



The bead-bonny ash – inspired by the poem Inversnaid by Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Below: The paintings take shape; from sepia tones in a notebook to oils on a canvas.



# The other J. Sainsbury

Internationally recognised artist Jonathan Sainsbury has much to say about wildlife art, through brush and words. ALEX FLINT visits Perthshire to find out more.

Artists are seldom boring, and Jonathan Sainsbury is no different. He is a striking man, though not in his appearance, for he is certainly too wise to take on the guise of a raving bohemian – he assures me those days are behind him, vegetarianism and all – but because of the clear joy he takes in the natural world, and his passion for art. With the Scottish Highlands piercing the sky behind his home in the small and quiet country village of Comrie in Perthshire, it is not difficult to see where he gets his inspiration.

Working with a variety of materials, Jonathan paints atmospheric and evocative works of wildlife and the environment, from small watercolours that intrigue and draw you into the world of an early-morning walk on a winter's day, to large oils, rich in life and colour.

Jonathan trained at the Byam Shaw School of Art, before completing an honours degree in Fine Art at Leeds College of Art, and has always concentrated on the natural world in his work: "It's always been there in some form or another. When I was a young child I used to take dead animals to bits just to see how they worked, and I just carried on from there."

That his work is popular amongst those in the sporting community is no great surprise – most of us have a deep respect and appreciation of the natural world – however, Jonathan himself is not a sportsman: "Some wildlife artists are real sportsmen, and it's reflected in their art, but I think of myself as more of a pure painter in which the natural world is my interest.

"I don't paint birds going over butts or guns, because you just don't have enough time as a painter – I don't have enough time to paint the pictures I want to. I'm interested in the process of painting and the integrity that goes into it.

"There are choices made when you paint a picture. When Landseer painted his stag (*Monarch of the Glen*, 1851) he chose to paint a royal, but it's more than just that – it's a reflection of the class and the times, the people who commissioned the

picture and who were hunting the animal.

"It looks very noble and grand, but someone else could have painted the stag as forlorn and knackered after the rut had ended. So, the artist comes with baggage: how am I going to portray the subject? What do I want to say about it? What am I saying about the people who commissioned the painting, wittingly or unwittingly, by the fact that I'm painting it? That's what being a painter is about."

Jonathan has explored a great range of subjects for his art over the years; from brick installations in the style of Carl Andre mourning the loss of the Javanese tiger, and a light box that highlighted flora and fauna in danger of extinction when he was a student, to his current works, which are inspired by poetry: "Because I am dyslexic I don't read novels, but I do love poetry. I'll read a poem and pick out a line, and it will

epitomise certain aspects of nature for me. I think that so many of these poets like Gerard Manley Hopkins and John Clare evoke a real love of the natural world, so I thought, why don't I paint some pictures of these poems and let them be their own inspiration?"

"I think one reason I'm trying to paint these poems is to help me to connect with the world. I'm not very good with words, but poems encapsulate like paintings do; it's a frame into which everything is put – the idea is thought and it will be complete and whole and within itself, in the same way as a painting should be. I guess somewhere along the line I'm hoping you'll find the poems that express that."

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Something that becomes clear very quickly when talking to Jonathan, over and above his passion for his subject, is his artistic knowledge. This extends beyond techniques and painters of the past – he has strong views on the world of art as a whole, and its place in the modern world: "A painting is a game – it's a 3D world being painted on a 2D surface, so it's all a trick of the eye. There's no point in being a painter these days unless you're prepared to use what painting gives you. It was fine in the past just to make pictures of grouse flying over