old oil paintings in the attic, and a beam of light falling on it gave it new possibility. Poet John Drinkwater:

*'They are lying in rows there, under the gloomy beams;
On the sagging floor; they gather the silver streams
Out of the moon, those moonlit apples of dreams,
And quiet is the steep stair under.'*

*In the corridors under there is nothing but sleep.
And stiller than ever on orchard boughs they keep
Tryst with the moon, and deep is the silence, deep
On moon-washed apples of wonder.'*



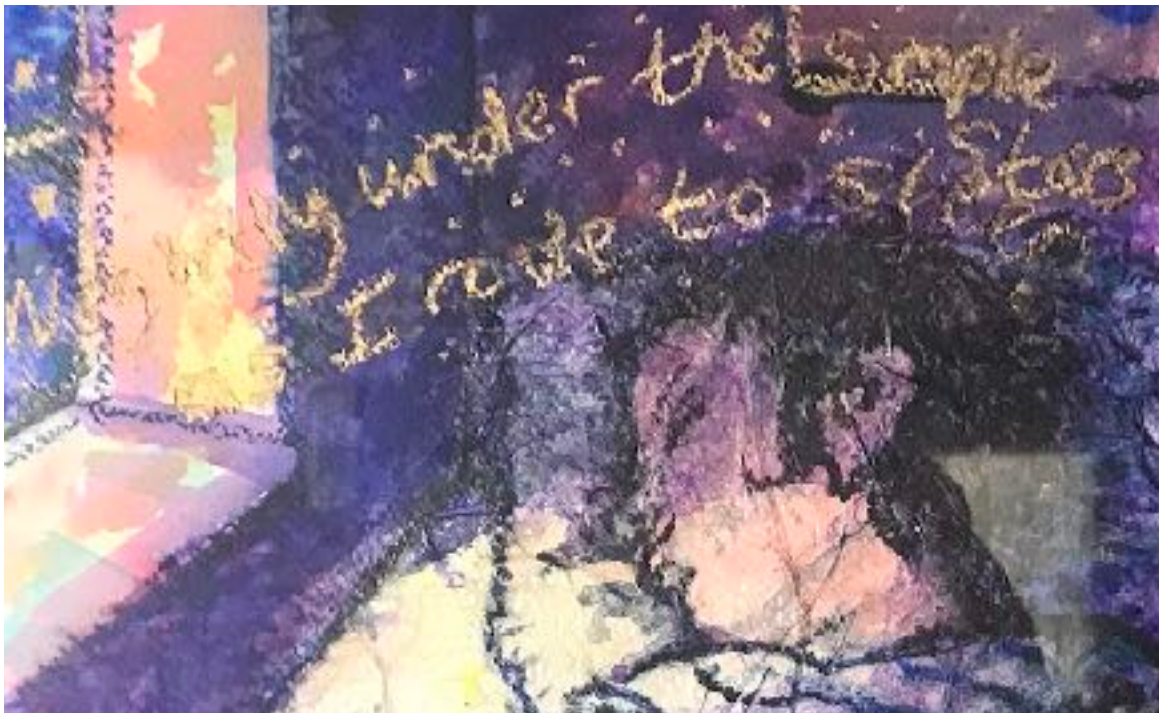
Silver and glass frame, Framed size 37x40cm. NFS

Nightly Under the Simple Stars

Mixed media incorporating tracing paper, 2010

In *Fern Hill*, the poet Dylan Thomas recollects an idyllic country childhood surrounded by nature, sleeping on summer nights filled with magic and mystery:

*'(And) nightly under the simple stars
As I rode to sleep ...'*



Framed size 46x37cm. NFS

Garden of the Pink House

Watercolour and Indian ink, 1992

We lived for a time in a little pink villa in Exeter, a Victorian house in built in the style that is delightfully called Strawberry Hill Gothic. Despite its city centre location, the back garden was large by Exeter standards and remarkably secluded.



Framed size 56x66cm. NFS

Chickens

Watercolour and water soluble crayon, 2023

Chickens are very satisfying subjects, full of life and busyness. They never stay still for long.



