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Part of: [Suzanne Bethell: Lucky Dip](#)



HOME's Talent Development Producer for Visual Art Alice Wilde chats to artist Suzanne Bethell about her latest exhibition, [Lucky Dip](#), currently on display in HOME's Granada Foundation Galleries (until Sun 22nd May)

Let's start by you telling us a bit about yourself and your career to date...

A compulsive painter and creator, I have not always had the luxury of time to pursue this passion, having brought up a family alongside a career as a lecturer in Further Education.

In my sixties now, I am from a generation discouraged from pursuing art as a career. My degree is in English from the University of York. Largely self-taught until graduating with a Foundation Degree in Art and Design in 2000, I have developed my skills and artistic horizons through undertaking many courses with practicing artists. I took a Complete Printmaker course with Hotbed Press, Salford in 2017-2019.

I find painting incredibly freeing. I love to experiment with new materials, blends and scale. There's something exciting and compelling about discovering what you can create next. I'm eclectic and source ideas from the infinite range of resources available both digitally and in the real world. Colour excites me.

A few years ago, I became interested in mindfulness and have found that the practice feeds into my work.



Exhibition view. Photograph by Elle Brotherhood at On The Brink Studios.

My first solo exhibition was at the Pankhurst Centre, Manchester in 1995. This solo exhibition at HOME in Manchester feels like coming full circle. It is such an exciting opportunity for me, one I am massively grateful for. HOME is the perfect environment for my work, the team a wonderful group of people with which to work.

Other recent exhibitions include at Saul Hay Gallery, Manchester 2021, Manchester Art fair (2021), the RWA open, Bristol (2021), HOME open (2021), Hepworth Print Fair (2019) RSA, Edinburgh (2018), and I've exhibited widely in galleries throughout the UK since that first solo exhibition. I am a member of Hotbed Press, Salford and an associate member of Castlefield Gallery, Manchester.

What would you like the audience to take from Lucky Dip?

A sense of joy, enjoyment, feeling uplifted, luxuriating in colour, being dazzled by neon...

That life is a balance of chance and choice.

Your paintings are very playful and you inject a lot of fun into your work, can you maybe tell us a bit more about your process?

Creating assemblages is ultimately enjoyable and fun.

I rarely throw away unsuccessful work and keep scraps for collaging and assembling. I am a very messy creator. My work space becomes covered with fragments of paper, fabrics, card, string, all kinds of materials I have hoarded.

To begin, I sort material into piles which may be arranged by colour or type. For the assemblages in this exhibition, which were commissioned, I returned to remnants of the Urban screen prints

and mono-printed scribble drawings. I find it helps to introduce constraints when working so, besides the colour palette and materials, I limited the work to 15cm square khadi paper, painted white.

Then the fun begins. Playing with the fragments, tearing and cutting, assembling and reassembling until something feels right.

My way of making is intuitive and process-led, often initiated by an emotional response to a sense of place or time. With paintings, the first in a series occurs in the moment. There may have been a lengthy gestation period, underpinned by an idea or by a desire to create in a certain way. Then on a particular day, there's a trigger which ignites a process.

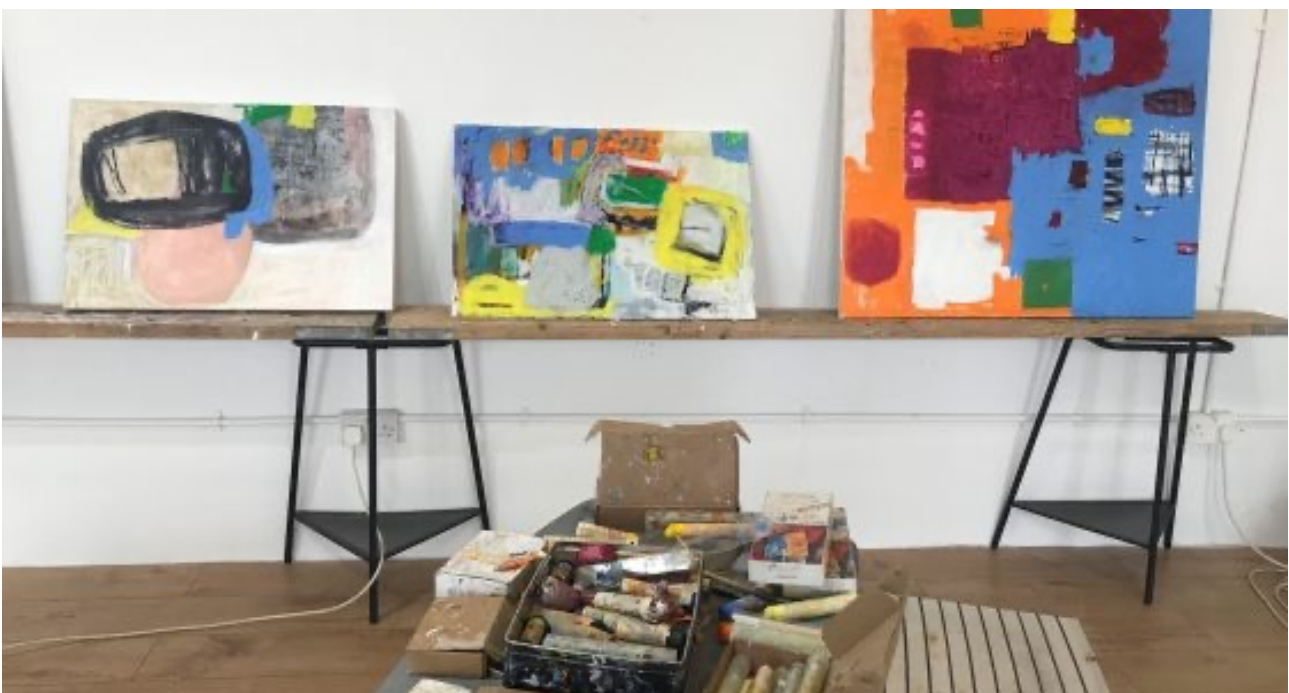


Flow 3, detail, Mixed Media on Paper, Float Mounted & Framed

I tend to keep a large sheet of paper beside a canvas on which I'm working, to test out colours or marks. So with the Flow series for instance, it was late afternoon in the studio, I'd been working aimlessly and unsuccessfully on a couple of canvasses when my eye was drawn to the test paper – it had elements of spray paint, a few oil stick marks ... I'd been looking at a diverse range of the

artists whose work incorporates lively mark making and mixed media.

