

Views of **Varanasi**

Last year **Peter Brown** set off on a painting trip to Varanasi, India. Luckily for us he kept a diary, some of which he shares with us here

In March 2015 Patrick Cullen, Ken Howard and I spent a week painting in Varanasi, India, accompanied by fellow NEAC painter, Neale Worley, who wanted to make a film of the experience. I had visited Udaipur with Patrick and Ken on two previous trips and thought that was busy, but this time I was in for a shock. Varanasi is a stunning city, ancient and spiritual; it sits on the river Ganges with its famous ghats. It has more colour, noise and smell than anywhere I have come across. Setting up an easel in the middle of all of this is an incredible experience, which I found amazingly exhilarating and rewarding. I kept notes in my sketchbook on these trips and it was the best way to describe our week. What follows is a taster. TA



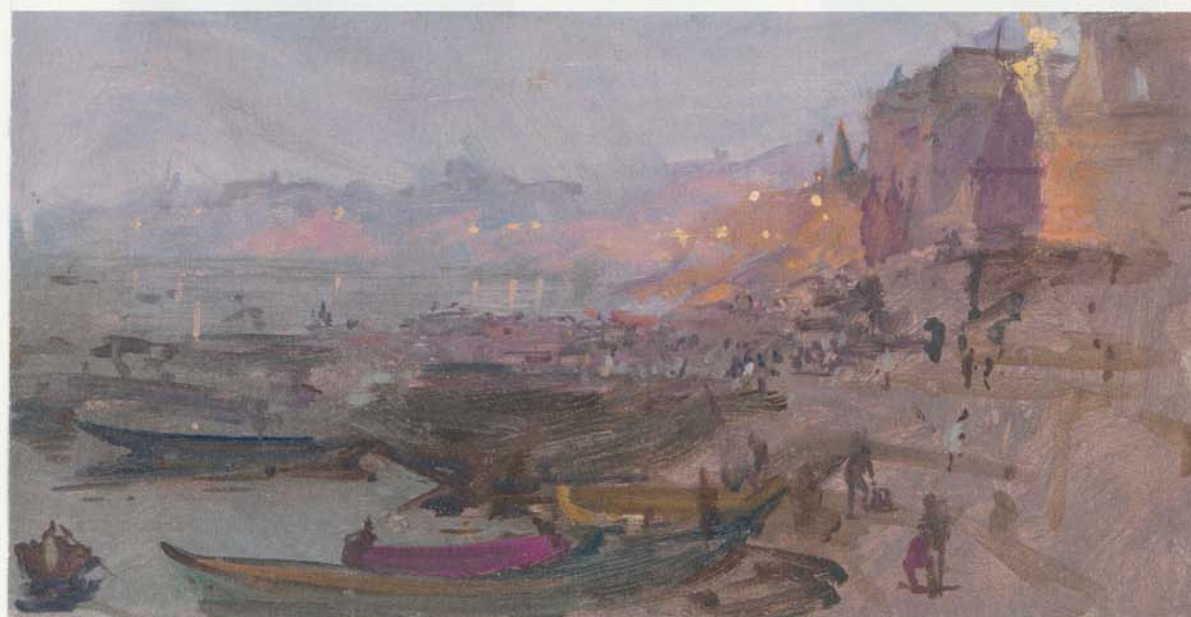
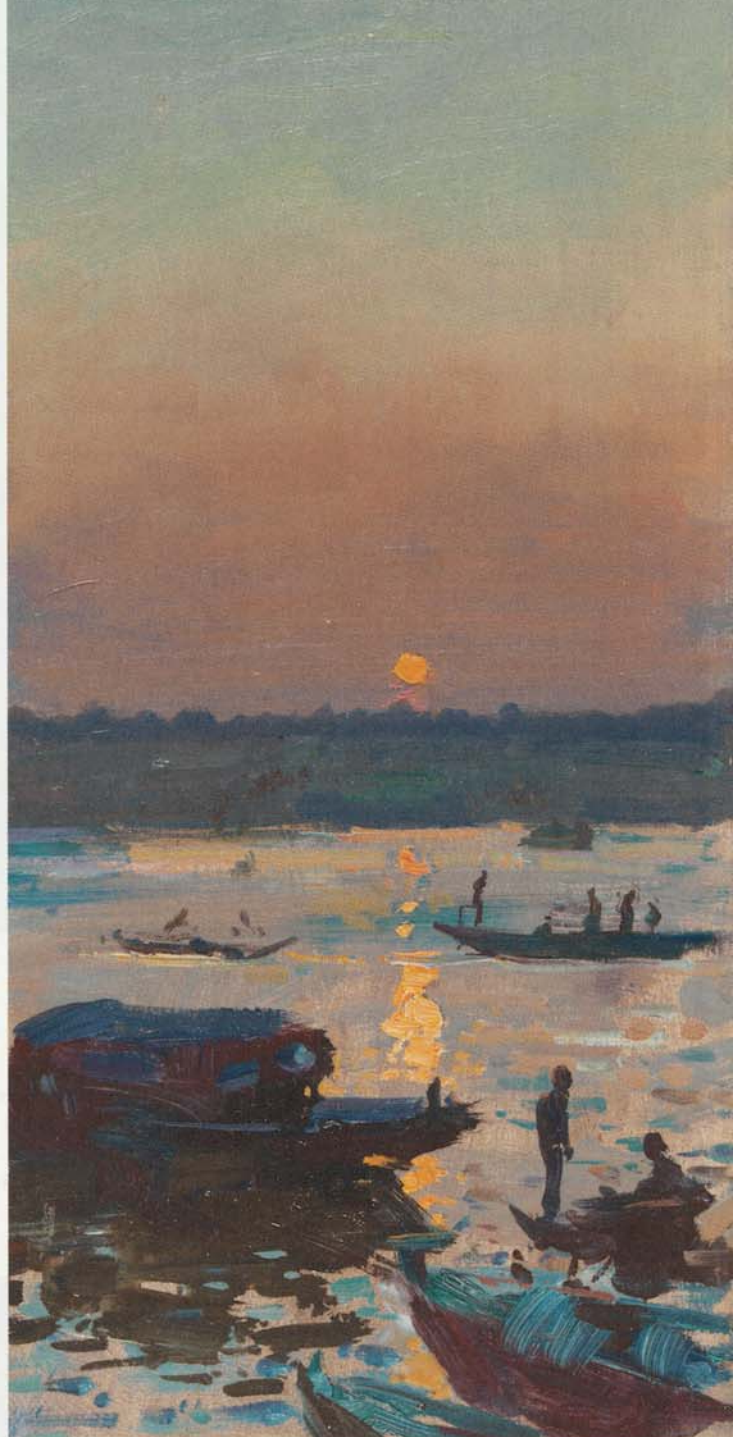
◀ *Sleeping Dogs, Varanasi*, oil on board 12×16in (30.5×40.5cm). March 8, 2015.

I was itching to get going yesterday when we arrived. It was a manic taxi drive from the airport but the car could only take us so far, then we walked. Our bags were heavy and we had to negotiate cow and dog excrement through dark, narrow alleys to the light of the river and our hotel, sitting high above the river on top of several flights of stone steps. I was worried the streets were too manic even for 'Pete the Street'.

After checking in I set out into the city, apprehensive to say the least! I walked up to the roundabout where we had abandoned the car, took a right, found a bend in the road and set up. Very quickly I was engulfed. The crowds increased and decreased but I was accompanied by someone at all times. By 6pm the light, which had been casting shadows across the road when I had started, had retreated and was hitting the tops of the buildings. It was time to pack up – my luck was done! Walking back, the twilight appeared and sparkled – about ten minutes later it had gone. It does not hang around here

▶ *Sunrise 2, Varanasi*, oil on board 12×6in (30.5×15cm).

