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AN INTERVIEW WITH CHOWWAI CHEUNG

Chowwai Cheung is a mix-media artist based in South West England, UK. Here, Chowwai delves into how the natural geometry of Devon and Dorset shapes her abstract landscapes, the technique behind her printmaking process, and how her background in textile design has influenced her vibrant colour palettes.

CG How do the landscapes and coastal areas of Devon and Dorset inspire the geometric forms in your work? What elements influence the scenes you create?

CC Moving to the South West in the mid 90's after I graduated from Manchester university, has really influenced my current work. The awe inspiring landscape, from its more dramatic northern coastline, to the gentle verdant valleys.

They have led me to create work that forms a natural geometry, specifically observed in rock formations and the lay of the land.

CG You work with a mix of mediums, from print and collage to acrylic painting and oil stick on wood panel. Why are these your preferred medium to work in to create abstract landscapes?

CC My Collagraph prints are cut from boards using similar materials to create my mixed media collages; with a use of board, acrylic, papers, and etching ink. From a recent progression of my printmaking, I started painting in a familiar process using acrylic. This medium is applied onto wood panel as a preferred surface.



CG Can you walk us through your creative process, and how your hand-cut layering technique developed?

CC Collagraph process is my chosen practice of printmaking. I find the accessible materials allow me to be more adventurous in my approach.

Each board is cut with fine lines for detail, depending how deep they are incised will determine how dark they will be. Larger areas are cut away so ink can be merged together and create a solid shape. Transparent areas are created by using carborundum or by removing thin layers of the surface. This allows the colour to be held in the grooves of my intaglio print.

My prints are very involved using A La Poupeé method (multiple colours), I can spend hours inking up. I usually go to a meditative state during this process and it can take a whole day to print. I enjoy this variable process, eager to see the results when lifting the print as it reveals the image from my etching press.





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CG Can you discuss more about the themes you explore through your work such as the role of geometry and your choice of subject matter, particularly rock formations?

CC Exploring themes of geometry in the landscape is my main focus and inspiration. I seek out unusual shapes and lines in rock formations on my walks in the countryside, or coastal areas. By using specific lines and transparent patterns, I translate them as a reference from my experiences. They can represent how heavy the rocks are and how they are balanced; portraying what could lie beneath, or what these layers might look like. Sometimes these rocks feel like a puzzle or a maze to walk through.

CG Each landscape has a vibrant combination of colours, can you share more about your choice of colour palette?

During my studies I learnt that colours played an integral part of what I love. Whether it is painting or design, I like making colour sit together in harmony. I remember as a student that we made a diary of colour, we would walk through a picture of a painting, pick out the colours, and see how they sit together.

CG How has your background in textile design influenced your current practice in painting and printmaking?

Looking back, I can definitely see the influence of my background as a textile and surface pattern designer. I learnt so much over the decades in different styles of painting, using oils, gouache, watercolours and inks to make my designs. Colour played an important role especially in textiles, where limitations would make you think how to consider what colour sit well with one another. Although I am not restricted anymore it has taught me how to use colour to its best, becoming an intuitive and instinctive process, evident in my current practice.



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