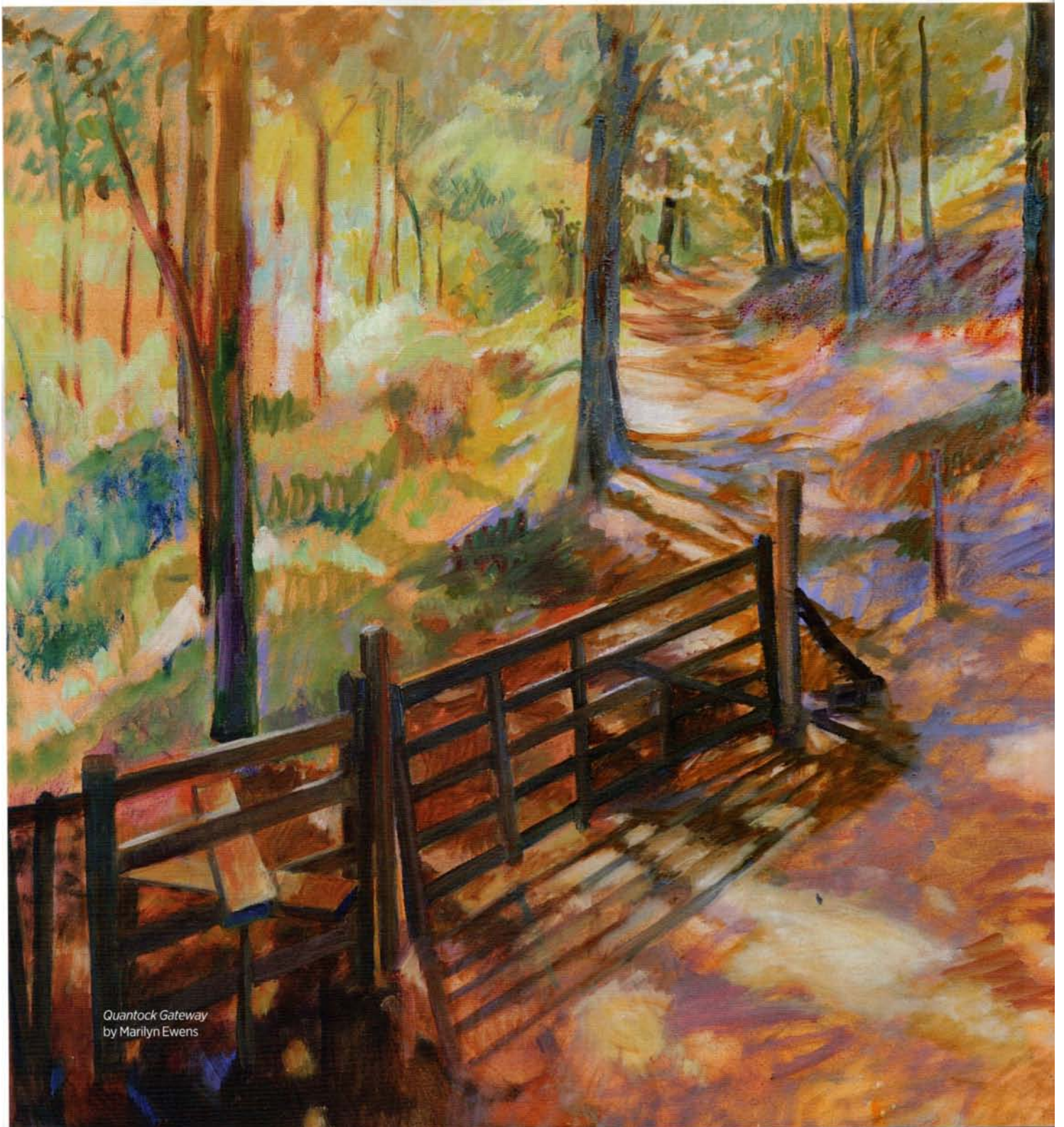


The magic of Somerset

Artist Marilyn Ewens first visited Somerset at the age of 17 and now she has lived in the county for more than five decades. She tells
TIM SAUNDERS how the county has inspired her art journey



Quantock Gateway
by Marilyn Ewens



Quantock Beeches in Snow

When Marilyn was 17 she stayed with a friend for a week at Porlock Weir; this tranquil nook being her first introduction to 'the beautiful county of Somerset'.

