

New Art Studio champions the work of asylum seekers and refugees, as **John Evans** discovers

Tania Kaczynski says: "My father's a refugee from Nazi Germany and what astounds him is that people are allowed to be here but not allowed to work – everyone knows that refugees and asylum seekers are survivors, diligent, hard-working and determined people, with so much to offer our society, yet their hands are tied by bureaucracy."

Not a bad starting point for Tania, an art psycho-therapist who, with her colleague Jon Martyn, runs sessions that provide a platform for asylum seekers and refugees at the Islington Arts Factory.

And from next Friday, October 30, they are hosting three days of events to launch their New Art Studio with an exhibition, panel discussion, and art making day over that weekend. The exhibition's title, *36 Pounds and 95 Pence: Asylum, trauma, poverty and the power of creativity*, is a reference to the new standard rate of asylum support per person, per week, as of August.

Tania says: "We are not teachers. We are art therapists. We're not running an art class. Each person is encouraged to develop in their own way."

"These people have suffered untold horrors that only exist for us in our worst nightmares; prison, torture, rape, lost of family and home. They are victims of war, caught in the cross-fire. Often imprisoned for activities that we can't help but take for granted, like attending a women's demonstration in Iran, or being a Kurdish gay man in Turkey."

"Not only do they live – they flourish through art making. It is a direct line to the unconscious, to our dreams and nightmares, and at the New Art Studio we travel this journey together."

The programme



Babel, Anon



Crying Teddy by Paul (DRC)



Red War by Saeed (Afghanistan)

GHOSTS *in the machine*

provides space for the artists one day a week and Tania, who is also the art therapist at Hungerford school in Islington, and Jon, who lectures at Goldsmith's College and has a private practice, are backed by the Camden-based Helen Bamber Foundation, a human rights charity.

Tania says: "Contrary to public belief, asylum seekers are not allowed to work, do voluntary work, attend a college; in short to integrate into our society. They live on vouchers of £36.95p (hence the title of the show), and are housed in hostels and short-life accommodation on the outskirts of London."

"They are ghosts in our machine. Imagine for a moment the fear of having to leave your home, your

family, suffering nightmares and daymares, not knowing if your children are alive or dead, living on vouchers, and not being received with sympathy but hostility; when the man on the street thinks you've come here to take his job."

The process can take up to 10 years and "...then they become refugees."

Tania adds: "Many of the clients have never made art before, but a powerful image comes from extreme emotional experience not only technical ability. Through art-making we can all make sense of our experiences."

Yet because of the restrictions government

imposes on asylum seekers they cannot receive any money so proceeds of the show

sales will go to Helen Bamber Foundation.

Some 60 works by eight artists will be on show.

Clients come from all over – from Afghanistan, China, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iran, Pakistan, Russia and Turkey. And Tania adds: "Where there's war, there are refugees. Please join us for an exciting weekend of debate, art making, and a extraordinary exhibition made by extraordinary people."

● *36 Pounds and 95 Pence: Asylum, trauma, poverty and the power of creativity* is at Islington Arts Factory, 2 Parkhurst Road, N7 0SF, October 30 to November 6. For full details of the free events (booking necessary for Saturday and Sunday) visit newaristudio.org.uk

Still fearful

"It has been quite difficult to get clients to agree to talking about their life stories, they are still frightened of any repercussions," says Tania Kaczynski. But two did agree to share a few details.

● Saeed said: "I came from Afghanistan 12 years ago. I came when I was 15 years old. I walked most of the journey, got lorries, horses and boats. I came with my parents but I lost them on the way. I was very frightened." It took 10 years for Saeed to get his asylum and he became a refugee. "I was detained twice during this period. I never made art before the studio."

When I paint I can relax and think differently. It makes me hopeful, I want to move forward in my painting and my life. I love to paint and be connected to my friends at the New Art Studio. It has opened a new world up for me. I would like to be a professional artist one day."

● Paul, in his early 30s, is from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and has an engineering degree from his home country. Here, where he has also now "got his status," he is taking a course in plumbing.

● Two women artists from other countries are happy for their artworks to be seen but not for their stories to be recounted, fearing repercussions.

Lanyon's flights of imagination

Gliding inspired **Peter Lanyon** (1918-64) to produce a series of innovative paintings.

The **Courtauld's** major new exhibition explores how Lanyon, described as "one of Britain's most important and original post-war artists" tried to create a new vision of landscape painting.

Born in St Ives, in the 1950s he produced radical oils of the Cornish coast. He took up gliding in 1959 and went solo the following year.

He greatly admired JMW Turner's landscapes, and the results are unique paintings "that offer a thrilling sense of his encounters with the land, sea and air, collapsing the multiple perspectives of his flights into each new composition".

Some 15 paintings and related constructions, are brought together, among them (right) his acclaimed *Thermal*, 1960, oil on canvas, 72x60ins, from the Tate, London, which it purchased after his solo exhibition when the new gliding works were first shown that year.

Lanyon's knowledge of flying was influencing his paintings and a progression can be seen in the current show. Sadly he died in August 1964 as a result of injuries sustained – while gliding.

John Evans

● *Soaring Flight: Peter Lanyon's Gliding Paintings*, at Courtauld Institute of Art, Strand, WC2R 0RN until January 17. www.courtauld.ac.uk



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