

# THE RAINBOW

## Box Art Group Newsletter - Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> June 2022

Written by and for the members of Box Art Group (No. 75)

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### Highlights '21 –'22

The Group's final session for the '21 – '22 year was on 16<sup>th</sup> June, and we meet again in the hall on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> September, though we might manage a few outdoor sessions over the summer.

In looking through some of the Rainbow newsletters for this year, the October 15<sup>th</sup> issue was the 2021 Exhibition Special, and described some of the exhibits, including David's 'Under the Red Umbrella', voted the visitors favourite. The remainder of the term included Beth's printing workshop, the 'Donate and Buy' event organised by Tracy, with Mimi's help, the Autumn Competition, won by Richard with his Calligraphy, and the Christmas Social.

The Spring term started with a backward step as far as the Covid rules went, but we struggled on, and members provided lots of varied works for the newsletter, completed during the Christmas break. Outdoor sessions at Egypt Mill and Winstone's Ice Cream Factory helped, and Beth also kept us on our toes with demonstrations of the application of gold leaf, and on colour mixing. The Spring term competition was won by Lynne with a bonfire and dodgy shadows.

The summer term was extended by 4 weeks from the original plan, but it was noted that the numbers attending the Thursday afternoon sessions in June dropped significantly due to holidays and similar events, so we shall discuss this at the AGM. The summer term competition was replaced by a Jubilee Celebration around portraits of the Queen.

I'd like to include my thanks to our tutors, to the committee for their support during the year, Tracy, for the sale event in particular, and to all the contributors to this newsletter, Thank You.

## Free Alternatives to Photoshop

A recent “tea” conversation at the Box Art Group turned on the question of whether GIMP (<https://www.gimp.org>) - the “open source” image editor - would be an acceptable substitute for Photoshop.

Adobe, Photoshop’s creators, have now moved to a “software on demand” business model, which means you pay a monthly fee to license a selected package of their image management tools, usually with a certain amount of “cloud” storage so you can access your work from any computer. I take quite a lot of photographs, but I only need the power of something like Photoshop at most once or twice a week, and on that basis the cost-per-frame handled would typically work out at £1-£2, and it makes me think that I could be satisfied with a tool almost as powerful even if it did not have the same professional polish.

Of course, if you are earning a living that involves regular and sophisticated image processing, or even if you are a very keen amateur photographer processing thousands of images each year, you may well consider that a reliable regularly updated professional suite of well integrated, well documented and easy-to-use software tools is well worth the monthly licence fee. Most professionals would see it as a reasonable business overhead and the keen amateur spending thousands of pounds on kit knows that he will not get the best from his high-end cameras without high-end post-processing.

If money is no object, Adobe’s “industry-standard” Creative Suite is certainly a safe option, but if like me you know that you are unlikely to use more than a small fraction of its capability, and then only infrequently, you may well look around for alternatives that will provide the functionality you require at lower or even no cost.

The nearest equivalent to Photoshop is indeed GIMP, which is freely downloadable, runs on just about any computer you are likely to find around at present (unless you like me you still have not thrown away all your old hardware). Furthermore, unless you have particularly demanding requirements it will almost certainly provide all the capabilities that you might need, and for most people a good deal more than they actually need.

I shall, however, also take a look at *Digikam* (also open source, <https://www.digikam.org>) which is roughly equivalent to *Lightroom*, Adobe’s “Creative Asset Management” tool. *Digikam* maintains a database which allows you to associate descriptive tags with images, and group them into collections in a variety of useful ways. (This is very useful if you are assembling a collection of “reference photos” to support art-work.) It does, however, also provide an adequate image editor that covers at least 95% of my photo manipulation needs. I have installed it on my Windows laptop, along with GIMP for the small amount of work that *Digikam* does not cover.

Since GIMP and *Digikam* are free, there must be some downside, or everyone would be using them. That is certainly the case, but it comes down to a cost vs convenience balance that is essentially a matter of personal choice, taste and experience. The following comments are directed towards GIMP, but most of them also apply to *Digikam*.

Firstly, GIMP is *not* Photoshop. If you have already learned the Photoshop/Adobe way of doing things (and low-cost educational licences mean that it is often taught in schools and colleges) there will need to be a bit of re-learning. GIMP’s volunteer community of developers could not copy the Photoshop style without infringing copyright - and maybe they even thought that they could do better (because they do include some very talented designers). Nevertheless, Adobe has been able to spend large amounts of money in polishing Photoshop to a high professional gloss, while the GIMP team gave a lot of attention to supplying a rich range functionality and less thought to making it intuitive. Nevertheless, the common tasks are usually pretty straightforward.

Secondly, the GIMP documentation is not nearly as good as Photoshop. It is not bad, in fact some of the tutorials are very useful, but I think that it lacks the polish that comes when you hire (at considerable expense) top-class professional documentation authors. I am perhaps not the best judge in this area, because I have spent 40 years building, documenting and using complex software, so I have more than average ability to think my way into the heads of other software designers. The bottom line is that it would probably take you longer with GIMP than with Photoshop to work out how to accomplish for the first time

some complex multi-step image processing task. For the very common and straightforward tasks there is probably not all that much difference.

