

Interview > **Lisa Denyer**



Image: Temple - Lisa Denyer

When did you start painting and why?

That's a good question, and quite a difficult one to answer. I've always made paintings, so there's never been a moment of conscious decision to become a painter. There are many reasons why I do it and many things I love about the medium. I paint because for me, it's the best way of reflecting, and taking a step back from my immediate situation to think about things in a wider context. I choose to work specifically with paint because I enjoy exploring the materiality of it, how it responds to various stimuli, for example a change of surface or the addition of a medium. I like how the process of painting is meditative and intuitive. Concentrating wholly on the actions required to balance a composition, or in creating a meaningful dialogue, provides a total and immersive connection. I think this kind of outlet is really important as a way of escaping the constant sensory bombardment and information overload.

You are originally from Watford. How did you find yourself in Manchester?

I moved to Manchester in 2009 after I finished my degree. I had been to Manchester a few times before that and I knew it had a vibrant art scene. I was also immediately inspired by the architectural elements of the city, especially some of the older buildings.



Image: Space Boot - Lisa Denyer

You have been on the Castlefield Gallery Associates scheme. How helpful do you think it has been?

The Associates scheme at Castlefield Gallery has been really important to my practice over the last year or so. Some of the opportunities that I have been particularly grateful for include support in a two person residency and exhibition entitled *Catalyst* with Holly Rowan Hesson in August 2013 at Piccadilly Place, Manchester. Castlefield Gallery provided us with the exhibition space through their New Art Spaces initiative *

I've also been able to continue a longer term project with Holly at Federation House. We are currently on a six month residency there to develop ideas that initiated during the *Catalyst* project, looking at abstraction, materiality, and curated spaces.

I also recently took part in CPAGES, an artists' exchange between Manchester and Birmingham set up through Castlefield Gallery Associates and Eastside Projects ESP members. I think this kind of activity is really important in encouraging artistic connections across cities.

You are curating a show as part of Castlefield Gallery's 'Launch Pad' programme, do you want to tell us a little bit about that?

The show is called *About Painting*, and will look at various approaches to contemporary abstract painting. The artists who will be exhibiting are Claudia Böse, Louisa Chambers, Terry Greene, Matthew Macaulay, David Manley, Andy Parkinson, Anne Parkinson and myself. The preview will take place on 19th June, and the exhibition will run until 29th June 2014.

The paintings range from the highly structured and pre-planned, to pieces showing a freer and more spontaneous language. I'm interested in the capacity that abstract painting has to represent a multitude of thoughts, feelings and points of recognition through variances in visual language and openness to interpretation, so I wanted to explore this through the work in the show.

How do you feel that curation fits in with your personal practice?

Curating exhibitions is extremely important to the development of my practice. It's very helpful in contextualizing my own work, and I'm often inspired by conversations that take place during the process, and seeing work I really admire first hand.

I'm very excited about one of my next exhibitions - *Society of Island Universes*, which opens at Piccadilly Place, Manchester, on 17th July 2014. I'll be working with Holly Rowan Hesson, Jo McGonigal, Sarah McNulty, Willow Rowlands and Designer Michael Thorp on this show. The title of the exhibition is taken from Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*, making the link between ways of seeing and the discovery of new possibilities.

I already feel that this show will have a large impact on my work as it will look at abstraction in more general terms (including photographic elements, projection and installation as well as painting), and responding to site. I think this will force me to really push the boundaries of my painting in terms of surfaces, textures and moving away from conventional ideas about painting.

You had a solo show at South Square Gallery recently which looked great, did you find that this exhibition gave you any insight into ways of taking your work to the next level?

It was really helpful to see the work I've made in the past year in one place. The paintings I showed at Geode were very much finished pieces, and so moving on from that I'm trying to think more about experimental processes. The gallery was a great place to test methods of presentation, and it was a valuable experience to share ideas and work closely with the curators at South Square.



Image / Lisa Denyer - Installation shot taken at Geode, solo exhibition at South Square Gallery 2014

You studied in Coventry and made very different paintings to the ones you now make, do you think that the paintings you are making now still maybe echo some of your interests and ideas from your previous work?

Working through a non-representational vocabulary has enabled a focus on the minimal, emphasizing elements that could be compared to small sections of a composition in my previous landscape work.

I think my idea of nature has changed from being limited to landscape to being more encompassing, although I do feel that there are still some visual landscape associations present in my work. I've always been inspired by certain aspects of nature, such as precious stones and mineral strata.

At the moment in my paintings I'm concentrating on simple shapes contrasted with very textured, layered surfaces. The excavation and subsequent covering of colour is important. I'm interested in transience and materiality so details such as broken bricks or peeling paint on buildings really appeal to me.

This idea of finding meaning in incidental details, and closely exploring form through a complete stripping down to elemental components feeds into concepts of microcosm and macrocosm. I think this expression of the sublime is where most of the similarities lie between current work and my earlier landscape images.

1. Castlefield Gallery's New Art Spaces is an initiative to create dynamic project spaces for artists, artist collectives and artists development agencies. Making use of temporary vacant retail, office and light industrial units, NAS provides opportunities for emerging creatives to incubate their practices, produce work and showcase new art to local communities. Currently Castlefield Gallery runs New Art Spaces in Leigh, Widnes, and city centre Manchester.