

# Three as AIR



**Above:**

Artists, Ian Norris, Chris McLoughlin and Michael Ashcroft at Clitheroe Castle

**Right:** A typical en plein air set-up

Three Lancashire artists are following in the footsteps of French Impressionists by painting in the open air. Amanda Griffiths meets them

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN COCKS



A Late Evening At Ainsdale Beach by Chris McLoughlin



Lancashire artists Chris McLoughlin, Ian Norris and Michael John Ashcroft all have one thing in common - they love painting in the open air. Actually it's unfair to say they only have one thing in common because each has an undeniable passion for painting, they love landscapes and enjoy working in what the likes of Claude Monet called 'en plein air.'

Just as Monet and his coterie of Impressionists were great advocates of this way of working so are Chris from Burnley, Ian from Walton-le-Dale and Michael from Leyland. So much so,

they go out as a trio.

'It might sound a bit deep but landscape painting is not just about painting the subject but realising the emotions as well,' says Ian who made a conscious decision to only paint in-situ.

'The landscape never stays still. It's forever changing, the light, the mood,

your mood is never the same two days running. I don't knock people who work from photographs but for me I need to see and feel the subject and try to convey the feeling of the piece to the person

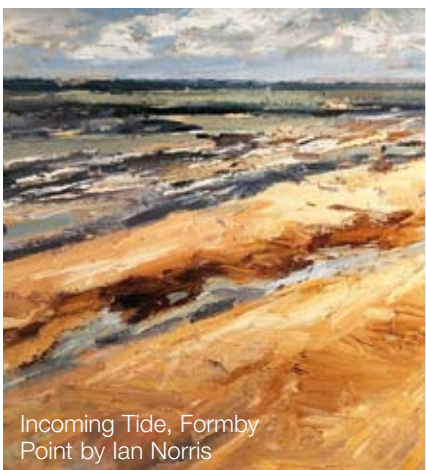
**“I pretty much live outdoors. I do a lot of climbing as well so painting outdoors was a natural progression for me”**

viewing the scene as well. You might paint the same scene twice but it'll never be the same, because something will always have changed.'

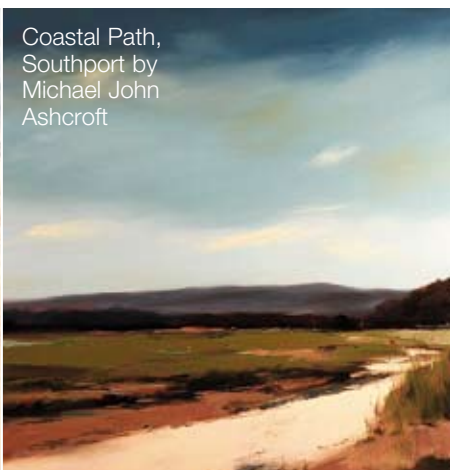
Chris, originally from Northern Ireland agrees about the constantly changing scenery, light and mood and says that en plein air painting was a natural choice for him.

'I pretty much live outdoors,' he says, 'I do a lot of climbing as well so painting outdoors was a natural progression for me. My inspiration basically comes from being outdoors.'

'I'm passionate about the English landscape and decided I wanted to become a real painter and bring the work home with me,' laughs Michael. 'The only way to do that was to get outside to be in the



Incoming Tide, Formby Point by Ian Norris



Coastal Path, Southport by Michael John Ashcroft



Sophia Smith with artists, Chris McLoughlin, Michael John Ashcroft and Ian Norris at Revolve Gallery



**ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

**Chris McLoughlin**

Chris first became fascinated by animation as a child and came to Manchester to study the art form. After spending time studying classical painting in Antwerp he returned to Lancashire 'and just wanted to paint'. After graduating he worked as a director for Bolton Art Studios before deciding to devote his time painting full time from his studio in Bolton and en plein air. Chris regularly exhibits his paintings, with some at Northcote in Lango and in private collections across the States and in Australia.

**Ian Norris**

Born in Preston Ian says he knows it's a cliché but he has been interested in painting and drawing since an early age; it wasn't until the late 80s that he took it up seriously. Initially establishing a reputation in watercolours he developed his passion for oils while doing a Fine Art Degree, which he graduated from with first class honours. A member of MAFA (Manchester Academy of Fine Art) he recently won the Barbara Oldham memorial award for the best piece of art in the exhibition as well as many other awards over the years.

**Michael John Ashcroft**

Born in Croston, Michael J Ashcroft left school with top grades in Art and design but began his career as an engineer, painting in his spare time. Regular Lancashire Life readers will know he was diagnosed with a brain tumour when he was 28 and during his recovery he started painting seriously. Since then he has had a rapid success story, winning a number of awards including the South Ribble Open competition and the Blue Ribbon trophy in the same year - the first artist to hold the two at the same time. Also a member of MAFA, Michael was named one of the top ten artists in the International Artist Magazine.

To see more of Michael, Chris and Ian's work visit Revolve Gallery in Castle Street, Clitheroe.



middle of it and just paint.'

While the three will go on expeditions together painting the same area they never paint the exact same scene, preferring to spread themselves, their pochade boxes - specially-designed portable wood cases with paints and an easel - balanced on tripods along the beach or fell. They travel all over the county; one will ring the others in the morning and say: 'I'm going painting in Southport today,' and the others will join him. It's as simple as that. Landscapes vary from Longridge fell to the windswept Southport beach - paintings that are often added to by bits of sand that whip up in the breeze.

'The best thing about being a painter is the network of people that surround you,'

**“They are no fair-weather painters, Ian has even been found painting the Ribble as it froze last winter - until his paints froze too”**

says Chris. 'Painting is very intense. People often come up when they see us painting outdoors and say how relaxing, but it's not. It's not a job, it's a passion, often when you start you just get drawn into it and keep going until you've finished. It's our version of what athletes call being in the zone.'

Ian adds: 'You do get wrapped up in what you're doing but the great thing about going out with Michael and Chris is that I can bounce ideas off them. It gives you reassurance as well. Sometimes you might not like what you've done, one of the others will

wander up and have a look over your shoulder and reassure you that you don't need to scrape it all off and start again.'

'For me one of the benefits of painting together is that it encourages you to go out and paint,' says Michael. 'Sometime you might not feel like it but as soon as one of the others call and say they're going out painting, you go too.'

And these three are no fair-weather painters. Ian rang the other two during one of the worst storms we've seen in recent history to say he was painting on Southport beach and has even been found painting the River Ribble as it froze over last winter. That is, until his paints froze too. 🌸



Chris McLoughlin en plein air painting