

A life less ordinary

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John Hudson finds out more about the artist hailed as the new [Beryl Cook](#), who's bringing her latest work to [Bristol](#) for a solo show at Beryl's favourite gallery

The worldwide popularity of Beryl Cook owed much to the Bristol art gallery that spotted her potential early on and published scores of her prints until her death last year.

And now, with an exhibition beginning on Monday, the Alexander Gallery is showcasing an artist who, if not the new Beryl Cook, is an entertainer who ticks many of the same boxes.

"We have been looking for someone to follow on from Beryl ever since her death," says the gallery's Peter Slade.

"Not to copy her, of course – I don't think anyone could do that – but to capture the public imagination in the same way.

"Now I believe we have found her, and her name is Angela Smyth. Beryl was perhaps more of a people watcher, whereas Angela's work has more of a 'flight of fancy' element to it, and contains an escapism and pathos that Beryl definitely didn't have.

"But the major similarities are that the pictures are in the main humorous, with a positive and empowering way of depicting women. In fact, it is mainly women who buy the work of both artists.

"The differences are in the subject matter. Beryl's humour and message was very immediate, whereas in some cases, Angela's meaning has to be teased out from the visual clues in the painting."

Peter says his gallery has been aware of Angela, who comes from [West Yorkshire](#), for about three years. "We've taken her under our wing, worked very closely with her and offered advice on all levels for the best way for her to progress," he says.

"Beryl first came to national prominence in 1976, and we published her first signed limited

edition in the following year. The next came in 1979 and we released at least one new title each year up to January last year.

"When we first published her work there was no market for humorous pictures of any description, and it was difficult to persuade other galleries to stock her prints.

"The faith and commitment of those that did was backed by the response of the public, who very quickly took Beryl and her sense of humour to their hearts.

"I believe Angela has the talent to make a similar long-term impact, with her life-affirming, quirky paintings that connect with people."

Angela Smyth has certainly come a long way remarkably quickly, from selling paintings in a local cafe to exhibiting at galleries around the UK and winning a worldwide publishing deal with the influential Art Group.

She thrives on contact with her collectors and often draws them dedications and little sketches to go with the paintings. They, in turn, fire her imagination for new works, and not a few have appeared in later paintings.

Last month the women's magazine *Red* honoured Angela in its "Red's Hot Women" awards to celebrate [Britain](#)'s most inspiring working women, her paintings hang in collections from [Japan](#) to [America](#) and her images are published as prints and cards in more than 20 countries.

She still can't quite believe how quickly it has all happened. "After all, I've been painting seriously for just three years, now," she says.

"It all started when I supplied 10 paintings to a cafe near where I live in West Yorkshire. They all sold within a week, and it went from there.

"I sometimes get emails from people who would love to paint for a living and my advice to them is to keep going. You never know what opportunities are around the corner.

"I have loved art ever since I was little, when my late father [Patrick](#) would sit with me in the Irish Club in [Halifax](#), teaching me to draw shire horses.

"It stuck with me from there, and while I was growing I was never without a pen and paper.

"It was only when I had my son [Alistair](#) that I decided to give painting a proper go. While Ali was sleeping I would do the odd painting or drawing, and I found I still really loved doing it.

"I now have my own studio, 15 minutes' walk from home and it's above my favourite cafe. I always start the day with a latte downstairs and then wander up and get stuck in.

"I live in a little village overlooking fields with maniac cows – and they have appeared in a few paintings, too! I'm kept constantly busy, and there is always a waiting list for new pictures, even though I paint as fast as I can, latte breaks allowing."

Angela's husband Chris, who works in design and marketing, helps her self-publish her limited edition prints. "We do our own marketing and work extremely closely with some amazing galleries and people," she says.

"Most of all, I'm astounded by the people who buy and collect my pictures. Whenever I meet them, they are all – without exception – lovely. I'm really looking forward to meeting more in Bristol this month."

This is Angela's second solo exhibition at the Alexander Gallery, and her reputation has spread far and wide since her first in 2007.

The show is titled *Make Mine a Life Less Ordinary: Scenes from a night in a small town*, and includes *Swiss Roll*, her largest and most challenging painting to date, inspired by the film *Chocolat*.

"These pictures are inspired by the place I live," she says. "I got to wondering what goes on when the weekend comes, and everyone dons their best clothes and hits the town.

"I admit my imagination has gone a bit mad, so these pictures include talent contests with performing dogs, dancing couples and a roll in a baker's window – and not a bread roll, either!

"Then there are long, luxurious baths, showgirls, bad girls from out of town and a few naughty ones as well.

"That's my little world. All right, it's a strange one. But I hope people will also find it's a tiny bit true."

The exhibition, at the Alexander Gallery, 122 Whiteladies Road, Bristol BS8 2RP runs from Monday until December 31, 9am-5.30pm Monday to Saturday.

Read more about

[Patrick](#), [Alistair](#), [John Hudson](#), [Beryl Cook](#), [United Kingdom](#), [Japan](#), [Britain](#), [America](#), [West Yorkshire](#), [Halifax](#), [Bristol](#), [Bristol Art Gallery](#), [painting](#)





