

# FRESH PAINT

INSPIRING NEW ARTWORKS, STRAIGHT OFF THE EASEL

## VERONICA SMIRNOFF

The memory of growing up in the USSR around the time of its demise is at the heart of Veronica Smirnoff's work.

Although she came to Edinburgh in her teens, later studying at the Slade School and the Royal Academy of Arts, her visual language still references a Russian sentiment, albeit filtered through cultural references from across the world. She now lives and works in London, and has exhibited around the globe.

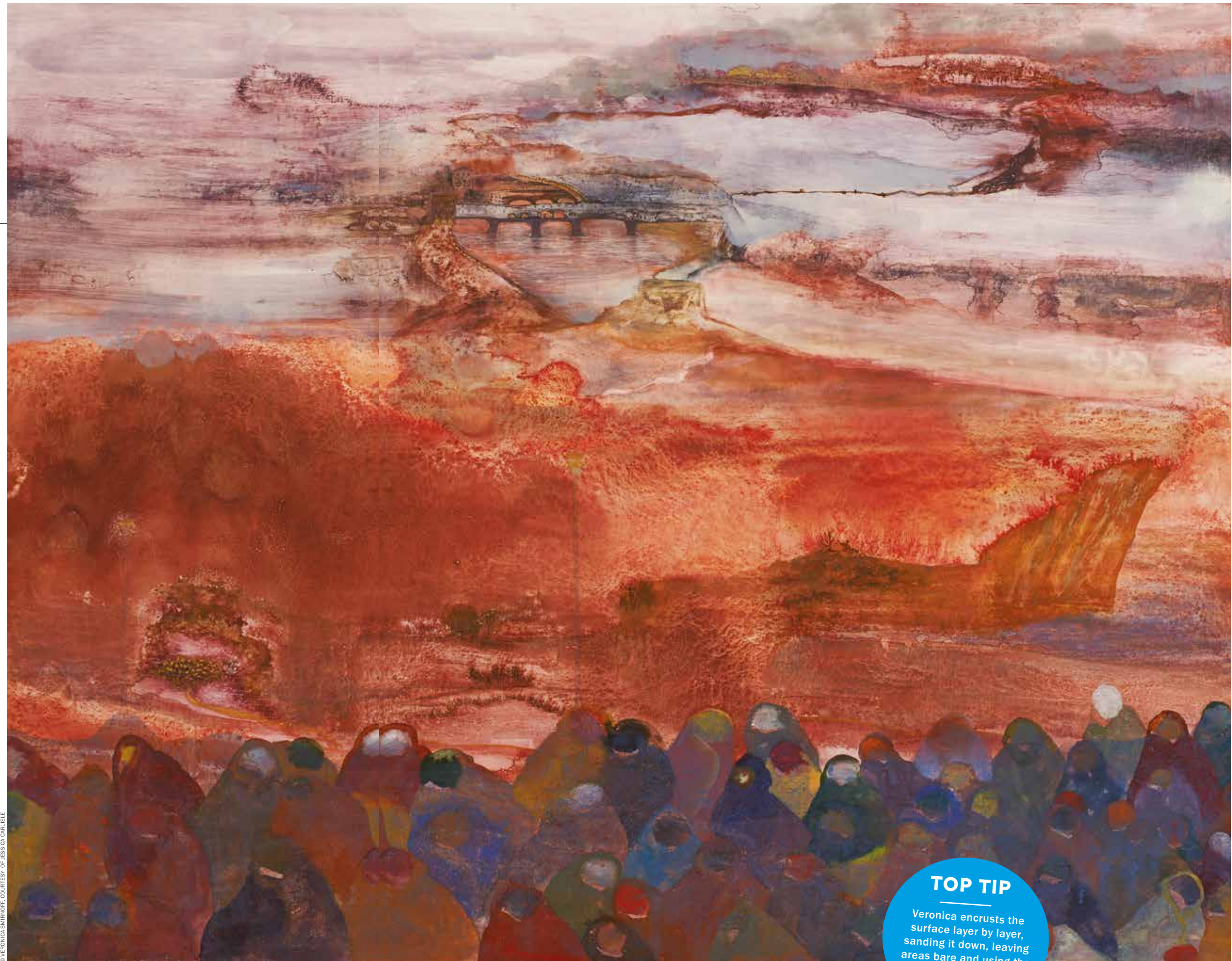
With its elements of folk art, Veronica's work explores the memories of places and people she left behind – as seen in her recent egg tempera painting *What Rocks Think Of*. It was inspired by the nature of the pigments, which came from minerals and stones ground into powder, and originated from loose sketching and the marking down of ideas. This resulted in the different registers and object positions in the composition. A sense of menace and foreboding looms in the blood-red landscape as people huddle together in the foreground. Veronica says it represents a “kind of uneasy calm after some cataclysmic event,” and that, “as one of the figures looks up, there's a sign of life, hope and the universality of human struggle”.

