

The Artist Questionnaire with the London based painter Alice Browne

November 2016_by Federica Tattoli

Fruit of the forest

ISSN 2374-4464

Drawing on an expanse of influences and materials, Browne's painted works describe obscure imaginative spaces, which simultaneously appear to adhere to the rules of gravity and perspective whilst outwardly ignoring them. Boxes, shadows, screens and girders mingle with drips, floating transparent forms and abstract geometric shapes. Her works appear to occupy multiple planes and visual languages, resulting in a complex network of forms that flip between object and image.

Browne harnesses her mediums flexibility (and sometimes unpredictability) to approach her practice with a playfulness, curiosity and acceptance of failure. Her recent works have a fragmented and imposing presence, encouraging connections with their surroundings and inviting viewers to take time to explore.

Underlying Browne's research is a notion that physical experiences take place in collaboration with a network of secondary and imaginative sources resulting in an intoxicating, partly fictional, reality. Phenomenological experience meets imaginative thought; language and fantasy mingle with memory – especially that of photography and film. Her works seem to perform this intermingling through their creation - realised over a period of time without a planned outcome, her works are able to reflect the physical location of their production and/or exhibition as well as reflecting thoughts and influences gained over the time of their creation.

Recent sources include Stephen Hawking's BBC Radio 4 Reith lectures on black holes (2016), Botticelli's illustrations of Dante's *'Inferno'* (~1480-90), Stéphane Mallarmé's poem *'A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance'* (1897), and Jon Krakauer's account of the 1996 Everest disaster in *'Into Thin Air'* (1997). Themes of impending disaster and chaos meet with consecutive layers of colour, wall anchor motifs, mock computer graphics and drawings of navigational cairns. Browne leads us through uncertain, shifting locations with her tour-guide parasol aloft, encouraging us to explore her works' alluring depths without losing site of their enduring surfaces.



How would you present your work?

I like to stress the importance of curiosity when presenting my work, being open to influence and change is key. I think of my process as a journey through a labyrinth – something I keep moving through, despite not knowing the structure and size of the tangle of paths. Sometimes you end up covering old ground and reach dead ends but its all part of the game, there's no point in getting frustrated by it.

Why you choose painting as your principal media of expression?

Paint is such a flexible tool, easily open to changes in scale and surface. I don't think I will ever get tired of learning about it. I guess it was also painting that first piqued my interest in art, and it remains an accessible and communicable medium with a vast history. Seeing the painted murals in ancient Pompeii was an incredible reminder of how fundamentally paint can influence and react to architecture and environment. I would soon like to visit the Church of San Francesco in Arezzo to see Piero della Francesca's famous 'The History of the True Cross' fresco's, a great example of paintings' ability to communicate without the need for literacy. Artists who chose to work with paint take on the burden/gift of this history but have the opportunity to react to their own epoch with the same simple tools – this can be paralysing or liberating depending on how brave you feel.

Searching material about you for this interview I found this quote “painting as the art form most akin to a collaboration with rather than a mastery of medium”, could you go deeper and explain me this thinking?

What I was getting at in that quote is that is that I find it productive to allow myself to welcome unexpected results, rather than be annoyed that it was not what I anticipated. Paint has its own characteristics; it wants to drip and splash and bleed and I think that's all good! I'm not really into 'mastery', I think that kind of perceived control might blind me from new ways of working, so we're in it together: collaborators. Sometimes it looks ugly, and that's ok with me.

The importance of colors, for your work and in your everyday life?

Colour is very important – it is usually the first decision made about any work and this decision seems to creep over into my clothes choices (which is often pointed out to me). What is crazy is that I've taught myself to think in colours that I can afford to buy, though having a limiting factor does at least mean its easier to choose. There are so many out there, it's overwhelming. I love greens right now. I also often get rid of colour all together and work in black and white.

Where do you make your works?

At the moment I make my work in a studio in Bow, East London, which is also the area where I live. I was awarded a one-year free tenancy at the studio, which is great, though it's not a space I would have naturally chosen. My previous studio was in Hackney Wick, which overlooked the construction of the 2012 Olympic Stadium, which I loved. I want to make sure my next studio has a good view, there's always so much building going on in London.

What can't be missing from your worktable? (can you send a photo?)

My canvas stretching pliers. So much time is spent preparing canvases, I couldn't cope without these.

A collection you wish at least one work of yours was part of?

I don't believe in making wishes.

A museum where you'd like to have an exhibition?

In a fantasy scenario, Dia:Beacon or Inverleith House, in the grounds of Edinburgh's Royal Botanic Garden, though it is sadly being closed down unless someone comes to its financial aid.

The market or your need to express?

I don't have an uncontrollable 'need' to express, but I want to be able to continue the work I do, research, meet people and start new dialogues, which all requires funding. I very much admire collectors who support emerging artists, its getting harder and harder for artists to keep a studio practice whilst shouldering immense student debt.

Lightness or depth?

Both!

Day or night?

I want to be a morning person, but I work best between 2 – 9pm

A question you've never been asked but one you've always wanted to answer? Answer that question...

I don't really imagine hypothetical scenario's like that, its best to say what you want to say rather than wait to be asked.

Could you briefly describe one of your latest works?

For my recent exhibition 'Forecast' at Limoncello in London I made a series of floor pieces called 'The Shape of Things to Come' which is named after H.G. Wells sci-fi book of predictions for the future, written in 1933. They are made out of grey-scale digital vinyl prints on lasercut Perspex. It was important to me to activate the floor space with something that used a different visual language to the paintings, but still worked with a sense of spatial confusion.

The photo's are of small, non-descript objects I made, that have been digitally enhanced and enlarged to look more 3D. They are mounted onto Perspex which has been laser cut to the size of the image and scattered around the gallery floor, some propped up at angles. I wanted them to appear as though part of a cleromancy ritual, in which lots are cast onto a surface in order to be interpreted as a reading of the future. This work was a significant step for me as it required a completely new, and very pre-planned way of working that I hadn't used before.

What are you reading?

Satin Island by Tom McCarthy and Philip Guston: Collected Writings, Lectures and Conversations edited by C. Coolidge.

A film?

Most recently watched The Ides of March directed by George Clooney as a warm up to the US election furor. In terms of favourites, The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou by Wes Anderson is a perfect film. I've been meaning to re-watch Barry Lyndon by Stanley Kubrick, it's a masterpiece.

Where would you like to live?

Somewhere near mountains and with an open-minded population. Scotland looks pretty good right now.

Do you have reference artists? Artists you'd like to work with?

There are artists I appreciate & reference for lots of different reasons, so to mix a few up I would say Max Beckmann, Prunella Clough, Richard Serra, Jeff Wall, Mary Heilmann, Donald Judd, Richard Hamilton, Mark Leckey, Thomas Houseago, Phyllida Barlow, Tacita Dean, Tal R...it's impossible to know where to stop! I've not really worked collaboratively before but I'd like to give it a try sometime.

A project, related to art, that you'd like to do?

Maybe a huge outdoor mural, though I think it would be really hard.

If you weren't an artist, what job would you like?

I can't really imagine doing another job.

Let's imagine a group show. Who would you like to exhibit with?

Some great artists, working in lots of different media.

Yes or no to curators? If yes, who would you choose?

Yes for sure, though it would be odd to choose one.

A dream of yours?

I crash cars a lot in my dreams.

