

BRETT HUMPHRIES



Brett Humphries



Pomegranates & Green Bottle, 34 x 44cm

Brett Humphries

“I’m up for the fight” Is this how you would imagine a painter thinks every time he or she starts a new work? Probably not. We like to imagine that inspiration strikes and then the muse appears and takes over.

But for Brett Humphries every new painting is a technical challenge with lots of possibilities to be determined. Looking at the work you begin to see why. There are some painters whose approach is, let’s say, loose. They simply experiment until the right look is achieved. Not Brett. He makes photo-realistic still lifes. To get the desired effect, he has to arrange everything meticulously.

The process can take days. First Brett experiments with the layout of his subject matter, moving things around until the balance (and the light) is perfect. But in truth the process can begin even earlier. Why? Because Brett frequently bakes the delicious foodstuffs he commits to canvas.

He explains: “I get an idea of what I want to paint and I find that I can’t just go out and buy it. The only way to get the right effect is to make it myself.” The catch? Brett admits he is no chef. He’s had to teach himself. But if this new show for the Catto is any guide, he’s a quick learner.

Three examples stand out. Coffee And Walnut Cake is a sumptuous treat – for the eyes and the stomach. Brett says: “I had to think very carefully about this one. I wanted the icing to look a certain way, and had to get the weight of the sponge just right. I made the cake at my girlfriend’s and had to transport it 10 miles to my studio. It was pretty nerve-wracking.”

The second example is Knickerbocker Glory. Even by Brett’s high standards this is an astonishing technical achievement, with its delicious swirls of colour and uncannily lifelike glasswork. Brett is especially pleased

with the finished painting, not just for its technical accomplishment, but for the sense in which it summons a sensory childhood nostalgia.

And then there’s Artisan Chocolates. In this instance, Brett did buy what he painted. But he concedes this painting was easily the hardest of the show. “I was tested a lot with this one and it took me four weeks to complete – easily the longest of this group of paintings.”

These works, like most Brett paints, are more or less life-sized. This is part of the painter’s mission to blur the boundaries between painting and reality. Brett says he is actively trying to boggle the mind of his viewer. “I’ll do whatever I can to make the illusion as strong as possible,” he says. “I want the eyes and the brain to be in conflict. I want viewers to salivate even though they know what they are looking at is not real.”

Of course, he achieves it. But only because he has been refining his technique for so long. After taking a foundation course in art, Brett took a degree in Scientific and Natural History Illustration at Lancaster University. He later mastered computer-aided art as a designer and 3D sculptor at a CGI studio. His studies gave him the skills to achieve photo-realism in his work – and the confidence to become a full time painter in 2006.

This is Brett’s fifth show for the Catto, and it will no doubt bring gasps from viewers just as its predecessors have. There’s so much to admire here. Check out the water droplets on the side of the glass in Mojito Cocktail, for example. Amazing. But if you want to know what Brett himself considers the technical highlight, head to Balsamic Vinegar and Olives. “I’m so pleased with the blob of balsamic vinegar in this picture,” he says. “I worked really hard to get it right, to create the effect that it had sunk beneath the oil. I hadn’t tried that before. But I think I pulled it off.”

CATTO GALLERY

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Exhibition dates: 10th – 28th November 2022



