

CREATIVE

Paintings are so good they can be mistaken for photos

Picture: Paul Nicholls GLPNZ0110624D-003_C



■ Matt Sellens' painting of Del the dog.

By Tracy Spiers

HE hunts, searches, intently studies his subject just as actor Rick Moranis did in *Honey I Shrunk the Kids*. Only he's not looking for his 2mm high son, he's looking for detail. Wearing a strange magnification kit around his head – not dissimilar to the gifted inventor – Matt Sellens, a young man of extraordinary talent, can spend up to eight hours a day in his garden studio perfecting a painting he is working on. Matt is able to capture an animal's unique characteristics with the most amazing accuracy using his inks, watercolours and, more recently, acrylics that it's very hard to tell if in fact his work is a photograph, which of course it isn't. But so good is he that it can often take a while for the observer to realise that a brush did the work not a camera lens. Matt has been a victim of his own talent for this reason and has, at times, been wrongly accused of touching up photos. But this remarkable painter is

for real. His endeavours can be seen in the Kendrick Street Gallery from Saturday until July 28 and there's a chance to meet him on the opening day from 10am to noon. Matt's purpose-built studio reflects the two sides of his nature. On one hand there are drawers full of carefully tidied away paper work, filed neatly so he knows where they are. On the other there is a refreshing chaotic carefree feel to this workspace. Paints are left randomly, making a colourful, lively messy mishmash, notes are scribbled on boards, detailing the colour mix he has just made lest he forget for another time. This is a place where Matt can relax, be, escape and enjoy that sense of joyful creativity, where sheer concentration and focussing take over and time is forgotten momentarily. The only thing which gets him out of his seat is to feed his cat and two dogs. "Paints are all over the desk and pencil notes are scrawled across a drawing board. It's a place where I can forget my worries and shut myself away," he admits. Born in West Sussex, Matt



■ The artist at work on his latest animal portrait, this time of a bird of prey.

moved to Stroud in 1993. A former Thomas Keble School pupil, he spent three years at Stroud School of Art before graduating with a BA (Hons) in animation from the Surrey Institute of Art & Design University College, Farnham. Four years ago Matt set up his company Hound Works as a freelance illustrator and animator, working for a new media group and local publishing house. Passionate about animals and the countryside, the 30-year-old is in his element when capturing these subjects with his paints and paintbrush. "I have always loved animals. There are certain things about the look of them. My dog has such droopy eyes when he looks at you. I love the subtle expressions they

have," admits Matt. His meticulous style is extraordinary. Labour intensive, he often works for hours on each piece until it is perfect. For his personal studies he sketches his own animals. For commissioned portraits, Matt works from photographs. "I blow up the image and, to get the detail, I use a magnifying visor. Throughout my animation course we were always taught to look out for the subtle details and to pick up anything that would make the image look as real as possible," he explains. One only has to see the results and read the comments from thrilled clients on his website to realise how good he is. To enhance a sense of realism, Matt also uses texture gels to capture terrain but because the process is so labour-intensive, he's often painting several pieces as once. Right now he is working on a puffin in flight. It's taken him three weeks to get the rock textures how he wants them.

And while the medium dries, he quietly sketches a black bull, works on commissioned dog portraits and explores ideas for a banner heading for Kendrick Street Gallery's website. Matt will be sharing a stall with Kendrick Street Gallery at Frampton Country Fair on September 11 and will take part in Berkeley Show on August 29. Once a month Matt has a stall at the Shambles Market. His next stint is the same day as his exhibition launch. Inspired by country scenes, Matt enjoys attending various events related to country living, hence his company name Houndworks. "I chose it because it was quirky. I like painting dogs and hounds and it's my spin on Dreamworks which is one of my favourite film companies," admits Matt. Alongside Matt's intricate paintings are sketchbooks full of wonderfully loose animation drawings. He admits it provides a break when the details become too much. "When I get too close to something, I will switch from photo realistic pieces to animation. I find quick doodles great for that," he says. "I would love to be able to make a living with my art, not just painting, but illustrating as well. I am trying out some book illustrations at the moment so I'll see what happens." See more of his work at www.houndworks.co.uk.



■ A painting simply called Barn Owl.



■ A point-to-point race.



■ A portrait of Oscar the terrier.