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The Dorset County Magazine

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DORSET

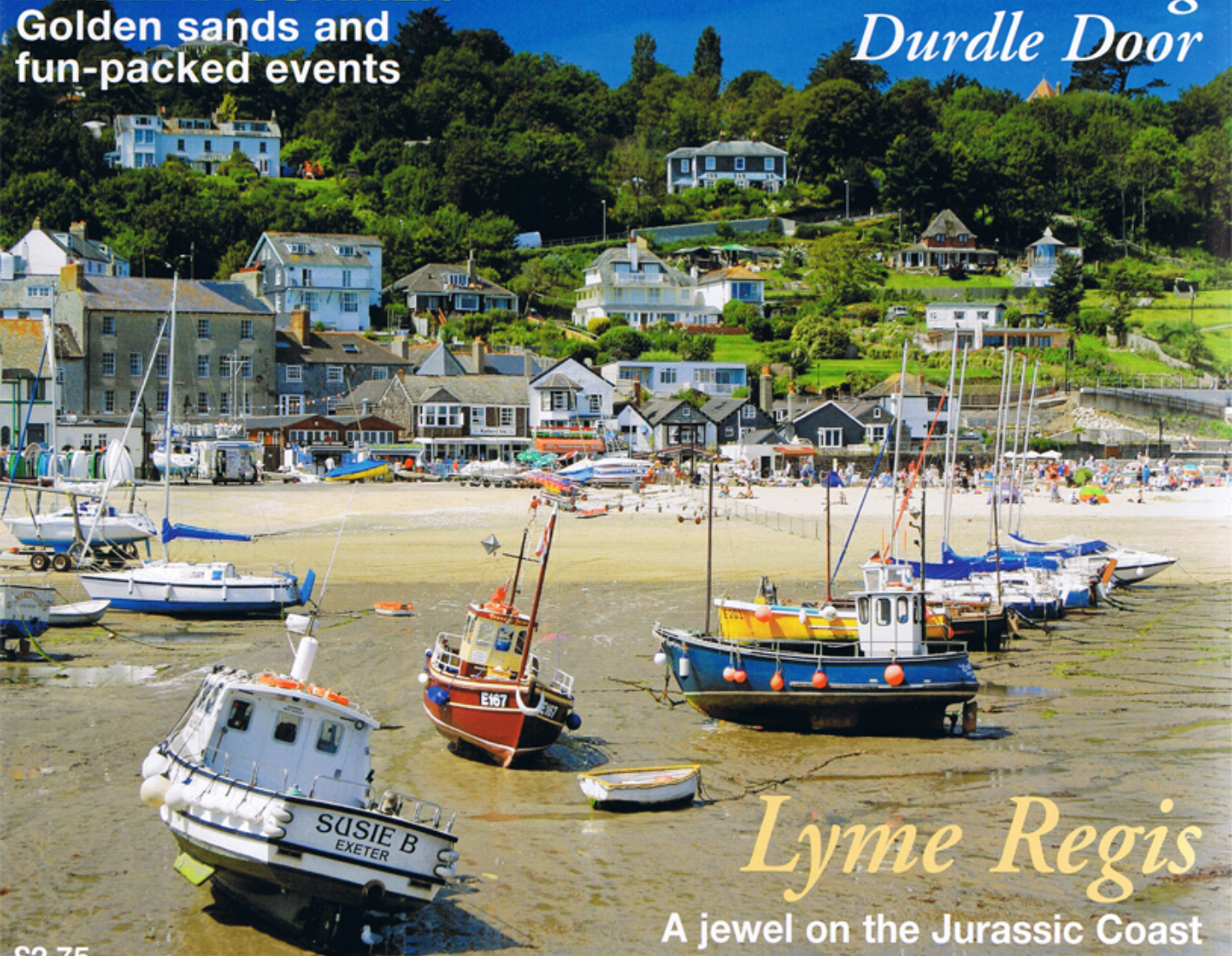
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June 2009

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PROPERTY BRIEF DORSET'S PRIME PROPERTIES



