



▲ *Absolutely Chucking it Down: George Street from under the Awning, pencil on paper, 7×11in (18×28cm).*

The oil-on-canvas study was much squarer than the larger painting so I could not get away with fudging the unseen four yards of building on the left-hand side. Also, the building is very intricate and from my study I couldn't tell exactly how it fitted together, so I returned to the spot with my sketch pad to do this wobbly drawing

Painting big in the studio

Peter Brown demonstrates his method for scaling up a recent oil painting to make a centrepiece for an exhibition

I do think that it is a good idea to have a centrepiece for an exhibition. For my last show at the Victoria Art Gallery I did a large semi-abstract sunset, 54×108in (137×274.5cm), which I referred to as my 'get mucky' painting. It was painted from 6×12in (15×30.5cm) on-the-spot oil sketches. And for my last London show at Messum's in London I did two large 60×75in (152.5×190.5cm) paintings of Piccadilly Circus, one in the sun and one in the rain.

I find this very hard to do. It is not how I normally work, which is to 'see and put' directly from the subject – I do 99 per cent of my work directly from the subject. When you are painting from life there is an endless source of visual

reference to take from. When working in the studio from studies the information is limited. These paintings are real learning curves for me. I am slowly realising that you should not be a slave to your reference material, which should only be seen as a starting point, and the large painting needs to take on a life of its own. If you are a slave to the reference material, you end up doing a second-rate copy.

Decisions

When producing work for a show I leave it as late as I can before I decide which painting I should use because I want it to be an image that will be striking on a larger scale. Both works shown here

◀ *Absolutely Chucking it Down: George Street from under the Awning*, oil on canvas, 60×75in (152×190cm).

Painted in the studio, bizarrely on sunny afternoons, because the morning sun floods through the east-facing windows and it is impossible to paint on something as big and great as this. In the studio it was easier to work on the rain splashes on the pavement and the water dribbling under the wooden slat of the awning than when being blown about on the street



▲ My original oil studies, on easels in the studio, squared-up

were made from 30×35in (76×89cm) canvases, painted on the spot in the rain – luckily under the colonnades for the Abbey painting, and under an awning put out for me by the estate agent for the George Street painting. I really have no plan in such paintings as these. I find I agonise over them perhaps too much and constantly worry about them becoming stale. You have more control over your materials but lack of control is one of the things I tend to thrive off, so I have to find ways of keeping spontaneity. The temptation for me is to work the paint too much

but I am not a technical painter and this rarely comes good. So I simply try to put it down and leave it. I rarely completely trust my studies, and have to revisit the subject either by taking the large canvas on to the street, as I did with the Abbey painting (below), or with my sketchbook, as I did with the George Street painting (left).

The original studies are squared-up with charcoal into 5in (12.5cm) squares; I then transfer onto 10in (25.5cm) squares on the larger canvas. This helps massively with drawing. It can be hard keeping proportions and shape right

when working up close on a big painting. The next step is to draw rough outlines in charcoal and make sure they tie up with the study. I have a studio easel that belonged to the painter Charles McCall, a member of the New English Art Club, who died in 1989; it has layers of paint from his career and I love the idea of adding to it. I kept the Abbey painting fixed here so I could photograph it for this article; this was not good for my back and it also meant I was either looking down or up at the canvas a lot, which can tend to skew or elongate your drawing. TA



DEMONSTRATION

Pigeons in the Rain, Abbey Courtyard

▲ STAGE ONE

I was keen to get the surface covered after squaring up, so I chucked on an estimate at the sky and reflection in the ground in a single tone

▲ STAGE TWO

Slapping in the sky was the most dramatic change the whole painting would go through and it was quite hard to work on the close tones of the stone, but I forced myself to make decisions and guesses. As with most of my painting, I zoomed in on detail quite early on, which gave me a key-in. Figures help with getting the scale right and a bit of shiny metal such as the silver pole in the foreground or the brass on the shop front in the George Street painting (above left), gave me a bit of confidence and something to head for in the rest of the painting ▶

DEMONSTRATION continued



▲ STAGE THREE

I decided to put some variety of tone in the sky which will be brought down to the reflection and help strengthen the composition. I lightened the stone on the Abbey and added darks. I am introducing some figures and deciding not to use the ones in the original (apart from the man in the middle). As you chuck paint on boundaries and lines can wander. The original grid gets masked out so to stop me going awry I reintroduced a grid line or two for reference



▲ STAGE FOUR

In order to get a fresh look I find it helpful to turn the painting upside down to work on. The figure in the foreground was taken from another painting of a girl talking to her friend (in a t-shirt on a bright sunny day!) and the umbrella she is holding was painted from a prop set up in the studio, balanced at the right angle



◀ STAGE FIVE

The foreground tables were fine in the smaller painting but were now begging for a cup and saucer, and I wanted to make more of the lady with the handbag who was looking in the shop window on the left. I added the pigeons on the ground and a bicycle track through the wet – something I noticed when painting the glossy pavements of Regent Street a couple of years ago – it helps to wind the viewer into this very vertical, up-and-down painting

▶ FINISHED PAINTING

Pigeons in the Rain, Abbey Courtyard, oil on canvas, 60×48in (152×122cm). At this stage I am very uncomfortable about getting all my reference in the studio and have to take the painting out for a fiddle, to see how it matches up. I changed the top of the Abbey and noted where the scale had gone awry a bit. Some of this I changed, so was happy. I spotted birds eating crumbs from the tables and decided that would be a good idea in my painting. Finally, back in the studio, I added ripples and falling rain – I was trying to get an idea of recession and perspective. It's good fun, this bit

Both paintings featured here will form the centrepiece of Peter's next one-man exhibition at the Victoria Art Gallery, Bridge Street, Bath, from December 3 to February 19. Telephone 01225 477233, www.victoriagal.org.uk. The exhibition will be accompanied by a book, which will be available at the gallery and from Peter's website. Peter's new DVD *Painting Arles* will be available soon from APV Films, telephone 01608 641798; www.apvfilms.com, www.petethestreet.com

If you're inspired by Peter's work, why not join him on a The Artist holiday to the UNESCO World Heritage town of Hoi An in Vietnam, from May 9 to 21, 2017. For full details see page 36.



Peter Brown graduated in fine art from Manchester Polytechnic, and later qualified as a teacher. He is an elected member of the New English Art Club, the Royal Institute of Oil Painters, the Pastel Society, and Bath Society of Artists. His many awards include the Prince of Wales Award for Portrait Drawing, 2008. He is represented by Messum's London, www.messums.com

