

## GALLERY OF THE MONTH

# WHITEWATER CONTEMPORARY, POLZEATH

This 'white cube' gallery has thrived over the last couple of years, thanks to great artists, virtual 3D shows, and classically beautiful curation

These have been tough years for the arts, but one of Cornwall's rising new galleries has bucked that trend, doubling in size and quadrupling its artist list since the start of the pandemic. In 2019, owners Suki and Nick Wapshott took a gamble on expanding the original Whitewater Gallery, which looks out across Polzeath beach, with the aim of establishing a classic white space for the curation of fresh and progressive new art shows.

"As it turned out, the timing was tricky," says Nick, "but we'd had this plan in mind for some years and we weren't going to let the pandemic steal our dream of establishing a really great art space. Suki and I were confident in our vision for Whitewater Contemporary, and we felt strongly that there would be continuing demand for great art here in Cornwall, maybe even more demand - and we were right."

Nick and Suki's investment proved worthwhile, despite the turbulence of the following two years of restrictions. Though their doors were frequently shut in line with lockdown rules, they found innovative ways to keep collectors viewing and buying artwork.

"Straight away, we invested in a 3D virtual tour camera and software for the gallery so we could continue our exhibitions digitally," says Nick, "That allowed us to invite clients to 'walk through' the gallery space virtually, and browse our shows online whenever they wanted. It's innovative stuff - the tour even

lets you walk up close to an artwork and examine the surface detail."

Whitewater also began hosting online private views. "These were great fun!" says Suki. "Guests logged in for live Zoom events - lots of them sitting ready with their own wine and cheese - for a virtual tour of the show and a chat with the exhibiting artist. It worked beautifully! It gave our clients the chance to socialize, as they would at a real PV, and to carry on enjoying their love of art. It was one of those unexpected lockdown things that turned out to be incredibly positive and bonding for everyone. I almost miss them now our doors are open again."

The creation of Whitewater Contemporary has also allowed Nick and Suki to show major artists, plus new and very different work, at a time when artists are much in need of support from galleries. The pair are artists themselves - Nick is a surf and fine art photographer, Suki one of North Cornwall's best-known painters.

"It's important we show established work and help further the careers of new artists," says Suki. "We understand that artists need positive, long-term relationships with galleries, so they can focus on making great work."

A key part of that is Whitewater's monthly Featured Artist series, which launched in the spring of 2020 with award-winning new painter Luke Knight. This year, the series opened with painting and sculpture by Simeon Stafford, one of the

great characters of British art. Showing established names like Stafford alongside relatively unknown new talent makes for a fascinating programme of shows.

Next on the bill is rising young ceramicist Hannah Billingham, exhibiting throughout July. She is much talked about, as the winner of this year's Prestige Award's Yorkshire Ceramic Artist of the Year, as well as receiving the Gibney Prize for Outstanding Achievement in 2016 and a nomination for the Emerging Artist Award in 2019.

Her incredibly beautiful and complex work combines her passion for glazes, texture and in particular her obsessive love of symmetry and perfection. Each hand-thrown piece is detailed with an intricate surface of raised slip-trail dots, applied entirely by hand and eye, titled for the number of dots on its surface: for example, 'Two Thousand, Six Hundred and Seventy-Six'. These are special works, and extraordinary labors of devotion. "Every piece is an individually made, unique, one-of-a-kind treasure," says Hannah. Suki adds: "Hannah's work is exquisite and highly collectable. We are very proud to have her showing here at Whitewater, as we are with all our talented artists." ●

See Hannah Billingham on show from July 1 to 30, 2022 at Whitewater Contemporary, The Parade, Polzeath PL27 6SR. [whitewatercontemporary.co.uk](http://whitewatercontemporary.co.uk)

Words by Mercedes Smith

