

## Summary Statement

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As a painter, I've wanted to explore the medium of printmaking for a while. To investigate how the contrasts between order and chaos, that I seek in my gestural expression and layered pattern, would translate to, and be enhanced by, this medium. This was partnered in my proposal with a desire to further my understanding of the influence that colour has on the viewer. I've often found printmaking rather flat and lack lustre, so my aim was to develop prints that have impact and feel alive.

Reading Agamben's essay *What is the Contemporary* - which seems to tell artists to focus on the darkness of their times<sup>1</sup>, and Batchelor's *Chromophobia* referring to feelings within the art world that colour is primitive and superficial<sup>2</sup>, I was fuelled with an increasing defiance to embrace and champion the importance of colour to lift one's spirits through my art.

From studying a variety of printmakers such as Roy Lichtenstein, Sam Francis and Terry Frost<sup>3</sup>, I selected a number of techniques that might suit my goal for bright colour, neat precision and gestural expression. Encouraged by finding examples of work with a "physical presence... retaining the immediacy of a painting"<sup>4</sup>

I began by creating two different sets of stencils - patterns and gestures, both derived from ideas within past work and based around circles. I'm inspired by the potential of a circle to be both an organic shape symbolising life, and yet also a very precise shape creating a sense of order. I like how Ellsworth Kelly abstracted observational drawings towards stylised shapes that he used in his paintings<sup>5</sup>, and have been sketching from nature, making simplified images for my prints<sup>6</sup>. I learned how to use Adobe Illustrator and the Laser Cutter for the more precise stencils, and I experimented with creating circular splats by bouncing a ball in paint.

Through initial exploration, my mono prints had a lack of precision to them and, although I loved the vibrancy of the risograph prints, the size limit isn't suitable for my intentions, so I opted to focus on screen print and lithography. I also learned from this early work that it was important to have calmer areas to allow busier parts to breathe.

To bring an extra distinction between the gestural and precision layers in my prints, I created the top layer in tissue paper and cut through areas, inspired by seeing the work of John Williams (print room technician). This gave more of a three dimensional effect, which helps towards my aim for impact and life in my prints.

In my research into the theory of colour and artists associated with it<sup>7</sup>, I discovered a number of artists, such as Josef Albers<sup>8</sup> and Charlotte Cornish (who I had the privilege of interviewing<sup>9</sup>), state that colour relationships are best understood through experimentation and application. Therefore I am seeking to explore and evaluate colour through my process, noting combinations that work especially well<sup>10</sup>.

I have also spent time contemplating the desire expressed in my proposal to make art that improves people's mood. On reflection I'm not sure I completely embrace Matisse's dream of art being "like a good armchair"<sup>11</sup>. I've realised that a focus on creating 'happy art' could be rather superficial. Happiness isn't a thing that can be measured and is different for each individual. I decided it was an unhelpful and nebulous idea for me to be working towards.

This led to a conclusion that if a piece of artwork were to genuinely have the potential to do people good, it would need to have meaningful content. I therefore adjusted my proposal from a focus on making people smile, to an emphasis on creating prints that have impact, life, and meaning.

The title I have given this body of work is 'What matters'. It is concerned with what we give our attention to, focussing on what matters. Being fully present in the moment, and noticing the details, in the middle of the busyness of life, with all its demands and distractions. This aligns with the gesture and pattern in my art, the pattern representing the details of life and busyness, the gesture symbolising the energy and attention we give to a moment, the gestural layer creates a 'moment' bringing focus, helping the viewer to see the detail.

At the mid point of this project, I evaluated my first series of prints. I was pleased with the impact of some of the colours on the black, as well as the white paper, I liked the physical and sound effects of the tissue as the top layer, and I liked the contrast between the expressive marks and the geometric pattern. However, I felt that to have the impact I was aiming for, they needed more intricacy, to be less flat and to work on a larger scale.

