



# CATCH OF THE DAY

If you love colour, Whitby artist Kate Smith's vibrant canvases will definitely float your boat, says **Jenny Needham**

**W**e all know that summer days out on our glorious coastline can come with a good chance of rain, but there's no room for a gloomy outlook in Kate Smith's vibrant seaside scenes. Luminous lobsters, brightly-coloured fishing cobbles, rainbow sands and oil slick seas – her impressions of the North East coast and its characterful towns and villages are a tide of brilliant hues.

Taking inspiration from in and around Whitby and the coastline where she lives, Kate draws on a sculptural background which has led her to develop an impasto style. She builds her paintings using thick layers of oil paint in exaggerated colours, applied with a palette knife rather than a brush.

"I enjoy the process of layering thick oil paint to achieve a loose definition, and use a contemporary colour palette to enhance the

subject and appearance of light," she says.

This technique has become a fundamental aspect of Kate's pieces, along with a love of the craftsman-built fishing boats that are the subjects of much of her recent work. "I would describe myself predominantly as a marine artist, taking inspiration from my atmospheric surroundings," she adds. "I am particularly drawn to the traditional boats along our coast and the marine life that inhabit its waters – a fascination developed from spending time with my husband and family pleasure fishing at Runswick Bay, his childhood home. Summers are spent at my mother-in-law's home, Cockpit House, soaking up the vibes and taking out our boat to catch mackerel and lobsters."

All these things – the catch of the day, the wooden boats, the village itself – are translated onto canvas and quickly snapped up by locals and holiday cottages owners ➡



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who want a flavour of the place, and to bring colour to their homes.

The Smith family - husband James, 19-year-old Molly and 15-year-old Tom - live on the west side of Whitby, in a Grade II listed terrace house overlooking the town park. The couple moved there 20 years ago when James came back to join the family business of surveyors, estate agents and livestock auctioneers. "This is where we have raised our children, in a five-bedroom Georgian house, set over three floors," says Kate. The fifth bedroom was converted into a north-facing art studio, the high ceiling and tall windows making it ideal for her large-scale paintings.

Kate's love of art developed from a very early age. Her mother attended an art school in 1950s and trained as a cartographer, so had great drawing skills and encouraged Kate's creativity and love of all things arty. "I was always drawing and making as a child and when I left school, it seemed natural to go to art college," she says. Loughborough University followed, and a degree in Fine Art, specialising in sculpture, then a PGCE in art education from Reading.

Kate spent a number of years as an art teacher in secondary schools, before moving to Whitby and working for the education department of the North York Moors National Park. She also tutored adult art groups, until 2016, when she felt the time was right to start to create art again for herself. "With no facility to develop my love of welding sculptures, I decided to give painting a go - that was five years ago and I haven't looked back since."

And while things came to a halt for lots of people during lockdown, for Kate it proved a catalyst for creativity. "I focussed on my art primarily as a distraction, but it also helped

me to develop a strong continuity through my work," she says. "Not only did I find it a way of escaping what was happening around me, but people denied a trip to the coast were keen to acquire a slice of its atmosphere for themselves and their homes. Lockdown was also good time for me to reflect on my work and decide where I wanted it to go."

Kate started an interesting collaboration with a local homewares company - COtoo - who print her marine images onto handmade lampshades, cushions, coasters and chopping boards. They're available on-line and through a selection of retailers. Her work can also be found at the Silver Street Gallery in Whitby, the Brightwater Gallery in Alnwick, the Ytene Gallery in Hampshire, and on her website.

A year ago, she was invited to exhibit at the Great Yorkshire Show, in Harrogate - "a first for me and a wonderful experience exhibiting alongside a wealth of Yorkshire talent"; post-pandemic, she has a number of art exhibitions back on her calendar. When we spoke she was busy in her artistic eyrie developing a series of work for North Yorkshire Open Studios.

Now that restrictions have ended, the North East coastline is awash with tourists again, Whitby packed to the gunnels. But although Kate admits it was nice to have the beaches and town to themselves for a while, she says it's good to see the tide turn, bringing a welcome boost to the economy in its wake. "The pull of the coast has more meaning than ever with people desperate for the views, smells and tastes of the sea," she says. "I am lucky to call this area my home, with a wealth of inspiration on my doorstep. Who couldn't help to be captivated by the charms of this coastline with its rugged cliffs, picturesque harbours and breath-taking views?"



## GALLERIES

Whitby - [silverstgallery.com](http://silverstgallery.com)  
Alnwick - [brightwatergallery.co.uk](http://brightwatergallery.co.uk)  
Hampshire - [ytenegallery.co.uk](http://ytenegallery.co.uk)  
[katesmithart.co.uk](http://katesmithart.co.uk)



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PICTURE ELLEN McNEELANCE