



Angela Adams talks to fellow photographers.



Michelle Whitmore

Michelle Whitmore first came to my attention when I viewed her lady bugs Associate panel at a past Societies' Convention. We got chatting and I was soon drawn in to her world of insects and floral art. This lady's enthusiasm for her craft can be infectious! It has been a pleasure to watch Michelle's transformation from chrysalis to butterfly and see her spread her wings to become the accomplished artist she is today.

What do you love, hate, can't live without?

I love spiders, flowers and all my fur babies. I detest bananas! And I couldn't live without a garden.

What motivated you to start in the industry?

My love for photography really took off when I was studying for my Environmental Science degree with the Open University. The field trips were wonderful! I always carried a point-and-shoot camera with me; I mostly photographed plants, insects and rock formations enabling me to record and identify subjects and also research and learn their scientific names once home. The pictures were then used as evidence for my assignments.

My subject matter was relatively small, hence my go-to camera mode was macro – as my love of photography and my chosen degree subject progressed I upgraded to a DSLR and a dedicated macro lens. As a keen gardener, I plant and create habitats to encourage insects and wildlife to visit ... I created my own personal suburban jungle to photograph right outside my back door.



What's your mindset when you get up in the mornings?

I am definitely not a morning person! I'm best avoided or approached with extreme care. Luckily, it's usually just me and the animals in the house first thing, so I don't have to talk to anyone until I really must, ie when I go to my day job.

Working full-time means I don't get to work on my artistry until the evenings and weekends. The motivation to start a project after a full day's work can be quite challenging at times; it's all too easy to sit on social media or watch the television all evening. I find writing a weekly list with a combination of short, as well as longer tasks keeps me on track and is helpful. I start with the longest task first then mix them up, dipping in and out of various projects. I find this approach helps to keep me motivated for longer and the list appears to go down quicker.

Do you work alone or employ staff?

The business is run in partnership with my husband John. However, we each work within different genres, so unless we are working on a joint project, I work alone most of the time.

Did it take you long to establish your name and brand?

As macro photography is very specific it didn't take me long to establish a name for myself within the genre. I've become a regular speaker at The Societies Convention and on the local camera club circuit. Interestingly, I began studying an online Photoshop Artistry course about 18 months ago, which has taken me in a completely different direction. Each month I discover new ways of creating art with my images and I'm loving every minute. All completed artworks are composites created using all my own photographs. My most recent project is a series of models wearing ball-gowns which have been created using flowers grown in my garden; the backgrounds are pictures of palaces and locations I've visited. I start by creating a unique watercolour/sketch to blend the images which produces an illustrated look.

I've had some very favourable responses to these illustrations so decided to market them. I've been working on establishing a new brand as a digital photo-artist and setting up an art gallery.







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How do you attract clients and what market do you target?

The new style has two very distinct and separate markets. The first is a collection of limited-edition, fine art illustrations aimed at the discerning collector and are priced accordingly – to give them a distinct individuality each illustration is printed on heavy-weight archival paper and embellished with acrylic paint and gold leaf. These are currently retailing via the Saatchi On-line Art Gallery. I shall also be displaying my work at art fairs later this year. For the former, Saatchi markets my products and I promote each piece on Instagram too. I am also in discussion with a local gallery, with a view to exhibiting later this year.

For the latter, I promote and sell affordable prints through ETSY which is now being populated with my new work – these prints will not be embellished. I shall be adding cards and bookmarks to the range. A new additions to my ETSY range are personal Pet Pawtraits. Clients send me their favourite pet photograph and I craft a watercolour/sketch illustration.

Each platform will be selling a specific set of images with very little cross-over.



Do you manage your own website, SEO, marketing, social media presence and PR or do you outsource?

I manage my personal website, which covers all aspects of my photography plus the art gallery. I also manage my own SEO ... I love Wordpress! I am aware that my sales and marketing skills are minimal but I'm adding to that skill set every day. I also manage my own social media campaigns.

