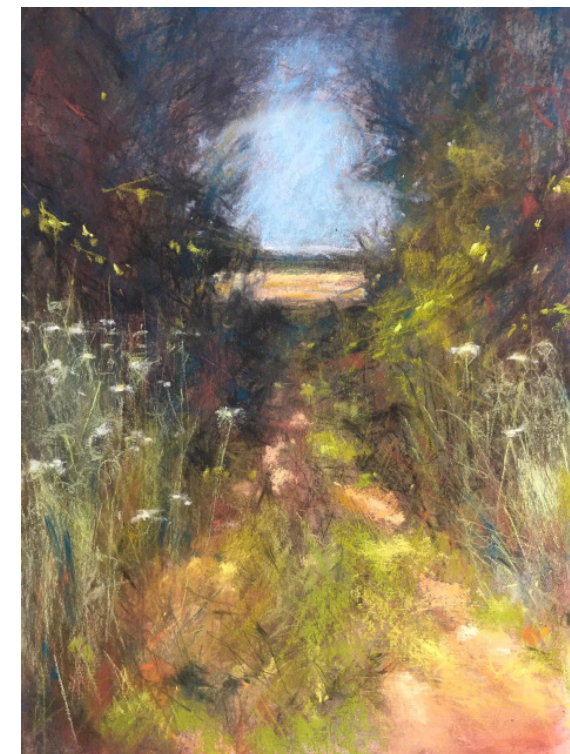




Drawn to Nature

ENGLISH PAINTER **KATRINA WALLIS-KING** RELIES ON LINEWORK, TEXTURE AND COLOR FOR HER EXPRESSIVE LANDSCAPES OF FIELDS AND STREAMS.

By Tim Saunders



Unknown
(pastel on paper,
00x00)

Forest Heather
(pastel on paper,
16½x16½)

When Katrina Wallis-King first submitted her pastel paintings to The Pastel Society, in the U.K., back in 2019, she never imagined that just two years later she would be elected as a full member to the prestigious organization. “Being invited to join was a great honor,” the artist says. When just starting out, Wallis-King was unconvinced that art could be a “credible life path.”

A TIME OF TRANSFORMATION

Born in 1963, Wallis-King spent her early childhood years in her mother’s homeland of Norway. Over the following years, her family moved throughout Europe for her British father’s military career. The artist assumed her creative inclinations had been inherited from her mother’s side of the family, which is populated with writers and poets, and actors and publishers. When leafing through her English grandmother’s old letters and journals, however, Wallis-King “came across her beautifully observed illustrations,” she says. “I myself always drew from an early age.”

Wallis-King went on to spend a year at Studio Arts College

International and Istituto Lorenzo de' Medici, in Florence, Italy, drawing and painting. Upon returning to London, she studied at University College London and earned a bachelor of arts degree in medieval archaeology. She then moved into London's main-stream working world. She eventually relocated to Bath and qualified as an addictions counselor, working for years in drug and alcohol rehabilitation services in Bristol.

Throughout her career, however, Wallis-King's love of art never faded, and she occasionally took life drawing classes and printmaking workshops. "It was only later on," she says, "when working with clients and encouraging them to engage in activities that gave them an internal sense of joy and achievement, that I asked myself, 'What about me and my forgotten hopes and dreams?'"

It was at this point that Wallis-King elected to attend a pastels workshop led by Sarah Bee, a Devon-based

landscape painter and Pastel Society UK member. "That week away was transformative," she says. "The time was dedicated to learning techniques and approaches, experimenting, and immersing myself in the creative process." It helped to foster her love of pastel.

INSPIRATION IN THE LANDSCAPE

Wallis-King, who revels in being outdoors, considers herself a landscape and nature artist. "Spending time outdoors and connecting with the natural world is really important to me," she notes, "not just for artistic purposes but for my mental well-being." She finds inspiration in the landscape of the Brecon Beacons, Dartmoor, Exmoor and Norway—"quiet empty spaces, streams and rivers, rocky expanses," she says. "I'm drawn to the beauty of trees, scrubby grasses, and the structures of spent flowers and seed heads. I also enjoy wildlife in its natural habitat."

The time spent in nature is essential to Wallis-King's creative approach, as it enables her to contemplate and interpret the locales she visits and the things she observes. "I make plein air sketches, take photos, and scribble notes about the weather, light condition and the animals I've spotted," she says.

