

# LIFE 3



Connection: Joannah May loves to stare into the windows of an owl's soul

## The eyes have it for wise old owls

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**A** LOOF, wily and somehow evincing a certain wisdom, owls have always intrigued wildlife artist Joannah May.

She loves to gaze into the eyes of these birds of prey and try to make out what they're thinking.

Then comes the hard part - recapturing both their beauty and somewhat haughty expressions on canvas.

The public can judge Joannah's success for themselves when she unveils an exhibition of owl paintings at her Wiltshire gallery on Monday (December 2.)

Joannah, aged 36, said: "I love owls. I love their expressions which can range from wise to really comical.

"They are proud and graceful creatures, you can spend ages looking at them."

But the Marlborough-based artist says its the eyes which really have it - and eyes are her speciality.

She said: "My forte is detail and the focal point of these paintings are the eyes.

"I take tremendous care over them, they are the most important aspect of the work.

"They say the eyes are the window to the soul.

"I've been told by people that they recognise my wildlife paintings just by the eyes," she said.

The exhibition includes Joannah's portrayal of a Hedwig-like Snowy White Owl, which she calls Snowy Mist, and was based on photos she took at the Hawk Conservancy in Andover.

A Snowy Owl is featured in the latest Harry Potter blockbuster which has just been released.

But eagle-eye wildlife artist Joannah says the producers got Hedwig's sex wrong.

"In the book, Hedwig's a female but the owl used in the films is definitely a male."

Joannah, who's been studying owls long enough to know, explained: "Males are predominantly white with a few black markings, while females have a lot more black markings.

"I had no idea then that the Harry Potter film was coming out around the time I finished it - it was just a coincidence."

Joannah's other owl paintings include barn owls, great grey owls and eagle owls.

Some are portrayed with local landmarks in the background, such as the Westbury or Uffington White Horse hill monuments or mysterious Silbury Hill.

Joannah has been painting ever since she was five years old and graduated in art and design at Falmouth in Cornwall in 1991.

Soon afterwards she found herself in hot demand as a wildlife illustrator for magazines, encyclopedias and children's books.

Now, however, she concentrates on paintings which she sells from the Joannah May Gallery in Old Hughenden Yard, off Marlborough High Street.

The new exhibition will mark her first anniversary at the gallery.

As well as original paintings she will be selling prints, postcards and calendars based on her illustrations of owls and other wildlife.

For more information, call 01672-519277.

**Barry Leighton**