I'm currently working with Pinterest (and ETSY) to create an 'In Memory' quotes board as inspiration for clients who order a Pet Pawtrait illustration for a much-loved pet who has passed away. Words and pictures working together can be incredibly powerful and I feel this will evoke memories of times shared with their pet. I'm really excited on where this new journey will take me!



What's the one piece of kit – camera aside, you wouldn't be without and why?

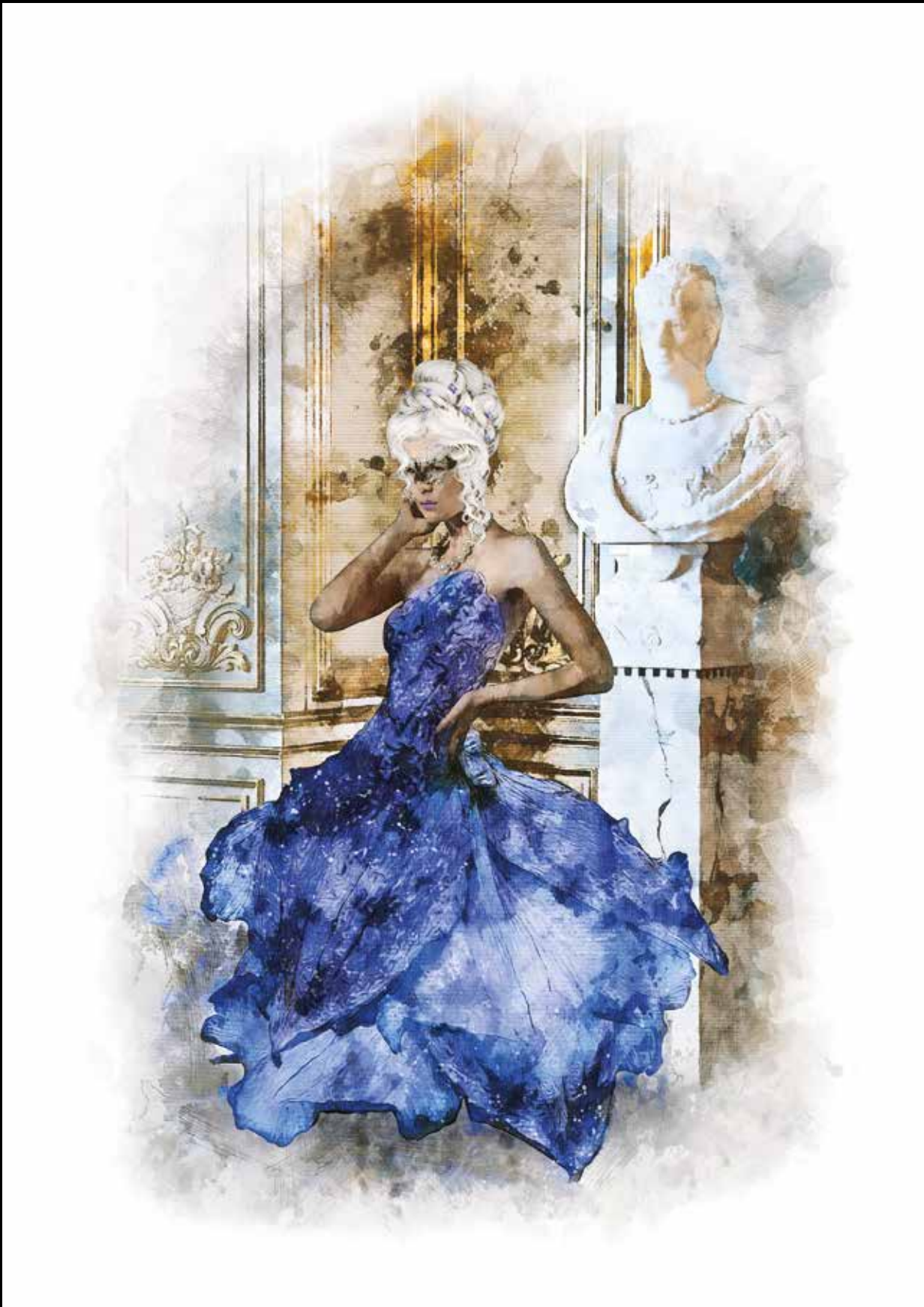
Without a shadow of a doubt I would have to say my PC and Photoshop, without them I could not craft my illustrative portraits. As far as photography kit goes, it would be my tripod. I use it for virtually everything I photograph. I have trouble holding the camera for any length of time so without my tripod I'd be lost and very frustrated.