Creating work with egg tempera is a laborious business. “I start with mixing the paints,” Veronica says. “Each colour is reviewed individually by adding the egg yolk emulsion. I use the studio's floor to apply paint horizontally in blobs and splatters onto a board.” The process is dictated by the fluidity. With this painting, Veronica says, “the yolk in the emulsion was starting to indicate its finite decomposing quality, which impelled a looser way of applying the paint.”

Inspired by the Aristotle quote, “Nothing is what rocks dream about”, this is a painting which reflects how giving something form is a work of belief and imagination as much as a physical process, and reminds us that behind even simple iconography lies a complex web of ideas. Veronica Smirnoff's solo show *The Greater and Lesser Ways* is at Jessica Carlisle gallery, London W1U, until 4 March 2017. [www.jessicacarlisle.com](http://www.jessicacarlisle.com); [www.veronicasmirnoff.com](http://www.veronicasmirnoff.com)

RIGHT *What Rocks Think Of*, egg tempera on wood, 70x90cm

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### TOP TIP

Veronica encrusts the surface layer by layer, sanding it down, leaving areas bare and using the pigment particles to build texture



### KIRSTY WITHER

Many artists seek the technical challenge and aesthetic pleasure of painting a vase of flowers, but it doesn't always result in images that are packed with energy and movement. Yet, in the hands of Scottish artist Kirsty Wither, still lifes pulsate off the canvas.

Her recent work *Cobalt Capers* is a riot of colour and texture with shocking swathes of blue locked in a swirling embrace with the brightly coloured petals. "As it came along," says Kirsty, "I realised that it was all about movement – as though the flowers were dancing."

She first fell in love with painting in the art room of her Helensburgh secondary school, leading to a degree at Gray's School of Art in Aberdeen, where she was drilled in traditional techniques. "My tutors were real sticklers about learning to draw properly," she says. "We learned about lines, spaces between things, perspective and structure."

And while the messy charms of oil meant that it was always her preferred medium, painting flowers wasn't her first passion; she grappled with both nudes and

landscapes before finding her subject after art school. But, when she did find her motif, she knew she wanted a simpler approach to composition, "paring it down to a background and a foreground, each with its own importance."

In *Cobalt Capers*, the empty spaces are full of complex colour, texture and movement – as are the flowers – yet Kirsty never paints from life, instead relishing the liberation of creating her work from an idea and her own recollection. Look carefully and you'll spot that the flowers in the painting aren't botanically correct.

Kirsty's handling of paint has evolved over the past 27 years, using variations of palette knife, brushes and fingers to create energetic work that she, above all, wants to be uplifting. "I don't dwell on depressive subjects," she says. "But I don't think that means the paintings are easy or facile. People often have a simple, visceral response to art, and if that can be a joyful one, then that is what I'm aiming for."

Kirsty Wither's new show can be seen on [Portland Gallery's website](http://Portland Gallery's website) from 3 April to 28 April, with work viewed by appointment. [www.portlandgallery.com](http://www.portlandgallery.com); [www.kirstywither.com](http://www.kirstywither.com) >

ABOVE *Cobalt Capers*, oil on canvas, 41x51cm

## GARY NEWBOULT

When settling down to a painting, Portfolio Plus artist and classically trained musician Gary Newbould takes a lyrical approach. The self-taught artist allows his musical discipline to weave into his practice, seeing his preliminary drawings as the all-important scales, his chosen media as the instrument, and his observation and interpretation of a piece as his final performance. Not to mention the multiple rehearsals as he perfects strokes off the page.

Alongside his musical achievements, Gary was a civil servant for 30 years, and painted pet portraits for friends and colleagues. Recently, he has concentrated on art full time, namely watercolours, taking commissions and working from his home studio in a converted caravan.

