

The Glassy Knoll

Viewed from the studio window at Charlotte Verity's new home in Somerset, one particular hill already features large in the artist's daily walks and work – including delicate studies of its flora that she meticulously paints on Perspex before printing. She's very clearly on to a winner here, says Tania Compton. Photography: Sophie Wedgwood



Charlotte Verity works on a watercolour monotype, a medium that's relatively new to her repertoire. Each one is built up in layers – here she holds a clear sheet of winter jasmine, with apple blossom and primroses on either side of her



On a table as we enter the enfilade of Charlotte Verity's new studios in Somerset is a branch of beech leaves in a vase. 'They were in bud yesterday [...] and there they are today in leaf,' she says. This moment of magic is echoed in one of the artist's favourite poems, 'Leaf' by Alice Oswald: 'the heartbeat of dead wood... a small hand unfolding, feeling about'. Charlotte has it pinned to a board in her main studio, penned in her own hand alongside works by Emily Dickinson, John Clare, Edward Thomas and Seamus Heaney. These exercises in ink on different Japanese papers, like devotionals, are in company with a collage of postcards that bestow inspiration for colour, space and form. Two Rothkos and two Masaccios, Chardin's *Girl with a Racquet*, Barbara Hepworth and David Smith, the studies of Monet and

Twombly alongside Constable skies and a Samuel Palmer full moon – these scenes are echoed from inside out as the studio's wide sliding glass doors overlook the Mendips. Those soft outlying hills feature in one of her new canvases, the finished state of which is still under consideration.

The painting we are looking at features the soft grassy knoll visible from where we are standing. When Charlotte and her husband, the painter Christopher Le Brun, moved here from London, its apex was topped by a majestic sycamore whose storm-torn trunk now lies fallen, but it's still a focal point. This painting began as a still life, 'but it wasn't working and somehow the landscape came to my rescue when I was a bit desperate. I think about landscape all the time,' says Charlotte. She walks through it daily, from their 15 acres

of stream-coursing meadows, orchard and garden to the fields beyond. The pool of blue in the centre of this painting was inspired by one such ramble in deep winter, up along a high path from where Charlotte mistook the deep frost filling the valley for a huge lake. In the painting, a blast of wind-blown tulip-tree leaves darts across the blue, the same leaves that now line a shelf by the window, leathery, buckled and sculptural. Another luminous canvas features nettles and grasses, neither of which Charlotte had painted before coming to Somerset, picked from the banks of the stream whose calming gurgle is the soundtrack to her working day.

This abundance of new subjects makes the artist profoundly happy. 'Because of the huge amount of choice, I've got to be intuitive here, so instead of big paintings

Seen through the branches of a walnut tree, and lying beyond a stream lined with willow and alder, is the hill that has inspired the artist ever since she and her husband, the painter Christopher Le Brun, moved to the Southwest



From top: scented lilac from one of Charlotte's daily walks – placed just as it was picked and never arranged – casts dramatic shadows across a table in her house; handwritten copies of poems join postcards on a board in the studio. Opposite: the buckled and sculptural leaves of cherry, beech and tulip tree gathered in the garden last autumn are laid on to the Perspex sheets of a snowdrop monotype

I am working on dozens of small ones, working very quickly, from one to the other as I walk around and see something that catches my eye.' She was transfixed by the papery transparency of honesty seed heads when she found them last winter. Their blend of frailty and strength combines naturalism and abstraction with a powerful and gentle sense of colour. The damsons, in a small canvas above the table with the beech branch, were another great joy, burgeoning from what she thought would be sloes into orbs, black as night

with their dusting of bloom that she set against a deep dark background.

The night before my visit, Charlotte worked late in her smaller, white-walled studio, high-ceilinged and -windowed like a monk's cell, with an easel and tables set up for the subjects of the watercolour monotypes and photogravures she is now creating in tandem with her oils. She has developed a technique that allows her to work at speed, building up layers of colour on Perspex, with each tint absorbed by the damp paper as the sheets go through the

press. There are branches of apple blossom in water and a vase of primroses. Charlotte isn't convinced she has nailed the background for the latter. 'It's not quite the right green, so I will do another layer and then try to anticipate that extraordinary milky yellow,' she says. A new way of working that the painter finds carefree and exciting as, stroke by stroke and line by line, she creates her own inimitable genre of poetry. Charlotte Verity is represented by Lyndsey Ingram Gallery, 20 Bourdon St, London W1 (lyndseyingram.com)

