



VANESSA GARDINER

'Sounion 7', acrylic on plywood, 68 x 173cm

IN THE FRAME

Seascapes

EMILY TOBIN turns her attention to artists whose work has been inspired by the coast

The depiction of seascapes has long been part of the British artistic tradition; perhaps it's a reflection of the fact that we live on an island beset by temperamental weather but blessed with spectacular shorelines. In the 'Insight' pages of this issue, Celina Fox looks at the paintings of J M W Turner, an artist whose pursuit of creative experience was so extreme he once insisted on being bound to the mast of a ship during a storm. This month, 'In the frame' looks at current artists who focus on the sea, using less extreme methods.

Vanessa Gardiner paints the coasts around Cornwall, Ireland and Greece. Her paintings extract a pared-back clarity and precision from her chosen landscapes, with angular lines and sweeping curves slicing across the surface to depict the course of a path, foaming surf and dramatic headlands.

Vanessa, who studied at the Central School of Art and Design, lives in west Dorset and has always been drawn to the dynamism of the sea, particularly a stretch of coast around Boscastle in Cornwall – an unspoilt area made up of dark slate cliffs with inlets of deep turquoise sea. A residency in Ireland resulted in a body of work depicting the panoramic north Mayo coast where, she explains, 'triangular fields interlock with each other over the headlands, and the geological formations of the cliffs are echoed by the lyrical lines of white foam running along their base'. A number of trips to the Peloponnese resulted in a series of paintings illustrating the 'unexpected opacity of the cobalt-blue sea, the

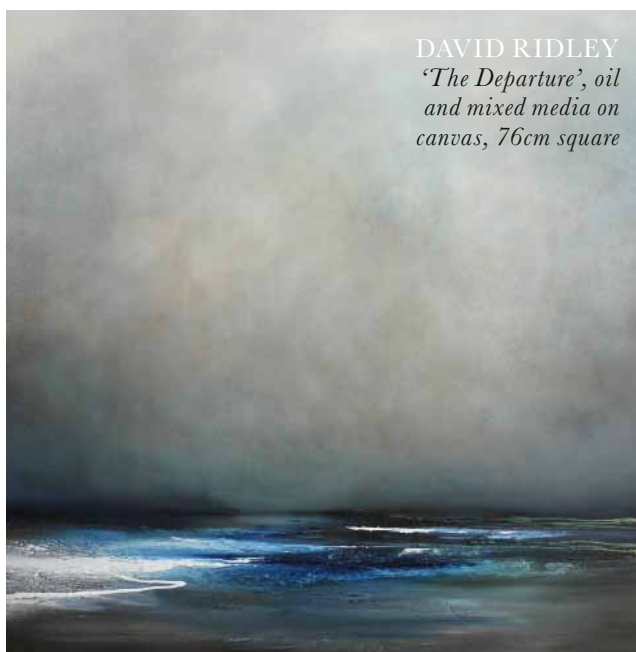
particularly crystalline light and the contours of the pale grey hills, studded and mottled by scrub'. For Vanessa, it is essential she knows the place she is painting: 'I can then feel justified in abstracting and reordering the landscapes into the carefully selected compositions I use later in the paintings.'

She has devised a method of painting that is distinctively her own. 'I work on plywood or hard-board,' she says. 'It gives me the freedom to change the composition of a painting easily if necessary by cutting it down, and the painting is not restricted to a prescribed format.' She will often redraw the image, scouring and sanding back the acrylic paint until the surface becomes 'abraded and enlivened'. At times she might completely obliterate the picture with white gesso, let it dry and then scour off the white to reveal the ghost of what was there before. Vanessa likens her painting technique to the 'random disorder found in the natural landscape'.

David Ridley has a similarly experimental approach towards painting, but with very different results. His atmospheric large-scale canvases depict the ephemerality of the sea and surrounding landscape, a sense that is heightened through his use of multiple layers of oil, acrylic and even household gloss paint.

While Vanessa's paintings are anchored by a sense of place, David's are imbued with an almost dreamlike quality that is not specific to any location. Despite its rawness in texture, the paintwork is mostly soft, except for sharp white bands of splattered

paint, denoting crashing waves. Light plays a central role in David's images; its source seems always to be obscured behind a layer of cloud, creating luminosity across the canvas. David captures the calm before the storm, or perhaps just after □
To see more of Vanessa's work, visit www.vanessagardiner.co.uk; prices start at £1,000. Further examples of David's work can be seen at www.davidkridley.co.uk; prices start at £800



DAVID RIDLEY
'The Departure', oil and mixed media on canvas, 76cm square

OTHER ARTISTS

The atmospheric paintings by **Mark Johnston** are stimulated by the 'primitive power of nature' (www.johnstonarts.co.uk). **Ramsay Gibb** depicts lowering skies and shimmering waters; his paintings are wide panoramas that seem to go on and on (www.ramsaygibb.co.uk). **Douglas Gray** paints more traditional seascapes, in which gleaming light plays a central role (www.douglasgray.co.uk).