

# Life in technicolour

As one of the country's best loved contemporary painters, John Lowrie Morrison hopes to bring joy to people's lives through vivid depictions of Bonnie Scotland, says **Roz Scott**

**C**olour bursts forth onto the easel of John Lowrie Morrison, who uses the pen name 'Jolomo', with the painting of 'Wet Winter Croftscape South Uist.' The deep, iridescent blue sky of a wet, Scottish day at dusk, merging into an orange sunset. But there is more to this story.



'In January 2005 a young family drowned in a storm that was the worst in living memory on the islands of Benbecula and South Uist,' begins Jolomo. 'The storm had built up a few days before as a shallow depression off America's Eastern seaboard. However, it developed into a monster. A young family were stuck in their croft house for many hours but decided to flee. They left in two cars but as they crossed a single track road causeway the sea swallowed them up.'

'A BBC director, Neil Campbell, was reporting on the storm, not knowing his father, wife and three children had drowned on the Benbecula to South Uist Causeway. I know this place well. I had to paint this tragedy at Lochdar, South Uist that shocked Scotland on that stormy night as a memorial of that lovely family.'

Jolomo expresses feeling through colour. He doesn't make photographic paintings of the West Coast with her often drab, overcast skies and dark rain clouds. He has a catalogue of photographs and sketches that inspire him and then he paints his interpretation of the scenes. Therein lies his magic.

'I paint my world, rather than the world the way it is,' explains Jolomo. 'Picasso creates his own universe. I guess I do the same with really strong colour. I do try to get things looking like the place - it draws people in, not the colours. Archie the Jura has gold and purple on the road, purple and gold in the sky, cerise and green. Colour brings out feelings and a sense of place. I hate grey paintings. To me paintings should be about colour.'

Jolomo conveys mood and the beauty of Scotland in all its glorious technicolour inspired from a very young age by



Left: Jolomo believes in the therapeutic qualities of art.  
Above: Wet Winter Croftscape, South Uist.



**Clockwise from top:** The Spark, the Duke and the Vic; Sandy; Pomegranates and Flowers.

Soutine, Marc Chagall, Oskar Kokoschka and Andrew Wyeth. As a young man, he was also inspired by oil paintings in L'Abri, a theological centre in Switzerland, with high key colour and sharp, clean air.

'The keys got higher and brighter,' he says. 'I layer colours. I'm still learning even though I'm in my seventies. Even today I found out new techniques that I will use again.'

Impressionists used high key colour to great effect but it's what Morrison does with the

mid-range and darker colours, like his blue, that sets him apart. He carries this control over colour into his more recent work and introduces ever higher keys.

The deep, dark colours of his early days and the associated heaviness have to some extent receded and have been replaced by lighter blues, purples and lavender, suggesting that he has found his peace with the world.

'Painting is breathing,' says Jolomo of his painting. 'That's it. It's there inside me. It's the gift that God has given to me.'

For 25 years, Jolomo taught art regionally in Argyll and became the art adviser to the Scottish Office. Now, he dedicates himself almost entirely to his painting from his two studios in Tayvallich and Ardnamurchan.

In the 1980s he became a lay preacher after deputising for the local minister. He enjoys travelling the Western Isles, speaking of God's love

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as a supply minister for the Church of Scotland.

Jolomo believes that art is therapeutic, it gives people confidence – kids struggling with maths or French would come to art class and gain the confidence to tackle

those subjects they found difficult.

He is inspired by Phineas Taylor Barnham, who once said: 'The greatest thing you can do is make people happy.'

'I try to lift people's spirits,' says Jolomo. 'I give loads of prints to hospitals. There was a man who I knew. His dad was dying. He sent me a lovely email saying, "I saw you in the Co-op: it made me think of your paintings. The prints really lifted my spirits, then I was in hospital with my Dad and I saw one of your prints, I felt an inner peace." That's worth more than money.'

Part of his legacy is the Jolomo Awards and Foundation, created to highlight the painting of the Scottish Landscape in the 1990s when he felt conceptual art was taking over. He feels the award has reversed this trend and there is now a 'massive' number of landscape painters in Scotland.

Jolomo's earnings are significant because he is prolific and he wants his art to be accessible – you can buy one of his canvases for between £2,000 and £2,500 and his prints for much less. He paints to bring joy. His high key colour opens people's eyes to Scotland at her magnificent best. Indeed, few would question the fact that John Lowrie Morrison has become a national treasure.

You can see Jolomo exhibiting at the Glasgow Gallery on 27 November - 29 January 2022.

## FIELD FACTS

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