Thirdly, GIMP is not seamlessly integrated with the other tools that are required by those who work with large collection of images. Professional photographers and graphic artists have high rates of image throughput, and need reliable tools to manage libraries of many tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of images. They also want to toss images between different tools with the minimum of effort. If you are dealing with the products of a photoshoot comprising hundreds of images, a few extra seconds handling each frame quickly adds up to extra hours. I am not by any means the most active of amateur photographers, but my library grows by several thousand images each year. Without a systematic approach to curation using a suitable software tool I could easily lose useful material in the general photographic noise.

Many of the comments I made about GIMP, in term of polish and documentation, apply to Digikam, but it certainly seems to do an adequate job once you have adjusted to its world-view. (There will always be a learning curve and a certain amount of pain associated with moving from an "industry-standard" product.) Nevertheless, if you have a sufficiently large collection of images such that a certain amount of curation and cataloguing would be sensible, but you do not need particularly sophisticated image editing, Digikam may well be the tool you need, rather than GIMP.

There are many other image management tools available, often well recommended by users on the web, some free, some low-cost. I did a survey of user comments and eventually choose to try Digikam first. It seemed to be good enough, so I have not tried to install and use any of the others. I am therefore not in a position to give my own survey recommendations.

Although I have installed Digikam and GIMP on my Windows laptop, I also use an Apple Mac desktop. (There are reasons why a lot of creatives like working with Apple's hardware and software, but that is another story.) MacOS has its own integrated "Photos" application, providing fairly intuitive asset management and editing (cropping, colour balance, exposure adjustment, etc.) - roughly functionally equivalent to Lightroom or Digikam though a perhaps less comprehensive. That is what I use most of the time, and I can also call up GIMP (from within Apple Photos) when I want something with more power. My style of photography does not depend on heavy image manipulation. (Though, I still like to work with monochrome images from time to time, and with GIMP I can do some of the "dodge-and-burn" type manipulations that I used to do in a darkroom.) In practice, GIMP fires-up for only a few percent of the frames I want to keep. The Photos/GIMP combination would, however, not do the trick if my library were a factor of ten larger, or if I had professional customers, but at present it floats my boat.

The main potential problem with Apple Photos, and potentially with other photo management applications, is a certain amount of lock-in: image asset management involves adding a lot of "meta-data" to frames which the software typically store in a proprietary database that is separate from the image file itself. Having invested a great deal of time in adding important descriptive and tagging information, you do not want to risk losing it should the software become obsolete. I know, however, that Adobe's "Lightroom" can, however, open a backdoor into Apple Photos and grab all the meta data. (In fact, with my software development background I am pretty sure I could open this door myself, if I wished.) Hence, I do know that I have a potential route out of lock-in - even if it is in the direction of more expensive software.

It may well be worth me organising a short Thursday afternoon teach-in for the autumn for those interesting in the possibility of using GIMP or Digikam.

*Michael McEllin*

## **Osprey**

It is in watercolour and the title is "Flying before the Storm". It started as a view of Chesil Bank at Portland, but Roxy suggested cutting off the lower part and this has made the clouds more dramatic as a backdrop for an osprey.

*Hilary*



### Sketches from Scotland

Hot from the page - current outdoor sketching in the NW of Scotland. Mostly taking about 10-15 minutes, with notebook pages held down by elastic bands (very windy!). A couple redone back at the cottage from a photo, when rain stopped play.

*Michael*





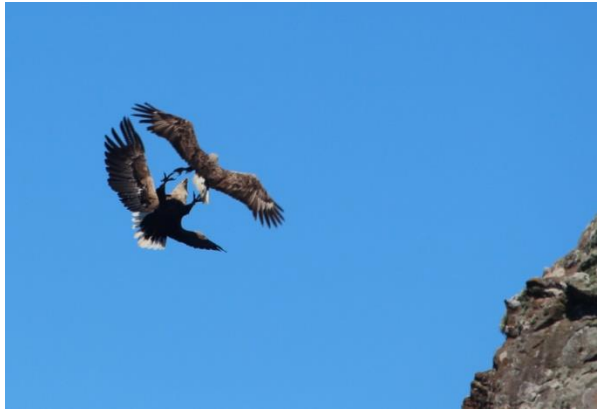
**More Sketches from Scotland**

View from the holiday cottage looking North toward Skye. And a calm sea and pebble beach.

*Pete*



I can't resist including a couple of photos from my recent Scotland trip; a dolphin performing just off the Rosemarkie beach, and a pair of white tailed eagles playing footsie over Mull.



**Local Exhibitions (and plein air sessions)**

Art in Brownhill is on from 16 to 24 July, with work from 16 artists. Jill H and I have work in plus painters, photography, sculpture, ceramics and glass work. As the setting of the church is lovely, I thought it might be nice to have a plein air session for box art group at 2pm on Thursday 21st July, weather permitting. There will also be a public plein air session at 11am on Friday 22nd with Jill H. And also on Sunday morning 24th with Owen James.

No loo on site but a couple of minutes drive from Lavender Bake House for tea and cake!

*Beth*

**Our Exhibition Events**

The Box Art Group Exhibition in the village hall is planned for 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> October, with set-up on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup>, so we won't have a painting session that afternoon. We'll sort out the arrangements for this exhibition when we start the Autumn term.

*Pete*