

# HEART OF THE MATTER


Steven Lindsay swapped art school for *Top of the Pops* when his band hit the charts in the 1980s. Now, he has revived his love of painting and is building a new career in the visual arts

Words Catherine Coyle


Steven Lindsay is brow. That's the view of fans of his music. Fans of his art, however, are quickly learning that the same applies to his paintings. Steven is laughing, head in hands. "That fan site, ([stevenlindsayisbrow.com](http://stevenlindsayisbrow.com)) is by an American guy who keeps in touch and comes to our gigs," he says, admitting it feels a little strange. Despite being the frontman – vocalist and guitarist – of 1980s Scottish band The Big Dish, Steven is a rather quiet, unassuming fellow. It probably feels strange to him now; rather than taking centre stage, belting out a crowd-pleaser, he's more likely to be found alone in his studio, surrounded by canvases and oil paint.

Although Steven graduated from Glasgow School of Art in 1986, he's only really embarking on a career as a painter now. As a student, he and his band were signed up by Virgin and took off on a musical adventure. "I didn't paint during that time, but I did still draw," he recalls. "I got involved in the art for our record sleeves." The band put out three albums before they split in 1991, with Steven recording solo for a time.

Jaded with the music business, painting offered a new creative outlet. He had studied under the late Scottish Colourist John Cunningham and his contemporaries included painters Alison Watt and Stephen Conroy and sculptor ▶



[Top] Steven at his easel in his studio at home. He prefers to paint from life, arguing that while photographs can be a useful reference, the human eye will see much more. [Above] Drawing has always been important to him, even at the time when the band were successful and he'd given up painting



