

# Cube Gallery

## AN INTERVIEW WITH CLAIRE COHEN

*Claire Cohen* is an artist based in Bristol, UK. In this conversation, she shares her journey from physical sciences to the art world, and her years of experimentation evolving her technique of multi-dimensional layering with perspex.

**CG** You have an interdisciplinary background from studying physical sciences and printmaking, to a career path in technical and commercial sectors. What prompted your shift towards art?

**CC** It has been a slow transition and seemed to happen naturally. During the 90's, I took a series of evening classes including botanical painting, ceramics and printmaking as a counterpoint to my technical job. The turning point was probably having the ability to work part time which meant I could take up serious study, ultimately leading to my Masters degree in Printmaking. After that, I was able to devote all my time to creating and developing my practise, first at Spike Print Studio and then, as my practise moved away from print, in my own studio.

**CG** How does your scientific background overlap with your abstract forms today?

**CC** My interest in science came from seeing the beauty in diagrams, charts, graphs and maps as much as wanting to understand the reasons behind them. It is these sorts of patterns created from data and formulae that interest me and I like exploring ways to create and manipulate them. My technical background has given me a head start in getting to grips with a lot of the technology that I employ and I think my background is



apparent in the way I like to experiment with combinations of processes and techniques.

**CG Can you elaborate on your creative process with Perspex and multi-dimensional layering, and how this technique has evolved over the years?**

**CC** My earliest works using Perspex were screen-printed silhouettes of trees. I then explored engraving patterns onto the surfaces and incorporating found objects between the layers. Towards the end of my Masters course, I experimented with using a method of transferring inkjet prints to the surface of the Perspex. The result was my first 'Planes' piece, a representation of the Sun, shown at the RWA Autumn in 2014 where it won the People's Choice award.

Inkjet print proved tricky to work with and I started using fine layers of acrylic paint. The evolution of the work has included some changes and enhancements in construction and materials. More importantly, as I learned more about using the 3D software, I have been able to develop more elaborate shapes on which to base the designs. Many hours spent modifying parameters have allowed me to build the knowledge about which shapes will read correctly when reduced to flat slices.



**CG Your works span from bright, saturated colours to muted tones, can you elaborate on your choice of colour palette?**

**CC** Colour is important in my work, but I don't see it as the defining element. I start with creating the shapes and overall design before deciding how they should be 'clothed'. I think colour creates the mood of the piece and I love using subtle, understated colours that don't shout, as much as I like to use vibrant colour palettes to add drama.

**CG Can you share how experimentation is a significant part of your artistic vision?**

**CC** Experimentation is very important in my process. My work relies heavily on the materials I use and trial and error is the best way for me to see what works and what doesn't. Developing a successful workflow that produces what I see in my mind's eye can take a long time. My newest strand of work, which came out of a desire to translate my planes work to the wall, has taken a few years to get beyond the experimental stage, having tested a number of different materials and modifying the designs themselves to get the desired effect. For example, the flatter work that is hung on the wall, more intricacy is required to give the work texture and provide interest.



**CG    How do you hope the viewer engages with your multi-dimensional creations?**

**CC** The abstract nature of my work means that the viewer can choose to interpret what they see however they wish. I hope that there is a sense of fun in exploring the way in which the shapes disappear and reappear as one walks around the work. Similarly, I hope that viewers find the detail in the laser cut wall pieces an interesting contrast with the overall large-scale designs. Mainly, I hope that viewers simply enjoy what they see.

**CG    Has living and working in Bristol, as well as your time at Spike Print Studios, shaped your artwork?**

**CC** Meeting so many other artists in my learning journey and living in such a unique place has been very important in my development as an artist. Learning by just being around other practising artists is as important as the academic study.

**CG    Your work has been exhibited internationally, including at Art Miami and SOFA Chicago. Has this influenced your artistic practice?**

**CC** I take a great interest in the big art events, particularly those in the States where there is a lot of very exciting art being shown. I am really quite humbled that I have had work shown and sold around the world and I owe my international exposure to the Cube gallery who have been instrumental in the success of my work. It definitely encourages me to think big and to constantly try to push myself.

**CG    Can you share some details about your past commissions?**

**CC** The commissions I have done have been some of the smallest of my works, done for several people over the years. It has been a lovely, extra facet to my process to meet clients and come up with designs together. My largest pieces have also been commissions and these have thrown up their own challenges, not least because the pieces don't fit in my studio. It has been very rewarding to push myself to tackle the creative and technical issues for these pieces and see the finished results turn out successfully.

**CG    What are you currently working on, and are there any upcoming projects or exhibitions that you're particularly excited about?**

**CC** I am currently focusing on a new strand of work for the wall which utilises finely detailed laser cut paper. I loved Spirograph as a child and spent hours producing endless patterns, so I am using the mathematical formulae that describe these patterns to recreate them digitally. I then laser cut paper pieces that are assembled into the final, large-scale design. I am very excited about this work because it complements the 'Planes' work so well. I am able to use designs with complex geometry without the loss of detail, which is a limitation of the slicing process of the Planes work.



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