

EVENTS: *Barcelona and Beyond, Fountain Gallery.*

Nancy Groves

Few 20th century artists provoke such a Marmite response as Anton Gaudi.

Tourists who stand beneath his modernist masterpiece, the Sagrada Familia church in Barcelona, tend to divide into two camps – those who see a building of breathtaking beauty and those who see only a tower of tack.

No prizes for guessing the reaction of Croydon-based artist, Suzy Abrahams, whose Gaudi-inspired work goes on display next week at the Fountain Gallery in Hampton Court. Abrahams first visited Barcelona in February last year.

“I was going to see the Picasso Museum but was sidetracked walking up Las Ramblas by a postcard of Gaudi’s Park Guell,” she recalls.

“I jumped in a taxi immediately and asked the driver to take me straight there. It was absolutely amazing. Just off these suburban side roads, this fantasy land! My first reaction was this must be what Disney was based on.”

More gaudy than Gaudi, surely? Designed as a forward-looking housing estate, the park was inspired by the garden cities of London’s commuter belt, rechannelled through Gaudi’s extraordinary imagination. But only two of the proposed 60 houses were built after buyers refused to put their faith in his daring aesthetic.

Not so Abrahams. “I took 500 photos and stayed there all afternoon and when I got back home, I started creating paintings from them. My first painting was titled Wow Barcelona and that was my

Barcelona revisited



initial reaction on walking into the park – the wow factor!”

The starting point for her paintings – powerful acrylic and mixed media canvases in vividly-coloured and vibrant compositions – was Gaudi’s undulating serpentine bench in the centre of the park, which is entirely constructed from fragments of coloured ceramic decorations.

Abrahams admits that she could not live in a Gaudi house herself – “Would you live in an installation?” she asks – but she is happy to defend his work against the critics.

“You can like it or dislike it but I think you have to appreciate the sheer genius of what he actually did and how he achieved it. Park Guell was constructed between 1900 and 1914 and continues to be controversial to this day — his projects were way ahead of his time,” she says.

Barcelona and Beyond, Fountain Gallery, 26 Bridge Road, Hampton Court, East Molesey, until September 17, Tues to Thurs, Sunday, 11am-5.30pm, Fri and Sat, 10am-5.30pm free, call 020 8941 5865, visit fountaingallery.co.uk