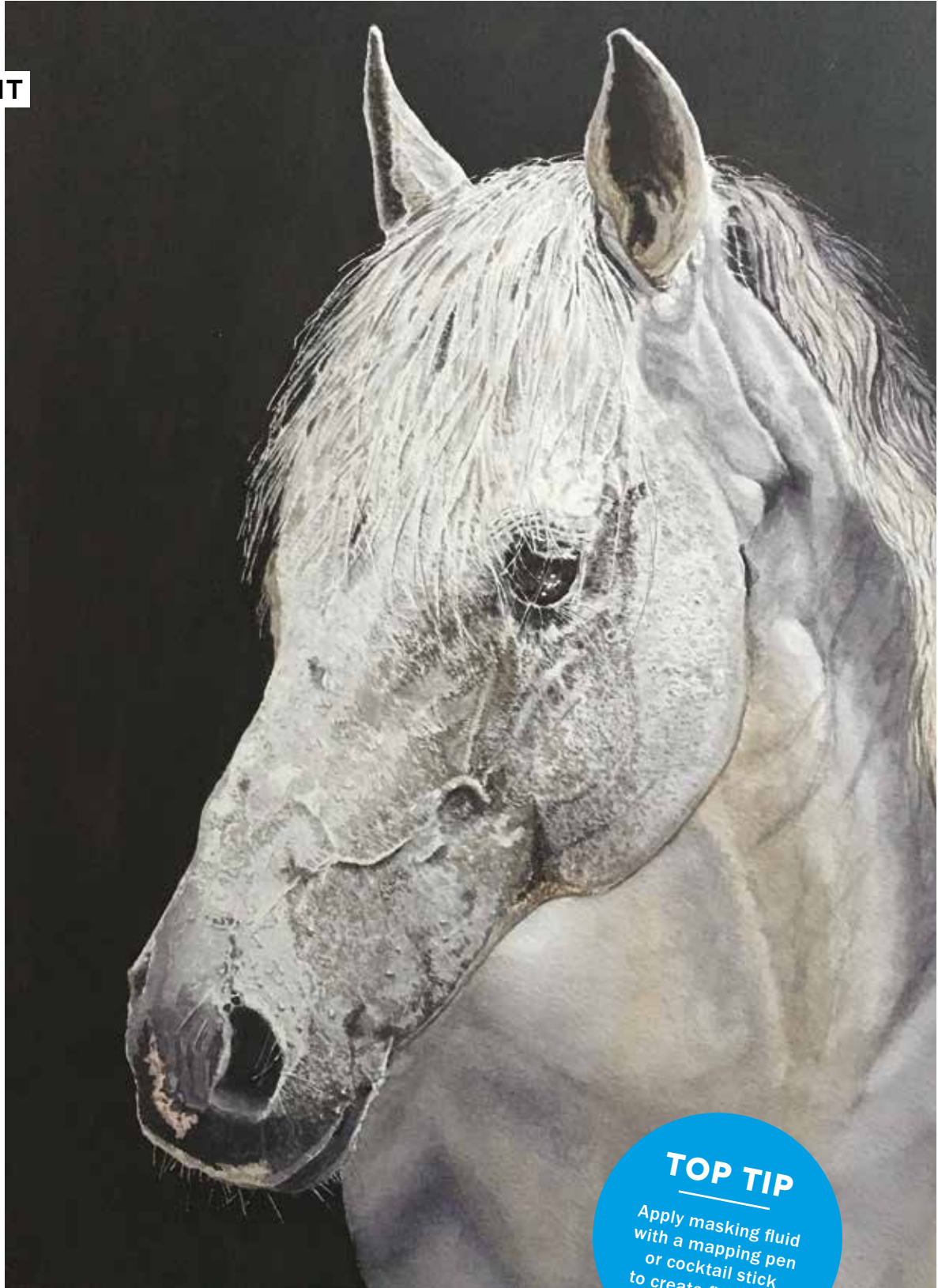
Based in Aubourn, near Lincoln, Gary is exposed to nature and, as an animal-lover, he relishes the birds of prey, snakes and amphibians that venture into his garden. However, the horse in Gary's watercolour *Grey Star* isn't painted from life but composed from dissected reference photographs, his memory and imagination. When painting an animal, he sometimes makes use of video, capturing stills to analyse movement and how the muscle groups work. For this work, he visited horses in a nearby field.

Careful planning, the right tools and a lot of patience allowed Gary to create the texture of the coat and mane. He applied masking fluid using old brushes, cocktail sticks and a mapping pen – useful for fine hairs and sharp edges – and layered washes, smoothing the edges as he went with a damp brush or kitchen roll.

Gary maximises paper whiteness by using transparent colours and restricts his palette to maintain continuity and balance. In *Grey Star* he used French Ultramarine, Burnt Sienna, Raw Umber, Rose Madder Genuine and a small amount of Permanent White Gouache for eye highlights. He achieved subtle greys and blacks by mixing French Ultramarine with Burnt Sienna or Raw Umber, making use of an eye dropper to delicately add water to the mixes.

Just as some of the best melodies are crafted with a few carefully chosen notes, Gary shows that minimising your palette and giving space to the white paper can produce a harmonious and sympathetic painting.

ABOVE *Grey Star*, watercolour on paper, 26x40cm



**TOP TIP**  
Apply masking fluid with a mapping pen or cocktail stick to create fine hairs or whiskers

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