

PROFILE



Ian Davenport in his studio, 2018. Photo: Jooney Woodward



Ian with Pete Kosowicz at Thumbprint Editions, 2019. Photo: Ian Davenport Studio

Lockdown Blue-Green-Greys

Romina Provenzi makes a virtual visit during lockdown to the studio of **Ian Davenport** to talk about colour and inspiration

Naturally drawn to mixing colours and encouraged by his parents to engage with art from a young age, Ian Davenport said, 'Applying for art school was a conscious choice because art was something I really wanted to do in my life properly.'

Davenport and I had a FaceTime conversation back in April during the 'Stay at Home' phase of the lockdown. He was a graduate of Goldsmiths in London where Michael Craig Martin was among his tutors. The recipient of unusually early recognition, he feels 'very fortunate for an early success.' Although at the time he admits 'that wasn't without its challenges, because of the many expectations every

time I tried to change my work.' Noticed while still at Goldsmiths by late art dealer Leslie Waddington, and shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 1991 and for the John Moores Painting Prize in 1999, Davenport thinks that 'prizes are good for visibility because as an artist, you want a lot of people to look and talk about your work.' The Turner Prize shortlisting brought him exposure to a large number of people at a young age.

Today, one of the most influential abstract painters and printmakers on the international contemporary art scene, Davenport reflects that, 'Abstract painters have always been drawn to vertical stripes and lines for the same reason, because it is such a good way of exploring colours.'

Yet his exploration of colour goes further, adding a tactile and performative aspect that is very much his own and this exploration expands into printmaking. In fact, the artist has ‘found that the printmaking and the painting work really well alongside each other. One method informs the next one; one project leading to another. They really are a useful combination from that point of view.’

In 2002, the artist published his first series of prints, the *Oval* screenprints with Cristea Roberts Gallery. In 2006, he started making etchings with Master Printer Pete Kosowicz at Thumbprint Editions in South London: ‘With Pete we found a way to develop a technique where we could split my prints into different plates, and then kind of overlap them, and print them in three sections. The first print was terrible, thinking about it in retrospect, but the germ of the idea was there.’ It is quite a complicated and lengthy process to print the *Seasons*: three plates need to be printed subsequently and quickly one on top of the other using chine collé, while the paper is still wet. Davenport is personally involved in the process of making the prints, especially in the phase of preparation just before the plates are made, and recognises that, as he likes it, ‘printmaking allows me to just concentrate on the colour.’



Colour Splat Fizz (2019) Screenprint in 28 colours on 410gsm tub size Somerset satin paper, paper and image 1177 x 942 mm. Edition of 30. Photo: Cristea Roberts Gallery



New palettes

Creativity needs ideas and continued nurturing, and when the artist felt that there was no novelty in his choices with colour, a conversation with his wife, artist Sue Arrowsmith, revealed a new way ahead. ‘Sue suggested that I look at other artists’ paintings in more detail and with a different kind of eye, and that helped me enormously especially while looking at the colours in Van Gogh’s paintings. Therefore I tried mixing colours the same way he would have been: the greys and greens on the blue background, all very beautiful, then adding this orange that suddenly owns the whole painting. I would have never thought of doing that.’

Left *Evening* (2019) From a series of four etchings on Canson Edition Bright White 320gsm, paper 620 x 620 mm / image 500 x 500 mm. Edition of 30. Photo: Cristea Roberts Gallery

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Spring (2019) One from a series of four etchings with chine collé on Hahnemühle Bright White 350gsm paper, 1150 x 1130 mm. Edition of 30. Photo: Cristea Roberts Gallery

I am not trying to replicate a specific painting but looking for a trigger that push me into different choices.' Occasionally, a simple walk will serve his exploration of colour. 'In the spring here in the UK, you get this fine scenery like bluebells coming out into fields, and their colour blue in amongst these trees with the grass is an overwhelming experience for me, and brought me to do some paintings with that in mind when mixing the colours.'

His practice has also been influenced by experiencing the impact of murals and paintings in public spaces while on holiday

in Florence with his wife in 2000. 'While I was looking at murals in Florence, I just loved the directness of the way the artists painted on the walls and their very large scale. And the fact that you still have to visit the very same building they were set for to see them in the scenery, experiencing the architecture of the place as well, that whole experience was awesome.' The trip inspired him to pursue the *Poured Lines* commission for Southwark Street near Tate Modern in London, a large-scale piece of public art that 'was like a game changer for me' in terms of placing his work in front of a wide audience.

During the lockdown so far 'we have been physically restricted, but our imagination is not limited at all. And creativity and imagination is what artists have. Even if we cannot do our normal things right now, we can find a creative solution to it. And after a period of reflection while doing hopeless and awkward stuff and working through ideas, after that bit, from there you gain information to develop the next group of works.' We cannot wait to see what Ian Davenport will present us with after this period of unrestricted imagination.