

# Ghost in the machine

*East Grinstead artist Julian Perry has embraced the digital revolution in his photography and artwork. DUNCAN HALL finds out more*

---

“PROBABLY I’m a frustrated watercolour artist!” says Julian Perry, whose source material is based around his photography. But it is his skill with digital paintbrushes and modern computer technology which puts his artwork into a similar category as the aforementioned classic painting style. Having learned his techniques on his son’s hand-me-down Mac, he has been able to convert his landscape and abstract photography into a whole new beast, turning a bucolic landscape photo into something akin to an oil painting – his brushstrokes adding a depth and texture which can’t be found on a straight photo.

“I’ve always had an artistic streak,” says the 61-year-old. “I got my first film camera when I was 12 and in 1974 I got a little reflex camera, an Olympus OM-2, so I could see what I was shooting through the lens. It opened up a new domain.”

A former physicist for the NHS and semi-retired teacher, Julian had kept up his darkroom experiments alongside his working life, switching to digital technology in 2007 when the quality began to improve. It was only in the past three years that he started experimenting with different digital tools to manipulate his images with stunning results. Now he has focused his energy on his art full-time, establishing the website JP-Digitalart as a way both to showcase his work and share his skills. Not only does he offer limited edition prints of his artwork online – on canvases, paper, metal or acrylic – but he also sells his self-taught techniques of restoring and digitising vintage photographs, enhancing low-res digital images and turning existing photographs into watercolour, acrylic or oil-style images.

One of his most popular series of works has been his East Grinstead series – manipulated versions of images he has taken of his home town over the last two decades. They are available from East Grinstead gallery Objets d’Art in Lingfield Road. “I can take a picture

as a source and use it as a reference or a stepping stone for a bigger piece,” he says. “It’s bringing out a sense of what moves me.”

This has particularly been the case in his explorations into the abstract world, particularly with his *Geologica* series, inspired by rock formations he spotted while on holiday. “The focus of my work is the detail that you don’t normally see,” he says. “It’s different levels of beauty, close textures and the design of nature. I was in

Cornwall last October in Godrevy, near St Ives, and all these metamorphic rocks were producing the most beautiful arrangements. One of the most powerful tools is the crop – you can cut out what distracts and

focus your perception onto one small bit.”

The results are beautiful abstract images, packed with colours ranging from blues to oranges and repeating organic patterns. Organic elements also come into his extreme close-up shots of flowers and natural phenomena. He distinguishes his more elemental work between the botanical, geological, meteorological, coastal and architectural on his sister website

**“One of the most powerful tools is the crop – you can cut out what distracts and focus your perception onto one small bit.”**



*Geologica VIII* by Julian Perry



*Alfriston Flats* by Julian Perry



*The White Horse* by Julian Perry

ArtElemental, which is run in conjunction with his wife Rhona at [artelemental.co.uk](http://artelemental.co.uk)

Julian has a long connection with Sussex, having been schooled in Eastbourne and lived for the past 22 years in East Grinstead in a beautiful family home close to Sackville College, overlooking a panoramic view of Ashdown Forest. He admits he is considering moving on soon to another beloved landscape – that of Cornwall, home of his geological pictures. “The geological pictures really symbolise what I’m trying to do,” he says. “I want to harness the charm and elegance within the most mundane and apparent things. Anything that evokes that sense of ‘Wow!’”

Today he can generally be found with a camera under his arm, looking for further inspiration. “More often than not the pictures that capture your imagination happen when you least expect it,” he says. One such image, *Corfu Café*, came as he walked the back streets of the island. “I came across this little café full of people sipping coffee – it was just a quick moment captured but it made a nice painting. A nice scene like that is a starting point of a train of possibilities. Where the artist’s sense comes in is when it looks right – you can overwork things and end up with something that doesn’t actually work. With digital you can scrape layers off a number of



#### NEED TO KNOW

Julian Perry’s next exhibition is at the New Community Hall in Lindfield Primary Academy, School Lane, as part of the Lindfield Arts Festival, which runs from Friday 8 to Sunday 10 September.

For more about his work visit [www.jp-digitalart.com](http://www.jp-digitalart.com) or [artelemental.co.uk](http://artelemental.co.uk)



*Geologica IV* by Julian Perry

times and create A, B or C versions – and it’s relatively inexpensive to try out new options. Sometimes plan B is the one which works better than the idea you started out with – it’s a journey of exploration. You might start out going to point A, but end up at D. As a piece of art you don’t know what the end result will look like – I will see something which moves me and will move somebody else.

“I think humans are creative beings – some people choose to find that creativity in dance or poetry, while digital art is bringing together the things I’m good at – finding detail, playing with processors and an artistic sense. The process can result in endless detail – you can find yourself and lose yourself in my art.” ♦