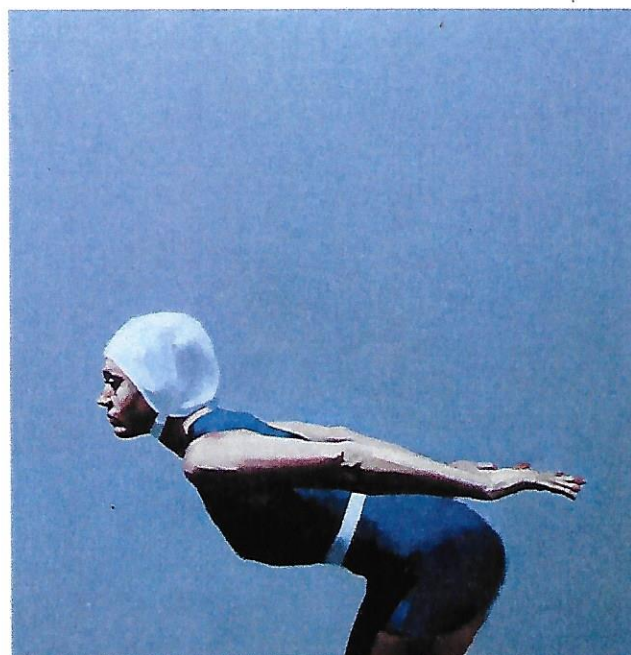


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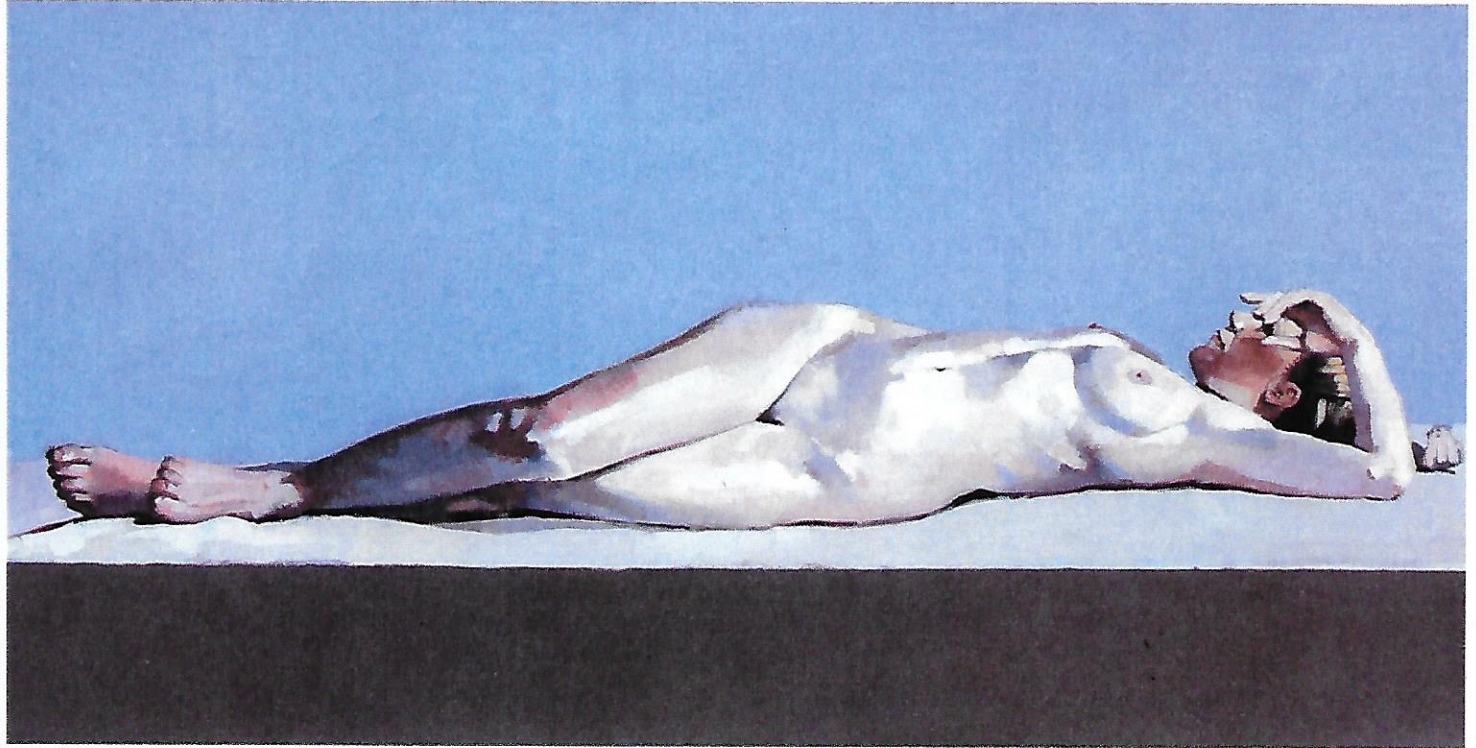
Andy Scott – a lively, popular set who have managed to be both artistically and commercially successful. His time there was not, perhaps, as he'd imagined it – drawing and painting was a notoriously disciplined subject and work was solitary with the onus on students to discover things for themselves, as opposed to turning up and taking notes from a lecturer. Today's GSA, says Steven, has evolved (he goes to the degree shows every year to check out new artists) – the almost 'lost art of painting' is, he believes, being replaced by the trend for conceptual art and installations.

In 2008/9, Steven went back to do life-drawing classes at night and then, three years ago, began painting again. "I wanted to get my hand in again," he explains. "With something like life painting, I think you have to get the technical side of things right." He was encouraged to enter the (now defunct) Aspect Prize and his work was shortlisted in 2010. An exhibition at the Fleming Collection ensued and other galleries started calling, looking to show his work.

Things have quickly gathered pace: as we speak, he is sending paintings to Stockholm for a group exhibition; propped against his studio walls are several unfinished works for his first solo show, in Bristol; and he's also in the midst of a London show that examines the nude in art. It's an ideal



[Top row, left to right] Three recent canvases, *Some Days Are Better Than Others*, *Lord Jim* and *Reclining Nude*. [Above] *Swimming Against a Tide of Indifference*



place for his work: Steven is an old-school figurative painter working oil on canvas. "I do the odd still-life but it's always people in my paintings," he explains.

He's fascinated with the notion that people feel insecure and unsettled in the modern world and his nude figures, many of them wearing gas masks, seek to show that sense of vulnerability. "It's hit a note," he believes. "They have all been snapped up," he smiles.

Looking to masters like Vermeer and Rembrandt, Steven's work is certainly in the painterly tradition but he likes to put a contemporary spin on his works, even if it's just the backdrop. The craft of what he does – sketching, transferring to canvas, layering the oils, allowing the paint to dry – seems as important to him as the finished product. He insists on working from life, describing how photographs can help with aspects such as light but the human eye sees so much more.

For him, layering the paint to create depth, seeing the brush marks on the canvas and watching them provide another angle to the story behind the frame completes the picture. All of his figurative works strive to convey that sense of 'elsewhere-ness' as the artist puts it: that unearthly quality that takes the viewer beyond this world.

With several paintings on the go at any one time, Steven is kept busy, buoyed by his enthusiasm for this new beginning. "You never know how each painting is going to end up," he smiles, confessing that he fails more than he succeeds.

For visitors to his fan site, there's a reunion of The Big Dish in January 2014 at the Hydro in Glasgow when the band will be special guests of fellow Scots Del Amitri to look forward to. It seems though, that whether it's music or art, Steven Lindsay will remain brow. ■



## HOW TO...

### commission a painting from Steven Lindsay

- "I would normally start proceedings with a chat on the phone or in person."
- "We would then establish the subject matter of the painting. Is it something specific – a portrait, say? Or just something in my normal style?"
- "Is there a deadline for completion? Are sketches or images of progress required?"
- "The cost is usually dictated by the size of the painting; prices on application."