I felt the sun was soon to appear, so began to mix colour, and slap it on darker than I wanted. Ten minutes later Patrick, who was beside me, announced its arrival. The sun gleamed pink and orange over the horizon. Fifteen minutes later the colours were gone and we painted, ignoring a bright sun and concentrating on the boats and figures



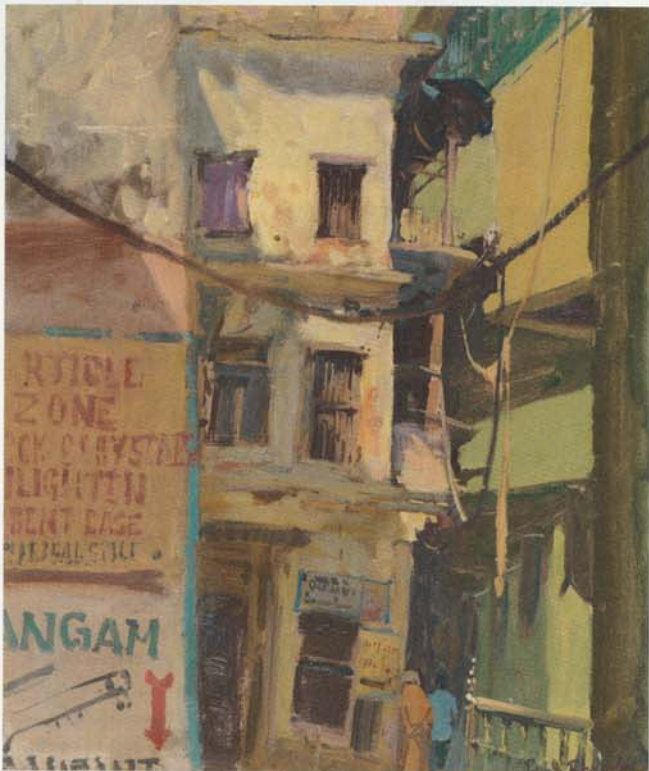
◀ *Before Sunrise on the Ghat, Varanasi*, oil on board, 6×12in (15×30.5cm). March 10, 2015.

I got up at 5.30am after a broken night's sleep. On the ghat, sunrise was a way off. It's a lovely time of day, busy with tourists going on boat trips and people washing and praying, but relatively tranquil barring the chanting and jangling music. The dawn light was soft and I pointed south, painting the pink pinpricks of light in a misty riverfront



▲ *From the Roof of the Museum 1*, oil on board, 12×16in (30.5×40.5cm).

After breakfast I found a spot on the roof of a museum building where I worked in the heat on a mass of information in front and below me for three hours. I saw Patrick working on one of his pieces from the river in the white-awninged boat and added him. When I had finished I was just as intrigued by the view now the light had moved round, and I started on another. It was wonderful to paint in peace, disturbed every now and then only by the odd tourist and some bright green parakeets



▲ *The Wobbly House, Varanasi*, oil on board, 12×10in (30.5×25.5cm)

You can paint with Pete in Florence, where he is leading a The Artist reader painting holiday from September 4 to 12 2016. For details and to book, contact Spencer Scott Travel, telephone 01825 714310, www.spencerscotttravel.com.

Peter Brown

graduated in fine art at 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 Messums, London, www.messums.com.

Pete's new book *London: Paintings by Peter Brown*, was recently published by Sansom & Co, ISBN 9781908326805, price £35. It is available from the Mall Galleries, Tate Britain, most bookshops and his website:

www.peterbrownneac.com.

Neale Worley's DVD of Peter, Ken and Patrick, *Painting Varanasi*, is available from the Mall Galleries, London SW1, and at www.nealeworley.com, or telephone 07779 983897, price £20 including p&p.