What do you love photographing and why?

My passions are still insects and flowers, only with my new skills I'm able to use them to create fantasy images and illustrations and take them beyond the realms of photography.

I also enjoy extreme macro photography and love to photograph subjects that the eye cannot always see, like mould, exoskeletons and of course more insects. I've recently started photographing food, which I'm really enjoying.

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What would you say is the most important challenge you've faced as a photographer?

Personally, it has to be deteriorating eyesight. As a macro photographer it really helps if you can see what you want to photograph!

Thankfully today's cameras are precise and the technology, advanced which allows me to rely on auto focus when required. Hence the previously mentioned tripod!

Photographically, I feel I'm not taken seriously by some because I don't shoot people although my SWPP Associate panel, The Lady Bugs, was well received. In recent months my new watercolour illustrations have been called into question too, with many stating 'they're not photographs'.

I have learnt to ignore this negativity and now shoot for myself and those who purchase my work. My photography journey has equipped me with the skills and the vision to create unique pieces of artwork which allows to take my photographs into a different realm. So it's all good in my little world!

What's the best single piece of business advice you'd like to share?

Don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone and master new skills. It really is okay to be different. I've always wanted to paint and draw but never had the skills but using Photoshop and studying artistry has unlocked a creative new skill set and taken me on a journey that I never could have imagined. I really am enjoying every minute of this new adventure.

Looking at a photographer's portfolio can be revealing – what does your portfolio reveal about you?

Weirdo!

My main body of work over the past couple of years has involved morphing ladies with insects or creating floral ball-gowns for them to wear, so I guess it could be described as a little unconventional but creative. However, because I also shoot both extreme macro, macro, garden and food, my portfolio is varied. A very dear photography friend once described my recent work as 'fine art meets contemporary surrealism, meets illogical contemplation with a touch of fairy dust.' I love that!

Do you enter competitions – if so, is it with your day-to-day work or do you shoot specifically to create a competition image?

I occasionally enter competitions with my day-to-day work, usually at the last minute. I have been known to re-work an image of a model for competition but it's not very often as I tend to approach each session with an idea in mind.

What do you love the most about being a photographer?

I love the variety in the subjects I photograph. The freedom to express my images through different mediums. The ability to turn something mundane into something completely abstract. The ever-developing journey.

Who inspires you?

My garden-insect macro work is very much inspired by Sir David Attenborough and the BBC Natural History film crews. Although most of his programmes are filmed in other countries, you can't help but feel it's something you could do in your own back garden with the right plants and a lot of patience. That's what I aim to achieve with my pictures in my very own back-garden jungle.

My photo-artistry was first inspired many years ago when The Societies' Convention was first at the Novotel in Hammersmith, London. I attended a fine art Photoshop Masterclass given by Podge Kelly. He opened my eyes to another world and gave me a small glimpse of what could be achieved. Only now am I able to appreciate the seed that sparked it all off. We've become good friends over the years and he continues to encourage me when I get one of my mad ideas, it's like he can see inside my head. Or maybe he's just humouring me, which could be the case!

Anything else you'd like to share?

Yes, I think it's important to take time to shoot something personal every now and then. Whether it's for a qualification submission, or simply a personal project. I find it helps to keep your work fresh, allowing you to push your boundaries outside your client remit and provides the opportunity to acquire new techniques and skills, which in turn can lead you to discovering things about yourself too. All of which can only be good for both you and your future clients.

More about Michelle: <https://michellewhitmore.co.uk/>



