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GLEN SCOLLER:

UNDER SOUTHERN SKIES

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Viewpoint

Glen Scouller's latest paintings brilliantly evoke the atmosphere of rural France, says *Jim Manson*

The Glasgow-born painter, Glen Scouller, reminds me that there is, of course, a long tradition of Scottish artists travelling south to experience the brilliant light and powerfully evocative landscape of southern France and Italy. "Think of the Glasgow Boys, or the Scottish Colourists – Fergusson, Cadell, Peploe," he says.

He has just been talking about his own passion for southern France, Provence in particular, and why he finds that now he spends more time there than ever. He sums it up in a sentence: "I can't think of many things better than being outside in the open countryside painting, with the hot sun on your back."

It's the simple, elemental things which continue to thrill and inspire him: "Knowing how to interpret in paint something as simple as sunlight hitting a stone wall is an incredible challenge. It probably sounds clichéd but like that but it's a completely compelling subject."

Scouller's latest paintings brilliantly evoke the atmosphere of rural France in spring time, when the morning chill is burning off earlier each day as the sun climbs higher in the sky.

Lemon yellows, pale blues, burnt orange and violet fuse on the canvas

The quick, gestural brush work and sharply observed colour in paintings like *The Yellow Bicycle* and *Returning Home* distil the essence of the back streets of the small town of La Basse Gaude. Lemon yellows, pale blues, burnt orange and violet fuse on the canvas to create a palpable freshness.



Left: *Climbing Stairs, La Basse Gaude*, 52cmsx70cms, watercolour on paper.



Returning Home, La Basse Gaude, oil on canvas, 75cmsx100cms.

Scouller turns to watercolour for *Climbing Stairs*, another painting in the same series of pictures. Citrus yellows and greens, shades of cobalt, hot oranges and reds bleed across the paper; shape and form are anchored to the page by calligraphic over-drawing.

Scouller started painting watercolours "seriously" about six years ago and now believes the move acted as a catalyst for a more lighter palette generally. He thrives on the spontaneity of watercolour. "It's a first time thing with watercolour, there's a natural vitality to the medium." He never underdraws, preferring to "push the image about on the page". Sometimes the paint is allowed to float across the surface of the picture, at other times it is smudged and scuffed into the paper.

"Paint is a big thing for me," he says. "The physicality of painting is important, and so is the paint itself. I enjoy the tensions created by the combination of thick and thin paint on the canvas."

Scouller paints quickly. His outdoor paintings are sometimes completed inside three or four hours. "But it's not really a question of time," he says. "Twenty years ago I didn't have the facility to work in the way that I do now. It is the accrual of knowledge and experience that is the key." He will also spend days searching for precisely the right subject to paint. Invariably this will contain a domestic focus – a farmhouse, a tangle of farm equipment, a

bicycle propped against a wall – and, increasingly, people; usually in the mid-distance, quietly going about their business. "Big skies and epic scale landscapes don't really interest me, I like the human element".

INFLUENCES

I ask Glen Scouller about his painting 'style', anticipating that he will dislike the word. People comment that his work is very recognisable and I want to know what he thinks about that. "I see influences of other painters in my work," he says, naming the Bonnard and Vuillard, along with the Fauves. "But I'm never conscious when I am painting of having a particular style. Ideas, new possibilities, are generated by the painting process itself. I think my work has changed over the years, and continues to change. But these changes tend to be evolutionary, too small to detect at any one point in time."

It follows that Scouller is reluctant to make predictions about the direction in which his work is heading. The only thing he will speculate on is the scale of his paintings. He has just completed work on a new studio, a converted farm building, at his home in Ayrshire. "It's been something of a dream since leaving art school to have a purpose-designed, spacious studio. It finally gives me the opportunity to increase the scale of the paintings, which I'm excited about."

With a series of major new commissions coming up, and another one-man show early next year at the Open Air Gallery in Edinburgh, Glen Scouller's reputation continues to grow. Meanwhile, the lure of southern skies is likely to have as strong a pull on this Scottish-based artist as it ever has, new studio or not.

■ Glen Scouller's paintings are available through Roger Billcliffe Fine Art, Glasgow; the Portland Gallery, London; and the Corrymella Scott Gallery, Newcastle.