Framed size 51x42cm, white oak and glass frame. £250

Mermaids

Ceramic, 2006

I wouldn't have the audacity to describe myself as a ceramicist, but I enjoyed hand building in clay for a time. The relief shown at the bottom left dates from the 1990s; it was made for a wall in a garden that is scheduled for redevelopment.





Sue Gay, 2025

A passion for life



Lively figure drawings

I first entered a life studio at 18, and still pay my artistic dues there regularly. In Hertfordshire I ran life classes and workshops for other artists; the picture of the standing girl at left won the Herts Open. In Devon I attend life sessions run by others, as an opportunity to spend a couple of hours in mindful drawing practice. Occasionally, I revisit a drawing and work it up in my studio, using mono printing from a glass sheet to try to recreate the spontaneity of the original moment. For the Open Studio, I've put out a selection of life studies I like — mainly new ones, but also some older ones. They're mostly for sale.

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Tina in the Studio

Watercolour and Indian Ink, 2007

I sometimes describe this painting as a monoprint – the washes of watercolour paint were applied to a layer of glass, which was then printed onto dampened paper. The lines were added using Indian ink from a brush. The conte drawing below was the source of the image.



Framed size 62x64cm. NFS



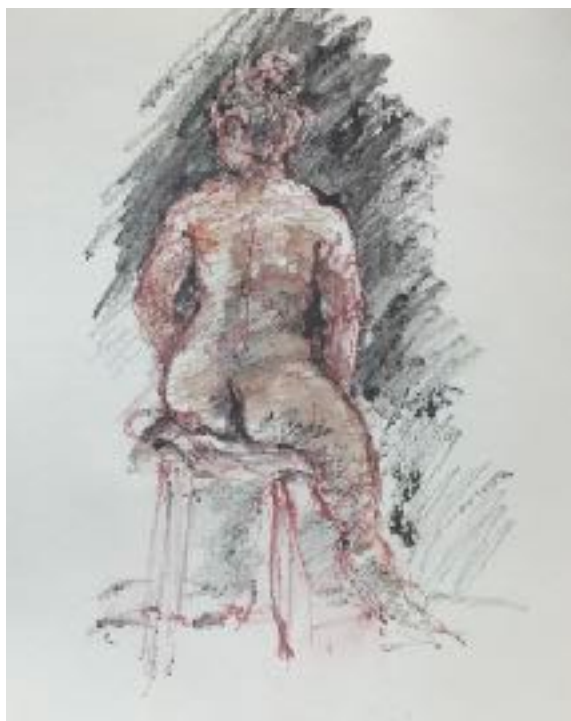
Unframed at £40

Various media, drawings from 2023-25



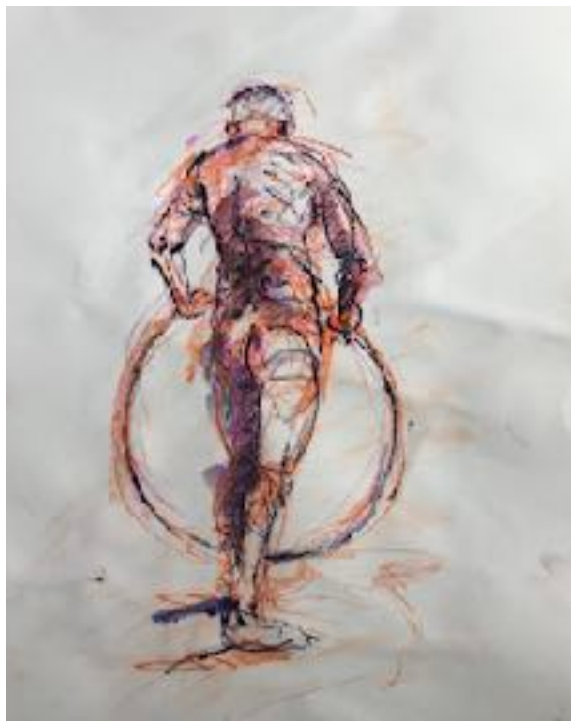
Unframed at £40

Various media, drawings from 2023-25



Unframed at £65

Various media, drawings from 2023-25



Unframed at £65

Various media, drawings from 2023-25