My next investigation was collage, a suggestion from our critique session. Influenced by the work of Jiri Kolar, I've discovered what is described in Krysa's book *Collage*, as "unexpected, but frequently beautiful, mistakes... giving rise to new ideas and progression."<sup>12</sup> Collage lent itself well to my desire for extra intricacy, and helped move things away from a flat surface.

The sizeable screen prints of Ciara Phillips<sup>13</sup> were a springboard into my second series of prints - a triptych, where I worked more intentionally and four times larger. This was a steep learning curve, needing to start again on several occasions due to lack of knowledge and experience, and served me well as practice towards my final piece<sup>14</sup>.

### Final Piece

For the culmination of this body of work, I designed a piece larger and bolder, starting to push beyond the two dimensional surface and the rectangular edge. Six colours, with seven layers, on a large scale and in a discipline I was still learning. I am very pleased with the results, the impact of size, colour and pattern.

There were many adjustments along the way<sup>15</sup>. Although I made plans through mockups in Photoshop, unknown practical issues needed new solutions as I progressed, and colour relationships were different in reality, which resulted in me making alternative choices. I allowed myself to be led by experimentation as I've learnt that this can be key in providing an element of life to ones work.

There is an intentional busyness to this piece, bringing a sense of movement and energy. I have encouraged various colour relationships and mixing which occurs through the translucent layering and collage, and this adds vibrancy. The expressive marks in the forefront cut across the overwhelm behind, providing contrast and focus, and movement can be harnessed through the addition of heat waves<sup>16</sup>. The distance between layers creates a shadow, adding depth, drawing the viewer in and helping them centre on details, reflecting my theme.

On completion, this piece feels like a prototype rather than a finished piece and I would like to take each element to a higher level of quality. The gestural layer created on perspex, the base layer mounted on panel, cut with precision and varnished, and the half spheres fashioned with a Vacuum Former and maybe painted or collaged.

This body of work is my first introduction to printmaking and collage techniques. With further experience and experimentation my skills will grow, as will my awareness of what is possible and how to push the boundaries of these disciplines further still.

Considering where this revised piece might hang, I am mindful of what it conveys. Reflecting on our need within the busyness of life, to make sure we give time to focus on the things that matter, it should maybe hang where people need reminding of this - places of busyness, overwhelm and stress. According to research<sup>17</sup> some of the most common causes of stress are money, work and health, and some of the most stressful professions are nursing, legal & business research<sup>18</sup>. I am concluding, therefore that the foyer of a hospital, court house or corporate office space would be a suitable place for display.

### Future Work

Next I would like to take my ideas more three dimensional and sculptural. Experimenting with printing onto various surfaces and using projection. I want to explore a new title 'You Matter' - where I contrast gestural marks representing what matters to us (our personality and uniqueness), with patterns inspired by body matter - what we're made up of (cells, DNA, atoms etc).

## References

1. Agamben, G., 2009. *What is the Contemporary? in What is an Apparatus and Other Essays*. Stanford University Press.
2. Batchelor, D., 2000. *Chromophobia*. Reaktion Books
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4. Coldwell, P., 2010. *Printmaking: a contemporary perspective*. London, Black Dog
5. Goossen, E C and Kelly, E., 1973. *Ellsworth Kelly*. New York, : Museum of Modern Art
6. Refer to mini sketchbook
7. Refer to page 54/55 in my sketchbook
8. Albers, J., 1993. *Interaction of colour*. Yale University Press.
9. Refer to page 78/79 in my sketchbook for interview with Charlotte Cornish
10. Refer to page 83 in my sketchbook
11. Matisse, H., 1908. *Notes of a Painter. La Grande Revue*
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13. Refer to page 63 in my sketchbook
14. Refer to page 84/85 in my sketchbook
15. Refer to page 96 in my sketchbook
16. Refer to video on memory stick
17. <https://www.webmd.com/balance/guide/causes-of-stress#1>
18. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/health/most-stressful-jobs-in-the-uk-are-in-welfare-health-and-education-report-finds-a3684826.html>

## Revised Bibliography

Refer to page 5 in my sketchbook for a list of the books I have used in my research for this project.