

Midlands Magazine of the Year

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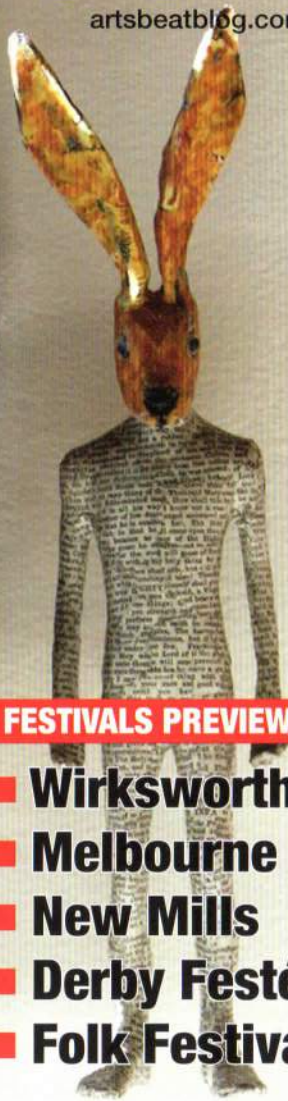
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artsbeatblog.com

## Amazing paper figures

Spectacular  
Derby Festé

Monumental  
sculptures



### FESTIVALS PREVIEW

- **Wirksworth**
- **Melbourne**
- **New Mills**
- **Derby Festé**
- **Folk Festival**

# Art is a Noble calling

Artist Lewis Nobel chats to artsbeat's Amanda Penman

**W**e were tying up the interview and my notebook and pen were being thrust back into my bag when Lewis Noble looked as if he had something to add.

I paused to let him speak and he blurted out that he was also in a band called the A52s, was I interested?

Well, yes, of course I was. To be honest I couldn't believe I hadn't wheedled it out of him earlier.

I was there to talk to him about his work as a landscape artist and we had covered all aspects of his painting, his inspiration and the solo exhibitions he had in the pipeline but he had made no mention of his musical side – I must have been slacking with my penetrating questions.

But as soon as he explained he sang, played guitar, piano accordion and the keyboards it made everything else he had told about the way he worked fall into place.

He is a man who likes to express himself, who likes to experience life with all of his senses and then share with



Lewis in his Ashbourne studio at the St John Street Gallery



others what he has felt.

With the music you can hear it and see the pleasure in his face. With the paintings it is all there on the canvas – you just have to use your imagination.

The Parwich artist says he considers his expressive landscapes as stand-ins for the rolling hills, moorlands and rivers of the Peak District and that his aim is to give the paintings enough space for the imagination of the viewer.

“I am attempting to walk the tightrope between representational and expressive painting. I like to think my paintings are alive. They are not just facsimiles of what the landscape looks like in a pictorial way. They are still happening – the opposite of a moment frozen in time.

“It is all about how it feels for me when I am out there. I try to show how the wind feels on your face, whether I was hot, cold or hungry. Paintings have the ability to be so much more than just what the landscape looks like – they are also about the person who is creating it.”

Above, from left: In a Landscape, Shadow Cast in the Dale and Rivers and Pathways  
Previous page: Ring Out Wild Bells to a Wild Sky



The layers of oils  
are eroded and  
repainted to echo  
the landscape

Photography, reckons the artist, has liberated painting. His reasoning is that at one time paintings were the only way of recording the landscape and needed to be more precise but nowadays we can (and do) take more than enough pictures of what is around us.

Carrying on with his theme of film and photography Lewis says he operates in a very similar way to a filmmaker.

“They can record hours of film but when they get back to the studio they edit out a great deal and cut it back to maybe just three minutes. They are making sense of what they have recorded and finding the essence of it.

“That’s really what I am trying to do with the sketches, collages and small en plein air



paintings I make when I am out in the landscape. At the time I don’t really think about what I am doing – I am information gathering.

“When I get back to the studio I condense it all down and put it back together again in a way which is less conventional.”

Lewis creates his work by building up many layers of oil paint, eroding and repainting them, making scratch marks – echoing the landscape that has developed over thousands of years.

As a lad growing up in the suburbs of London the artist had no plans to move to rural Britain to paint landscapes. When he first left university at Birmingham with a Fine Art degree he was painting figures and urban architecture out of a rough and ready studio in the Old Bird’s Custard Factory (before it became the chichi creative quarter it is today).

He only moved to Derbyshire 20 years ago because his wife Mandy’s job was relocated to Derby. The couple, who have three children, lived in

Ashbourne for a while and then moved to Parwich.

“At first it seemed a bit obvious to paint landscapes and out of sheer bloody mindedness I said ‘I am not going to paint landscapes just because I am in the countryside’ but then slowly my figures turned to figures in the landscape and then landscapes...”

Lewis, who has his studio in part of the St John Street Gallery in Ashbourne, was the first winner of the Jonathan Vickers Fine Art Award in 2000, and is staging a solo exhibition at Tarpey Gallery in Castle Donington from September 26-October 31 and at St John in October. He also has work at Bath Contemporary from September 1-26 and Signet Contemporary Art, Kings Road, Chelsea in October. Go to his website [lewisnoble.co.uk](http://lewisnoble.co.uk) for more information.

■ For those of you who are interested in his music then you need to know that the A52s will be playing at the Wirksworth Festival on September 12.