Opposite
'Shallow Pit'
2007, acrylic on
canvas board,
26cm x 37cm

Left
'Farmed Downs'
2007, acrylic on
board, 36cm x
36cm. Private
collection

Peter Joyce: *immersed in the landscape*

Stephen Swann looks at the work of a painter at the very top of his game



Peter Joyce

Poole-born painter Peter Joyce's status as one of the country's leading artists was confirmed not long ago when Southampton City Art Gallery acquired one of his artworks. Born in 1964, Peter went to what is now The Arts Institute, Bournemouth, and from 1982-85 he studied Fine Art at Stourbridge College of Technology and Art. From there he could have done a Masters at Goldsmiths but he decided to turn down the place on offer because as he saw it the college was moving towards a concentration on conceptual art and turning its back on painting.

Back in Dorset, and living in the same house in Poole that had once been his grandfather's, he got stuck into painting. And it was the landscape of Purbeck that he fell in love with. Constable famously said: 'I should paint my own places best.' Much the same could be said of Peter at this time. For him, Purbeck, its coast and hinterland, became a place of long solitary walks, its landscapes to be experienced, not just



visually, but with all the senses. In short, Purbeck became his muse and landscape painting became his métier.

Now, landscape art, as conventionally conceived, is a representation of what is out there in the real world made in order to give a pleasing visual experience. There is, however, another approach. The painter can take landscape as a subject for a painting without resorting to direct representation of what is out there. And in the hands of a talented artist, the paintings that result from such an approach can, like the more conventional sort, result in a pleasing visual experience. Peter Joyce is such a painter.

The paintings that result from this time spent walking the landscape sometimes have titles that refer to actual places, more often though they have generic titles like 'Farmed Downs', 'Chalk Fault', 'Shallow Pit'. They are best described as semi-abstract. This might seem paradoxical. It shouldn't. A painter like Peter can be in rapport with a landscape just as much as a naturalistic artist; he does, after all, inhabit the same world of light and colour and form. And looking at a painting by Peter it is possible to see marks, a kind of symbolic language, that stand for things that are out there.

Though not strictly topographical, then, his work is all about field boundaries, horizons, field marks, quarries, cliffs and seascapes. Such things are the starting point for a painting. When it comes to beginning a work, however, it is the formalities of painting that kick in. Only as the painting

progresses does Peter see in the emerging lines and shapes something that alludes to what he has seen or felt out in the landscape. Memory plays its part; this an almost Wordsworthian approach as things are seen on the 'inward eye'. His colours are the colours of the landscape: greens, browns, blues, ochres, siennas, white. His preferred medium is acrylic, his surface, board or canvas. As for his method of application, that can be by brush or knife, and marks can be

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made by scraping, rubbing and by using, it seems, almost any tool that will achieve what he is looking for.

Today Peter is based in the Bouin area of France. The new location could not be more different from his native Purbeck. It is flat, very flat, a landscape of salt marsh and muddy creeks, sea walls and withies that mark the deep water of tortuous channels that lead to old wooden quays where little fishing boats moor, of distant horizons and huge skies. Peter Grimes would feel at home here.

Just as in Dorset, Peter has immersed himself in his



*These paintings have a
compelling yet lyrical beauty...*

Above
'Crossing the
Marsh' 2009

Left
'Port des
Champs' 2008



surroundings, and as you would expect from an artist who draws on the realities of those surroundings, the change in location has resulted in images that are different from his Dorset work. The colours, shapes and forms are different. One thing, however, has not changed. They are still very much the paintings of Peter Joyce, an artist who, because his rapport with the landscape he inhabits goes deep, is able to communicate things about that landscape that are felt rather than understood. This is not to say that they are paintings that

are in any way woolly, fey or sentimental. They have a compelling yet lyrical beauty, a beauty all the more affecting because it is derived from the real world. □

A note for your diary. Peter has a one-man exhibition coming up at Harris Interiors Gallery, Lower Parkstone, from 1-31 October. A book about Peter, his life and work, both in Dorset and France, will be launched at the exhibition. To see more of Peter's work visit www.peterjoyce.org.uk.