

The Jurassic landscape

Catherine Mason celebrates the contemporary painter Jeremy Gardiner, who looks to the spectacular Dorset coastline for his inspiration

The Art of Jeremy Gardiner: Unfolding Landscape

Wendy Baron, Ian Collins, Peter Davies, Simon Martin, Christiana Payne and William Varley

Lund Humphries, £35

Jeremy Gardiner (b. 1957) aims to help us experience the changing face of the earth, and to this end he has spent decades exploring southern England's Jurassic Coast. Peter Davies says Gardiner's art is 'a vision of landscape as an inscribed "tableau" of ancient geological or man-made patterns'. His work is both constructive and destructive, a building up of layers and a sanding and scratching away of the surface. In this he mimics his ancient subject matter. The Jurassic Coast is a World Heritage site, running 95 miles from Orcombe Point in East Devon to Old Harry Rocks in East Dorset, and represents 185 million years of the earth's history. It is where the sea, sky and land meet and the process of evolution seems closer: the erosion of cliffs, the forcing upwards of rocks colliding with the rolling countryside. This hugely varied landscape includes fossil-hunting grounds made popular in the 19th century and the Isles of Purbeck and Portland, famous for their exports of stone. The coastline has particular resonance for this Royal College of Art-educated painter as it is there that he was raised, and he has walked, sketched, motorbiked across and flown over it in light aircraft ever since.

This handsome book situates Gardiner firmly within the history of the great English tradition of landscape painting stretching from John Constable to Paul Nash. (Don't let the blackness of the cover put you off – inside are glorious, colourful landscapes.) A touring exhibition coincides with its publication.

Gardiner's paintings are not overly descriptive, more concerned as they are with the geological rather than the picturesque. His work is largely abstract, but with occasional elements of realism, and an intriguing array of over-painting of one scene into another, Cubist-inspired forms and geometric planes. The surface of the paintings are routed and planed, and paint pools in crevices, giving the artist's works a tactile quality. Thus, as contributor Ian Collins tells us, Gardiner 'lets the worked and reworked surface tell a geological story', and his paintings offer a glimpse of the fragile ecology of the coastline. His use of materials such as acrylic, wood, gessoed handmade paper and jesmonite give a sense of rock-strata and fossils, as in *Morning Mist, St Oswald's Bay* (2007). Gardiner explains: 'It's the intersection of space and time that gives a place significance for me.'

Gardiner attended the Fine Art department of Newcastle University in the mid-1970s, where the

legacy of Victor Pasmore and Richard Hamilton's progressive teaching, modelled on the Basic Design course of the Bauhaus in Germany, was still in evidence. Pasmore and Hamilton's pedagogic innovations in the 1950s led to the creation of the foundation course, still a unique feature of British art education at that time. The chapter by William Varley gives a valuable first-hand account of being a teacher at this school; he writes: '[Basic Design's] purpose is to identify a grammar, a language of form which might be deployed as the student's content evolved and matured.' It was during this time that Gardiner was exposed to the work of Kurt Schwitters, as Hamilton was responsible for relocating *Merzbarn* (1947–8) to the Hatton Gallery, part of the University. A Schwitters-like sensibility can be detected in Gardiner's use of collage elements and what Varley calls a 'synthesis of abstraction and empathy'.

Gardiner's documentation of southern England continues with the use of LIDAR data to produce three-dimensional models of the terrain

Above: *Lighthouse, The Lizard*, 2010, and below: *Evening, Mullion Cove*, 2010, both by Jeremy Gardiner



(LIDAR, laser imaging, is commonly used in meteorology to create contour maps). His award-winning work, *Purbeck Light Years* (2003), is an interactive digital installation of the Isle of Purbeck and adds a temporal layering to the experience of this landscape, one in which the viewer can navigate through, virtually.

The broad selection of essays, well written by authors with differing perspectives, make this book a must for anyone who loves the British landscape and wishes to discover how landscape painting continues to develop in the work of artists such as Gardiner.

● 'Jeremy Gardiner: Unfolding Landscape', University Gallery, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, to 5 July. Free to all. www.northumbria.ac.uk/universitygallery

Catherine Mason is author of *A Computer in the Art Room: The origins of British computer arts 1950–80*, published by Quiller Press. She is currently writing a book about contemporary landscape art in Norfolk

Books to read this quarter, selected by Charlotte Mullins

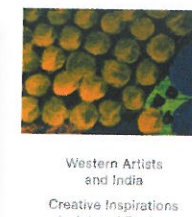
Banksy: The Man Behind the Wall Will Ellsworth-Jones's pacy account of street-artist Banksy's rise to fame appears in paperback this quarter. Ellsworth-Jones, the ultimate groupie, tracks down early Banksy works still visible in London: these days his rats with placards and riot police with smiley faces are more often chiselled off walls for blue-chip clients with deep pockets. Banksy himself has diversified into prints, paintings and international exhibitions, and his film, *Exit Through the Gift Shop*, was nominated for an Oscar in 2010. Ellsworth-Jones covers all aspects of the artist's career, including the incredible lengths people go to in order to obtain a Banksy to call their own. Aurum, £8.99



Cornelia Parker This major new title features an extensive catalogue of the artist's work spanning the last 40 years. Five essays on Parker's overriding themes and interests by Whitechapel Gallery director, Iwona Blaswick, punctuate the visual catalogue, in which each work is balanced by Parker's personal reflections on her practice. Thames & Hudson, £35

Vitamin D2: New Perspectives in Drawing Critics and curators nominate the world's most exciting and promising artists working in the field of drawing in the 21st century. There are 115 artists featured, such as Olivia Plender, Charles Avery, Neal Fox, Sun Xun and Irene Kopelman. Phaidon, £39.95

Western Artists and India Shanay Jhaveri edits this rich compilation of essays and portfolios, and assesses how artists including Howard Hodgkin, Francesco Clemente and Taryn Simon respond to India. Thames & Hudson, £29.95



Preview