

Wild at Art

British artist Tony Foster invited Sir David Attenborough and other 'luminaries' to name the world's most beautiful wild places – then he set out on a 10-year odyssey to paint them. A special exhibition opening in London this June reveals the results

*The notion of beauty has been at the back of my mind for a long time. I realize that what I've been doing is to persuade people that these are extraordinary untouched, wild places, many of which are extremely fragile. It should be a mark of whether we're capable of civilization in our society to leave these places alone because they are so exquisite. -- Tony Foster, quoted by art critic Kenneth Baker in his catalogue essay for the exhibition *Exploring Beauty: Watercolour Diaries from the Wild**

Tony Foster has taken a surprisingly adventurous path for a watercolourist, trekking for months at a time in locations as far-flung as Borneo and the Amazon with little more than a drafting table strapped to his back. -- The Art Newspaper, March 2016



Tony Foster, *Denali and Wonder Lake Looking South from Ansel Adams Point*, 2014. Watercolor and graphite on paper, acrylic, bone, leather, glass beads, glass tubes, oil, gold, cork, wax, wood, map. 36 x 54 in. | 3 1/2 x 10 in. Photo by Trevor Burrows Photography. Courtesy of Foster Art & Wilderness Foundation.



Tony Foster painting in Denali National Park, Alaska, September 2014. Photo by Luca Bovio. Courtesy of Foster Arts & Wilderness Foundation.

LONDON -- Where is the most beautiful wild place in the world? For Sir David Attenborough it is an underwater coral reef. For the explorer Robin Hanbury-Tenison it is a rainforest in Borneo. For the mountaineer Stephen Venables it is the east face of Everest. The British artist and explorer Tony Foster has spent the past decade on a journey trekking to and painting the most beautiful wild places in the world, as nominated by these experts, as well as by many others in a wide variety of fields.

For Foster's exhibition *Exploring Beauty: Watercolour Diaries from the Wild* opening at the Banksie Gallery, London (9 – 26 June), each expert has also contributed a statement about why they have chosen their spot. The result is an unusual and original show of 50 paintings depicting wilderness as remote as the Atacama Desert and as nearby as the walk out the artist's door in rural Cornwall. Later this summer the exhibition travels to the Royal Cornwall Museum in Truro (16 July – 12 November). In late November *Exploring Beauty* travels to the new Foster Art & Wilderness Foundation in Palo Alto, California.

Tony Foster (b. 1946) immerses himself in wild landscapes across the globe to convey the beauty and wonder of these often inaccessible and endangered places. Inspired by artists such as JMW Turner, Richard Long and David Hockney, for over 30 years Foster has climbed the heights and explored the depths of the earth to paint wild places in situ in series of large-scale watercolours (some measuring 4ft x 7ft) that evoke the impact and scale of the landscape. The only person to paint all three faces of Everest, this fellow of the Royal Geographical Society has trekked on expeditions to the edges of the earth to paint what remains of the wilderness. He travels on foot, by boat and raft, camping on-site in locations from the Amazon to Borneo, volcanoes to deserts, the Grand Canyon to the British countryside. He absorbs himself in a place for weeks to paint, while also recording his experiences on site with diary entries and souvenirs of natural objects, often included in the frame of his watercolours. His art celebrates the wild beauty of nature and he hopes to inspire people to value and preserve it.

Foster works in the traditional medium of watercolour because it enables him to get closer to nature: 'I use the elements of nature in the elements to paint nature.' Since Turner and the great British watercolour artists of the 18th century, artists have painted in watercolour to capture the quickly shifting lights and colours of the landscape. Watercolour's portable and quick-drying qualities make it ideal for painting in the open air. Foster has designed his own foldable, weatherproof 7-foot drawing board to be able to paint large-scale works over long periods of time outdoors, and he has even devised a way to draw coral reefs underwater. He never works from photographs because he believes they flatten the dappled light and colours of nature.

For *Exploring Beauty: Watercolour Diaries from the Wild*, Foster has collaborated with experts in a variety of fields, whom he calls 'luminaries'. Each one has nominated what they believe to be the most beautiful wild place in the world and has contributed a statement about it to accompany the painting. Some of the 'luminaries' include: the

naturalist Sir David Attenborough, the explorer Robin Hanbury-Tenison, the mountaineer Stephen Venables, the Director Emeritus of Kew Botanical Garden Professor Sir Ghillean Prance, former Director of Friends of the Earth UK John Halkes, Professor Steve Sparks, Chairman of the Geological Society and winner of the Vetlesen Prize 2015, Dr Winslow Briggs, Director Emeritus of the Carnegie Institute of Plant Biology, Stanford University and Maria Teresa Ruiz, Professor of Astronomy, University of Chile.

Press information

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Exhibition Details

Exploring Beauty: Watercolour Diaries from the Wild

Bankside Gallery, London,
48 Hopton Street, London SE1 9JH
9 – 26 June 2016

Open daily 11am – 6pm

Admission: free

www.banksidegallery.com

Royal Cornwall Museum

River Street, Truro, TR1 2SJ

16 July – 12 November 2016

Open Monday – Saturday, 10am – 4.45pm

Admission: £5.50 (under-16s free)

www.royalcornwallmuseum.org.uk

The Foster Art & Wilderness Foundation

940 Commercial Street, Palo Alto, California 94303

From late January 2017

Open by appointment

Admission: free

www.thefoster.org

Catalogue

Exploring Beauty: Watercolour Diaries from the Wild is accompanied by a fully-illustrated catalogue, which includes the statements of all of the experts and an introduction by Duncan Robinson, Director Emeritus of the Fitzwilliam Museum and former Chair of the Henry Moore Foundation, as well as an essay by the San Francisco art critic Kenneth Baker.

Related Events

- 9 June, 6 – 8pm: Professor Sir Ghilleen Prance, Director Emeritus of Kew Botanical Garden, opens the exhibition at Bankside Gallery, in conversation with Tony Foster
- 22 June, 6 – 8pm: Artist's talk with Tony Foster in the exhibition at Bankside Gallery

Notes for Editors

In late November 2016, this exhibition will travel to the new not-for-profit Foster Art & Wilderness Foundation (www.thefoster.org), which launched in Palo Alto, California, in Spring 2016. The Foundation reunites Foster's watercolour 'journeys' – series of paintings on a specific theme, created over several years – in powerful exhibitions, of which 'Exploring Beauty' is the latest of 17. The exhibitions are available for loan to museums and other public venues in the hope that they will inspire people to connect with the natural beauty of wilderness. The Foundation was established by one of Foster's patrons, the Palo Alto businesswoman and environmentalist Jane Woodward, a geologist and Stanford MBA, who founded an energy investment firm focused on US natural gas and wind energy.

About Tony Foster

For the last 30 years, the artist Tony Foster, based in Cornwall, has built a following in the US and Britain and increasingly around the world. One of his earliest watercolour journeys, *Thoreau's Country*, opened at the Yale Center for British Art in 1984. Foster's recent journey *Sacred Places of the American Southwest* is on view through 2016 at the Foundation's home in Palo Alto, California.