Once the artist has captured her subject matter, she heads back home. The artist has done some plein air painting, in oils and in pastel, but her preference is to work with pastel in her studio with the help of her on-site sketches and notes. After settling in, Wallis-King peruses her sketchbooks and reference materials. Before she begins a painting, the artist spends time "making a mess," often using mixed media in a freestyle manner, to explore different compositional possibilities, color schemes and textures. This time of playful exploration allows her to work more intuitively and organically.

INSPIRED BY ...

Other artists: Wallis-King says the atmosphere in the works of American painter Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009) "captivates" her. She's also inspired by the paintings of classical Russian landscape artist Isaak Levitan (1860–1900), who advanced the genre of the moody landscape.

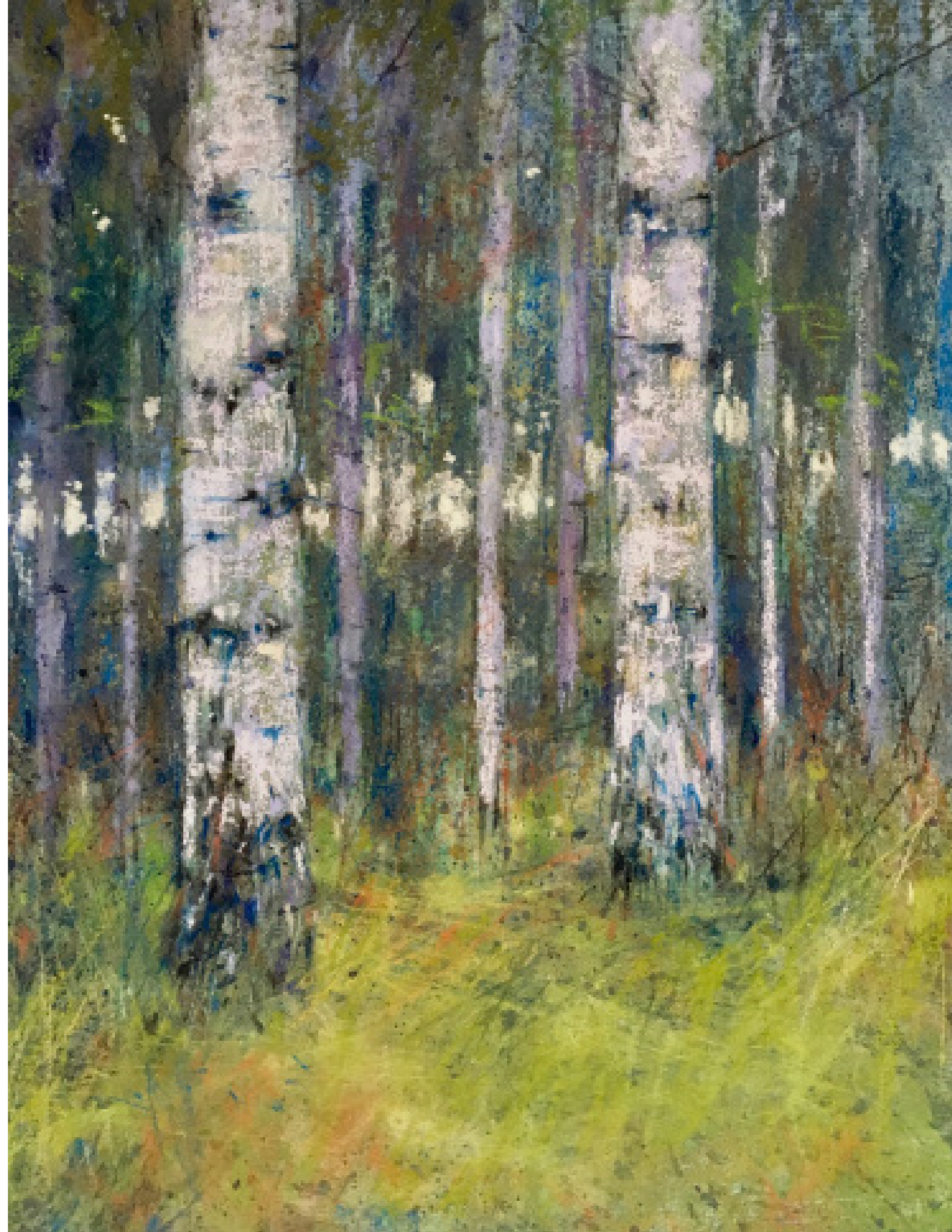
Prehistoric art: "The prehistoric cave paintings located in France and Spain take my breath away," she says.