Artisan Chocolates, 25 x 40cm

Coffee & Walnut Cake,
42 x 40cm





Negroni Cocktail, 22 x 27cm



Mojito Cocktail, 26 x 23cm



Martini Cocktail, 30 x 23cm



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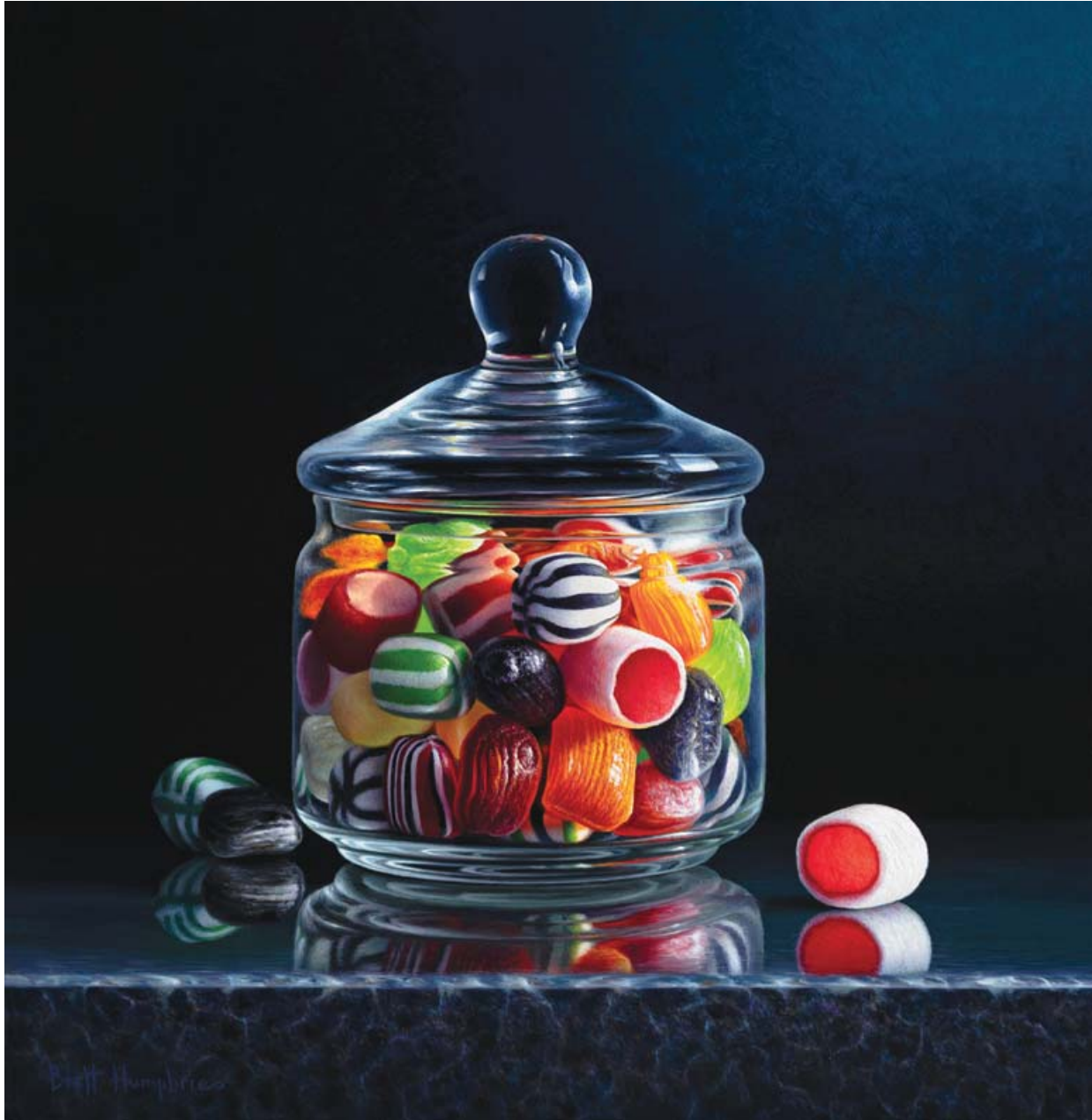
Swedish Buns, 27 x 38cm



Marmalade on Toast, 29 x 34cm



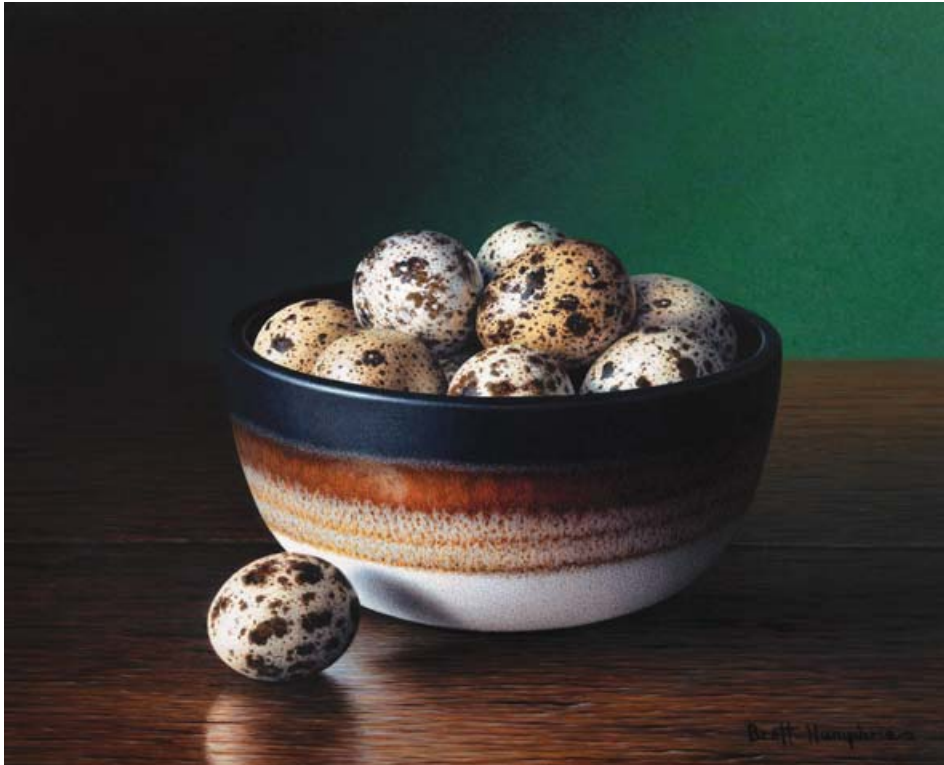
Flowers & Blue Vase,
57 x 40cm



Winter Mixture, 26 x 25cm



Jug & Pears, 26 x 40cm



Quail Eggs, 19 x 23cm



Wild Blackberries, 22 x 24cm



Red Carnations, 34 x 22cm



Knickerbocker Glory, 34 x 24cm



Balsamic Vinegar & Olives, 26 x 32cm