

ART

SPLENDID ISOLATION

For his latest photographic collection, Charles March captured the sparse beauty of Jura in the Inner Hebrides. By Catriona Gray

Windswept and remote, the Scottish isle of Jura is one of the least populated regions in Europe, pitted by peat bogs and surrounded by a rugged coastline that divides sea from sky. Perhaps it's the wildness of this Hebridean landscape that inspired Charles March to make it the subject of his latest photography exhibition. As custodian of the 12,000-acre Goodwood estate, the 11th Duke of Richmond has plenty of demands upon his time, but Jura, where his wife's family own a shooting lodge, is an opportunity for a respite from his busy schedule.

'Some of the raised beaches are millions of years old – they rear up above the coastline and jut into the air,' he says, as he leafs through the piles of prints in his photography studio in the private wing at Goodwood, a modern airy space that contrasts with the 18th-century oil paintings that line the corridors outside. 'But I'm not interested in taking documentary-style pictures, I'm trying to capture an atmosphere.'

Having spent much of his life as a professional photographer, March has always been interested in the medium's possibilities. After leaving Eton, he worked for the film director Stanley Kubrick and had a youthful stint as a *Harper's Bazaar* photographer, where his assignments included being sent around the country to snap female farmers, and to the late Garech Browne's Luggala estate in Ireland, then famed for its rock and roll atmosphere and eccentric owner. 'I had to sleep in the dining-room with an enormous salmon,' he recalls. 'As far as I can remember, it was the only thing we ate all week.'

Following this, he began to create photography for advertising campaigns, where in the pre-digital days, he had to

BELOW: CHARLES MARCH. RIGHT: ONE OF HIS IMAGES OF JURA



rely upon his own ingenuity to create extraordinary images. He points to an old composition propped up against the studio wall, its mountboard discoloured by damp and mould. The mind-boggling image

depicts a human body that resembles an anatomical diagram come to life, its organs exposed and steam billowing from its mouth. 'Nowadays you'd just create that on a computer,' he says, sadly. 'You don't question how photographs are made now. The greatest loss with the digital age is that the magic's gone. When you were in the darkroom, it would almost feel like alchemy. I miss that.'

In recent years, March has developed an unusual style of his own, creating landscapes that verge on abstracts, thanks to his technique of shaking the camera to pixelate the image into lines, blurring colour and shapes. You sense that his departure from realism is in response to how photography has changed in the past couple of decades, in a world where incredibly high-resolution images can be taken on a mobile phone. And despite the proliferation of photographs, March is still enthusiastic about photography as an art form. 'I love how it's become so accessible now,' he says. 'It's absolutely the medium of the moment.' □
A collection of Charles March's latest work will be shown at the Galleria del Cembalo in Rome (www.galleriadelcembalo.it), from 25 May until 30 June.