Poetry: "Rainer Maria Rilke's poem, 'I Live My Life in Widening Circles,' always makes me pause for thought," the artist says, "and I can spend all afternoon revisiting Séamus Heaney's poetry, with his imagery of landscape, weather and seasons."

Music: Tunes are always playing in Wallis-King's house, as both her partner and son are musicians. "In my little studio," she says, "I usually listen to Townes Van Zandt, Gillian Welch, Nick Drake, Van Morrison or a classical music station."



Unknown (pastel on paper, 00x00)



Birch Grove I
(pastel on paper, 12¼x9½)



Standing Water on the Moor (pastel on paper, 16½x16½)

Wallis-King's painting style involves expressive line work and vibrant color to create mood. "Sketching is where I begin, sometimes in a detailed manner and other times more gesturally," the artist says. "I love following a line to suggest movement or texture. Trying to find the happy medium between tight draftsmanship and a looser approach is an ever-evolving process."

She relies on vine charcoal when mapping out the initial composition on Daler-Rowney mountboard. She prefers this surface to others because "it's robust and can take a lot of punishment if I need to rework a composition," she says.

Next, she applies Winsor & Newton clear gesso to seal the underdrawing before adding an acrylic paint underwash to create a contrasting ground on which to work. "It's fun to experiment with different colors of acrylic to see what happens next," she says. "I'll often let the acrylic wash bleed through as I go over the drawing using charcoal before introducing layers of pastel."

With drawing as the underpinning of her work, Wallis-King appreciates the immediacy and variety of pastel sticks. "They're incredibly responsive for sketching, shading and layering," she says. The artist favors Unison soft pastels for the range and quality of colors. She often complements them with Conté hard pastels for finer details or gestural work for her trademark movement and texture.

As for her current color choices, Wallis-King notes that she's moving toward a more muted palette, "but that might just be related to the season," she says. "I was in Norway last autumn and really appreciated the end-of-year colors and quiet mood of the landscape. A spring or summer piece might call for a fuller range of color. It really depends on where a piece takes me and what feels right."

In the instances when she feels that a piece "isn't going anywhere, I'll scrub it out and just begin again," the artist says. In fact, several of her most successful outcomes were built over earlier attempts.

Upstream Light
(pastel on paper,
17½x14½)

"Some days it's a struggle to get things happening at my easel," Wallis-King admits, "and the floor will be littered with abandoned attempts. But then there's that breakthrough moment when I start to connect with a piece."

Woodland Waters (pastel on paper, 16½x16½)

I find that I have to follow it through until I reach a point that makes me happy. Then I'll usually set the piece aside and revisit it later with a fresh eye for any final changes."

LOOKING FORWARD

Wallis-King, who enjoys teaching and wants to offer more pastel workshops in the future, is currently working on landscape pieces for The Pastel Society's 124th annual exhibition, as well as for gallery exhibition. "I may not always know who buys my work, but it feels good when a buyer likes a piece enough to want to hang it in their home," the artist says.

Over the next year, the artist plans to make more time for plein air painting. "I want to keep developing as an artist; exploring other approaches keeps me interested," she says. "In the autumn, I'm heading to Brisons Veor, an artists' residential studio above a beach in Cornwall. The weather might well be stormy, but I'm really looking forward to the space and time to let go, experiment and see what I find." *PJ*

Tim Saunders (tasaunders.weebly.com) contributes to publications in Great Britain and the United States. He's publisher and editor of *Contemporary Artist* and hosts the *In Conversation* podcast.

HEADSHOT TK

Katrina Wallis-King (katrinawallisking.art), of Bath, England, is a landscape and nature painter. She balances linework, texture and color to capture an image and mood. She spent a year at Studio Arts College International and Istituto Lorenzo de' Medici, in Florence, Italy, and earned a bachelor of arts degree

in medieval archaeology at University College London. Her work has appeared in The Pastel Society, UK, annual exhibition every year since 2019. She was elected as a member of the society in 2021. Her paintings are in private collections in Norway, Russia, the U.K. and the U.S.. Her work is represented by Thompson's Gallery, in Aldeburgh, England.