'I remember we did a lot of walking as well as eating fudge and listening to the old harbourmaster's tales,' recalls Marilyn, who lives in Bicknoller. 'I remember in particular the coastal walk to Culbone and to the small church. Many years later, I made a painting of the same track; it still hangs above my bed (*Path to Culbone*).'

Marilyn had no inkling then that she would live in the county. Then in 1964 she moved with her parents and brother to their new farm at Waterrow outside Wiveliscombe.

Since then she has undertaken many drawing commissions of houses and churches in the county. These line drawings were usually printed as black and white postcards. She continued these commissioned drawings for years while also developing a passion for oil painting.

Her paintings have invariably been landscapes with a focus on West Somerset, especially the Quantock Hills. In addition to oil paintings she developed work in

charcoal, pastels and mixed media, and has been shown in the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition.

The first thing that struck Marilyn about Somerset was the change in landscape. 'The undulating countryside of Berkshire and my old home near the Thames was replaced with hills – in all directions. These hills were a striking change, as were the red soils – earth colours I had not encountered before.'

Marilyn worked part-time for a printer in Watchet. 'I used to drive there and back across the Brendon Hills that seemed quite wild in comparison to my former home area. I had my first views of the Quantocks on those drives. The new views were inspiring but this was before I had started to paint in earnest. Little did I realise that I would paint these landscapes for the next 40 years and more.'

There are parts away from Marilyn's home area that she has visited and used as subjects in her drawings and paintings. In particular the Somerset Levels. 'There are many places on those wetlands that remind me of the backwaters around the Thames; areas I used to walk around and painted years ago.'

Her favourite, most inspiring places

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Milkman - pulling sledge in snow

in Somerset are the Quantock Hills, Crowcombe and Watchet. When Marilyn married, she lived for a while at Kilve before moving to East Quantoxhead. 'It was whilst living in those villages that I first became familiar with the combes of the Quantock Hills. Those hills offered landscapes for which I felt instant affinity. The beeches and the low oak woods I found particularly inspiring, in all seasons.

'The Quantock Hills was the first Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England. I certainly fell in love with those hills quickly. For the artist, they offer a wide range of landscape types. I am especially fond of the broad drove road between Crowcombe Park Gate and Triscombe; the oak woods on the north eastern side overlooking Nether Stowey; the prominent field boundary of trees near the brow of the hill between Bicknoller and Halsway.

'I lived in Crowcombe parish for 20 years and had two homes in succession. My youngest three children grew up there and my two older children often visited. It was

a wonderful village and environment to bring up a family.

