

INTERVIEW ANDY SINGLETON



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How did the exhibition come about?

I was approached by curator Kirsty Rodda to put on a show for Hampshire Cultural Trust. Kirsty was aware of my work through an exhibition in Southampton in 2013 called 'The First Cut' which was a collection of works from 30 paper artists across the world and featured a large scale installation by myself. The exhibition was initially curated by Manchester Art Gallery and toured various venues including Southampton SeaCity in 2013.

What is the exhibition about?

The exhibition is an exploration of the connections between our inner world and outer world. I wanted to create a body of work that celebrated these connections and that spoke of the fragility and impermanence of being human and the fantastic reality of being part of the universe.

What was it like making work during a pandemic?

It has been a very interesting experience creating the work during the pandemic. In a lot of ways it has added an intensity to the making process and the final pieces. I had a lot of time to really think about what I was producing and pull together a body of work I was really pleased with. I usually have very limited time to make my own work, but with the current situation much of the commercial work that would distract me has disappeared, which gave me time and clarity to really make the work I wanted to. The theme of the exhibition has also taken on a greater intensity that I think will speak to people even deeper than pre-Covid. The pandemic has shone a light on so many issues facing us as humans and shaken us out of our comfort zones/normal daily lives. I think we are all thinking about our place in the world, our mortality and our relationship with nature in a deeper way, so I hope the themes

of the exhibition have been able to contribute to the collective thought process.

What is your background?

I was born in Nottingham in 1983 but moved to Wakefield, West Yorkshire age 3. I've always enjoyed drawing and making and always wanted to be an artist from a very early age. Art and Design was one of the only areas I excelled at during school so it felt inevitable I would study this in further education. I went to Leeds College of Art for my foundation study, which is where I developed an interest in Illustration. I studied Illustration with Animation at Manchester Met, graduating in 2006. It was in my final year where I started to create paper cut illustrations. After graduation I set up a studio in 2010 in my hometown of Wakefield. I began to create large-scale paper cut artworks that looked 3D due to their scale, this pushed me develop the full 3D paper installations I create today.

During Covid-19 people missed galleries & exhibitions. Some found inspiration in cooking, reading, the natural world etc. What has inspired you during this time?

I think the biggest inspiration for me has been the natural world, which is something that has always been there in my work. During the lockdown and gradual reopening my family and myself really tried to get out into nature as often as possible. My partner and kids love to collect little items from nature and it's great fun looking at these objects relating them to my work. We visited the Yorkshire coast a lot over the summer and found a lot of connections with the marine plant life and some of the patterns in my work.

Which part of the exhibition process do you enjoy the most - creating the sculptures, the install, the final result etc.?

I really enjoyed the whole process for this exhibition, from creating the initial proposal to making the work and executing the installation. Making the work was great fun as it was fully in my control unlike some commercial projects I have worked on in the past. The full

satisfaction and relief once the work is installed is possibly the most enjoyable aspect of the installation process but it is also slightly sad as the process has reached its conclusion and I'm left thinking 'Right, what's next?!'

The work looks incredibly hard to make. Are you a naturally patient person?

The work is very time consuming to make but I don't ever feel impatient while making it. I find the time flies by very fast while I'm absorbed into the making of each piece, especially if I am pleased with how it is going.

Is your home covered in paper installations and sculptures?

I wish I had time to make more work for my home, I do have a few pieces around the house and some prints and drawings. I don't have any rooms filled with installations or anything, I don't have the space!

What's your favourite tool for the work you make?

I use a round handle scalpel with a No.11 blade - these blades are replaced constantly! This is my essential tool for cutting paper and I have used this since the early days back in 2005 when I first started cutting paper.

Have you tried anything different with the works in this exhibition, and is it important to you to keep experimenting in your work?

I find it very important to continue to experiment and challenge myself in my work. For this exhibition it was more a case of taking what I had made in the past and making it more complex, refined or on a larger scale. It was also the first time I had been able to produce a full body of work for just one show so it was very exciting to produce a set of drawings, small sculptures, hanging works and prints that all directly connected to the 3 installations. For me it felt like a very complete set of work, where as in the past it has sometimes been fragmented due to only exhibiting one or two pieces in a group show.

Which artist has inspired you most?

One of the most defining experiences I had as an artist was visiting Vincent Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam when I was 22. I always loved his work but to see it in person was an amazing experience. What he was expressing about the movement and energy of life is something that I have tried to inject into my work ever since.

Which piece/s in *Bodies* are you most proud of?

I've tried to think about and select my favourite pieces but I feel the 3 installation pieces all work together as one and I am proud of them all.

When did you discover that paper was the medium for you?

The first time I cut paper to create artwork was creating stencils for in my foundation year. I didn't pick up the process again until my final year in 2005/2006. It was here that I started to cut paper to create standalone artworks. Once I started creating these paper cuttings as Illustrations I knew I had found my main medium.

When you are in the studio, what do you need to have around you to make it conducive to working?

My studio is quite well equipped and I usually have most things I need to work – what really helps to keep me focused is a sense of purpose or a looming deadline! If I'm excited about an idea I can't wait to try it out. I often find it most difficult to make time for my personal practice now I have young children. Often a late night studio sessions are my most productive.



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You've worked with some incredible commercial partners in your career so far. Is there anyone (or anywhere) in particular you'd really like to work with?

I don't have any particular goals to work with anyone but it would be great to work with Iris Van Harpen, Bjork or Aphex Twin on something.

Do you have a strong sense of knowing when something is 'finished'?

I would say yes - I think it's come with experience of making work but it is sometimes hard to finish something when more can be added. Often it can be down to time constraints but also asking yourself 'if I add anything else now will the work be improved or is it saying what I want it to say already'. Its often good to leave something and come back later to review it.

What advice would you give to your younger self and artists starting out?

All ways work hard and persevere – talent only gets you so far. There was a time when I was quite lazy but once I finished university I realised that I need to work a lot harder if I wanted to achieve anything. Also to remember to have fun with whatever you make and do, be prepared to push yourself and take risks, always know you're worth. I think you only learn the last one with experience.

What do you like most about being an artist?

The freedom and studio life is really great and perfect for me.

Do you think the previous generations had it 'easier' by knowing less, before the in depth scientific discoveries about space and our origins? Do you find comfort in the relatively minuscule human existence on a cosmic scale?

As humans we are naturally curious and want to look for answers to the deepest questions. I doubt the lack of scientific knowledge made it easier cope with life. I think they probably saw the world through a different prism that would throw up equally challenging questions of existence and death. For me personally I do not have any issues with the insignificance of human life on a cosmic scale. I think we can still find meaning and beauty in life even though ultimately our lives have no grand meaning. To be aware and understand our place in the universe is so precarious and fragile is what makes it all so special.

What's next for you?

Good question – in these uncertain times its hard to say. I have an interesting commercial project with the museum in my home town of Wakefield. I can't say too much but it's going to be along the theme of conservation and environment. As for personal projects, the solo show has triggered a lot of new ideas for new work. I am thinking about some very large-scale pieces not necessarily in a gallery setting. It will be something very immersive and I am interested in combining other elements as well as sculpture. Watch this space.