

# VISUAL ARTS

Imagination is the crucial component in Lucy Austin's drawings. Without that they would lack something vital. She plunders her imagination to create lines, the shapes, the colours, the layers, which have a conversation with each other that sings.

What feeds her imagination is her daily life. The walk home from the studio through an urban landscape, the packaging she collects, the beachcombing. The random small objects that catch her eye, the marks and detritus that litter the world and the sights and sounds that surround her. Structures like electricity pylons, windmills, ladders and spiral stairs and the vacuum cleaner which references not just the cleaning of a domestic interior but the cleaning out of the body's internal organs too. It is as much an emotional landscape as a physical one which is her resource.

Lucy draws with colour and a brush. No pencil preparation, no advance plan other than perhaps a ground of colour. It is intuitive and what emerges through her innate sense of composition is a complex composite of layering of shapes, marks, lines and colour which have a concrete meaning. They are something, they may touch on a narrative but they are not abstract in the pure sense of the word. Through their spatiality they have a three-dimensionality which negates the need for physical three dimensions.

Words fuel her imagination too. She reads fiction voraciously and loves the pure clarity of writers like William Trevor. Poetry too: the phrase, *shabby equipment always deteriorating*, from T.S. Elliot's poem in *The Four Quartets*, *East Coker* was the beginning of her *Tender Machines* drawings. She collects words for their sounds, their meanings and their shapes writing them on her studio wall. She is playing with them but it is a serious business and they may be future titles. She feels she has a responsibility to title her work, for her viewers and herself and also for the work. They are sometimes explanatory, triggered by the finished piece, a clue or a way into her thinking and at other times titles just are, for no particular reason.

Lucy Austin was a Cheltenham Fellow in printmaking and has made three-dimensional work although these were not sculptures, rather three-dimensional drawings. Now she makes drawings in a combination of watercolour and gouache; she uses acrylics in preference to oil paints, partly because she doesn't like the smell. Artists who are touchstones for her are Louise Bourgeois, Prunella Clough and Phyllida Barlow.

Drawing is her practice despite the ubiquity of colour. They identify themselves as such primarily through their use of a fluid line. However she has recently returned to printmaking after quite a long gap and is making screen-



'INDIGO DUOLOGUE 3' (Watercolour on paper, 28 x 38 cm)

## LUCY AUSTIN

prints, experimenting with her signature layering. Using acrylics with a printmaking medium she is able to vary the translucency and opacity of the colour in a similar way to that achieved in her use of watercolour and gouache.

Austin works slowly but fast which seems like a contradiction in terms. She produces a large number of

works in any one series. Her watercolour brush drawings rely on speed of execution and sureness of touch; hesitancy would kill them, and. Temperature is crucial too. In the summers heat the colour dries too quickly in the gap between the loading of colour and the execution. In the winter the opposite is true and the process is too slow. So the speed is in the physical doing and the slowness exists in the endless trials where nothing is certain, nothing is finished and complete until she is completely satisfied with what she sees. The thinking time and the consideration and re-consideration of where one shape, one colour, one set of lines will cross, layer, sit alongside or on top of another, and then the colour adds another dimension. It is a very long process, which leads to the completion of a body of work within which each work is resolved, satisfying and completes a circle. Each individual work only exists because of the ones that went before.

Fiona Robinson

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