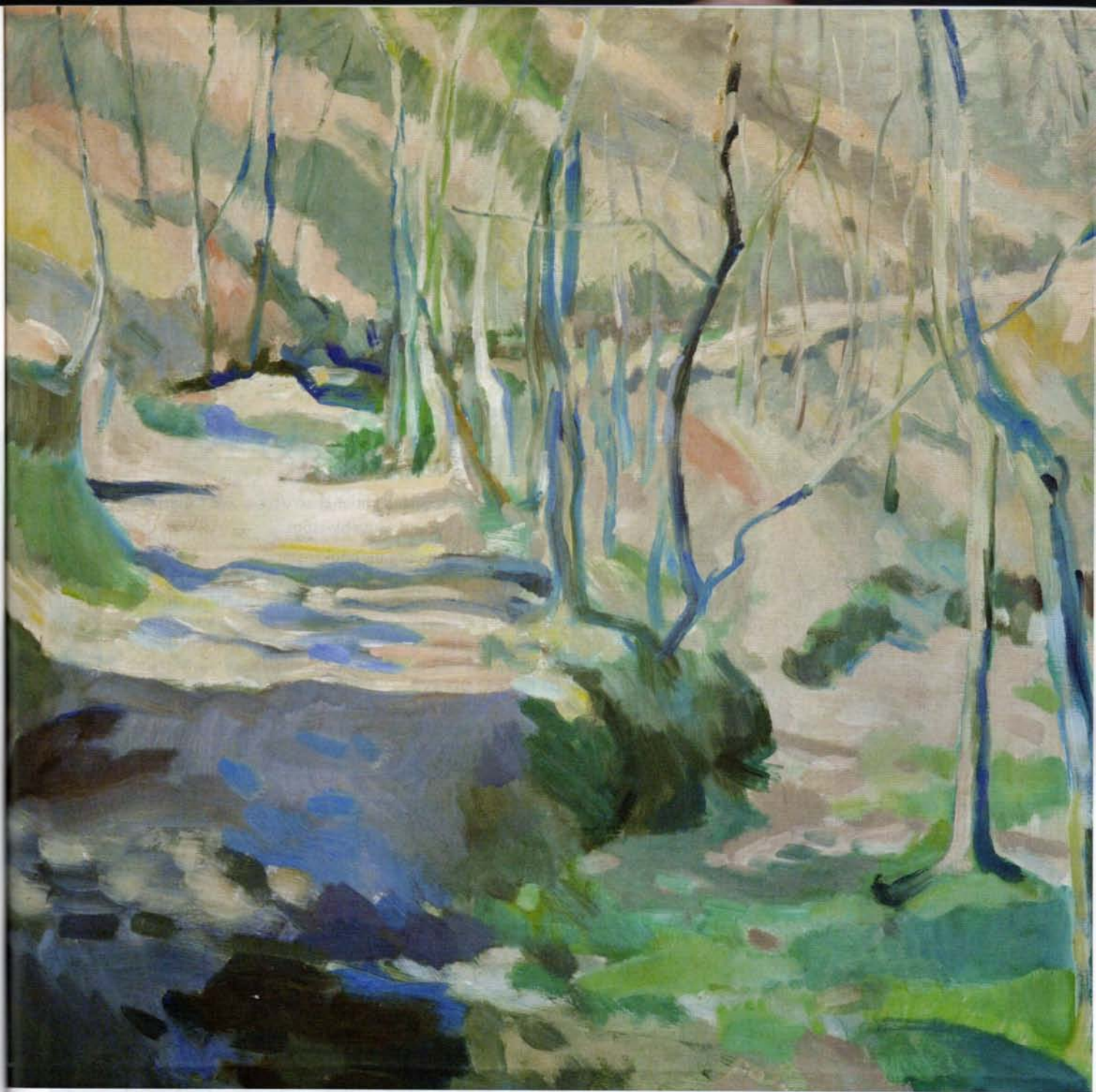
'Watchet only a few miles from my current home is where I rented a studio for a while. Watchet has developed a very supportive artist community as well as being a town that is blessed with a strong community spirit.'

Marilyn met her second husband at a life drawing class in Taunton. They have been together for more than 40 years and have three children; two boys and a girl. She has two older daughters from her previous marriage and seven grandchildren.

Marilyn used to exhibit regularly with the Somerset Society of Artists and took other opportunities as they came her way. She was increasingly successful in selling paintings but maintained her drawing commissions and developed other freelance commercial work, including designing chopping boards and placemats.

Marilyn enjoyed running occasional art classes and took on more either privately or through Somerset County Council's Community education department. 'I also held classes for Social Services focussed on young adults with learning disabilities. Then, once my children were established at school, I took the opportunity to undertake a Certificate in Education part-time over three years.'

*'Watchet has developed
a very supportive
artist community'*



Marilyn's first visit to Somerset as a teenager is recalled in her later painting *Path to Culbone*

Her pleasure in leading art classes and introducing newcomers to painting saw her continue her art teaching in various settings for many years alongside her painting and family responsibilities. 'Although I have reduced the number of classes in recent years, I only stopped my last class two years ago. I was delighted that the members of that class chose to continue to meet as an art group when I finally retired.'

Diagnosed with Parkinsons in 2005 and macular degeneration, Marilyn adapts her approach to her progressing loss of sight. 'I continue to develop new approaches to art and make bowls in papier mâché as well as including paper elements in my painting.' ♦



Marilyn's picture of children on the beach at Kilve