Some are well known, for instance Jade Fadojutimi, whose work I love, Patrick Heron whose Sydney Garden paintings have been a major source of inspiration and many others less well known – Instagram is a continuous resource. I moved the test paper onto the floor and started playing by transfer printing onto it, doodling with posca pens, collaging fragments ... and became absorbed, energized. As I was working, I taped a few blank pieces of paper up on the wall and worked quickly across all, placing a mark here, another over there. I seized on the bright pink duct tape that I'd been attracted to buy and incorporated it. By teatime, I thought Flow 1 was almost complete. I couldn't wait to return to the studio the following day to continue.



Suzanne Bethell's studio at Hallam Mill, Stockport

Some of the works exhibited in Lucky Dip were created during the various lockdowns, how did this affect your practice?

I was fortunate to be able to work in my studio throughout the pandemic. Before leaving my Compstall studio last October, I was able to walk along a canal, across a field to the studio – something

which became integral to the creative process; a settling of body and mind, an escape into the soothing qualities of nature.

I created in response to the emotional turbulence initiated by what was happening externally. *Lucky Dip* together with its companion piece, *Isolation*, was painted on the day we went into the first lockdown on 23rd March 2020.

The week before, I had hung *Mesh* at what is now Sadler's Cat overlooking Sadler's yard, Manchester; a solo exhibition of unique Urban screen prints some of which figure in this exhibition. As I went into Manchester, each day, that week, the city became increasingly and eerily deserted. The preview scheduled for Thursday 19th March was cancelled. The work hung in the building, largely unseen, until it came down in October 2020.



Exhibition view. Photograph by Elle Brotherhood at On The Brink Studios.

So back to March 23rd. I was in my studio, locked down, unsure of what that might mean. The neon acrylics remaining from the Urban screen printing, eyed me from the paint table. After a frustrating and unfocussed morning, I began to work quickly across two blank canvasses, responding to a mix of emotions. The two pieces were

largely completed towards the end of the day. I revisited them to tweak a little and add oil stick marks, during the next week or so.

Other work such as *Winter Walk* arose as part of a series begun in May 2020 when we emerged from lockdown – the first in this *Walking series* was called ‘*And so we begin to move freely*’ exhibited and sold at the RWA, Bristol in 2021. The *Walking series* pays tribute to positive changes in life during the Pandemic: a slowing down, valuing people, appreciating nature, reappraising.

The latest piece which is also currently at HOME is the spray painted work called *Into the Garden*. Some have a sense of travelling through landscapes, taking an aerial view such as *Walking New Ways*, *And so we move freely* which can be seen on my website.



Suzanne Bethell's studio at Hallam Mill, Stockport

Your studio is based at Hallam Mill in Stockport, what is an average day in the studio like for you?

I love this space. It's my retreat. It's a relatively new studio for me. It's bright and airy and large so I can continue to work large scale. There are few average days although I am generally in the studio

for a part of most days in the week. It was important that I found somewhere local when I had to vacate my last studio and ultimately this took priority over being in an artists' community.

When I arrive, I put the kettle on and make a brew. Then survey and reassess what I've been working on. It's so easy to get excited about a piece of work initially, and then on reappraisal, appreciate that it needs reworking. An overnight sleep gives a new perspective.

I usually work on a few pieces at once – it's an energy thing.

Recently Luke Passey kindly came over to give me a few tips about spray painting techniques, generously demonstrating his processes and helping me develop my own. A huge thanks to Luke.

Another artist has a self contained unit within the studio and if we're both in together, we'll have a catch up chat about life in general and usually discuss our work at some point.

I welcome visits to the studio from anyone who would like to view my work .

What advice would you give to artists starting out and perhaps those who haven't received any formal art training?

Experiment and play with materials. In fact play, play play. Use a huge variety of sources to develop your practice from short courses, you tube videos, other artists, visits to galleries, social media ...

Follow your passions.

Enter opens and take rejection realistically – sometimes your work just isn't the right fit, sometimes it isn't of the right standard... but keep going. Ask for feedback and use what resonates with you.



Stormy Days, detail, Acrylic & Oil Stick, 120cm x 100cm

And a fun one if you could sit down and have dinner with anyone (dead or alive) who would it be?

Jade Fadojutimi.

“Colour’s everything to me. I translate objects through colour. It’s the thing I notice first and it’s probably the way I make most decisions in my life” Jade Fadojutimi, BBC interview, Liverpool Biennial March 2021

I first saw her work in the flesh at the Liverpool biennial and loved it – the freedom, the colour, the scale, the neons. Her energy and openness to exploration is so inspiring.

Thanks to Alice Wilde for her innovative curation and interesting blog questions.

- Find out more about Suzanne Bethell by visiting her website [here](#).
- *Lucky Dip* continues until 22 May in our Granada Foundation Galleries. [Click here to find out more.](#)