

## Painting as a Pastime 2001

We were invited to submit a proposal for Compton Verney, Oxfordshire, England. Our proposal was to offer a single first prize of £10,000 for a national painting competition, titled 'Painting as a Pastime': an artist-organised event open to absolutely everyone! All forms and genres of painting would have been welcome, with no limit on size, and admission free. The event would have taken place over two glorious weeks of July, when the light and landscape can be at their most picturesque.

There would have been only two requirements. Firstly, the painting must have been completed within the landscaped grounds of Compton Verney Manor House, set in the beautiful Oxfordshire countryside. Secondly, all entrants would agree to produce their work directly from life rather than from a photograph or other lens-based image.

The lovely grounds of Compton Verney were landscaped in the eighteenth century by the celebrated Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, whose idealisation of the English landscape produced a way of 'surveying the prospect' from a particular position. While *Painting as a Pastime* invited reflection on the relationship between painting, photography and landscape, it positively favours being artistically present in a place.

While highlighting the ideal of art as a leisure activity, the competition would have created a heightened atmosphere around it, drawing the aesthetic hobby into a materialistic, competitive situation. In offering the bulk of our production budget as prize money, we asked to exchange the role of artist for patron, and beneficiary for benefactor. By taking up the offer, members of the public would have gone beyond their role as the creators of individual artworks to become active performers in a collective artwork.

The competition would have been judged by a panel of eminent figures (HRH Prince Charles? Sir Christopher Frayling? Sir Philip King? Rt Hon Chris Smith MP? Sir David Puttnam? David Bowie? Paul McCartney? Sister Wendy Beckett?).

*Painting as a Pastime* (1921) is the title of an essay by Winston S Churchill, in which he extols the virtues of painting as a regenerative activity for 'the avoidance of worry and mental overstrain', if it is undertaken with sufficient focus and concentration of effort.



Brett Prestidge  
*Compton Verney, Oxfordshire, England* (2000)  
Courtesy of Stanton Williams Architects