

artrageous

MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS IN ART

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You're using a building material generally perceived of as a bit ugly, that's usually concealed from view in an interior space: what's the appeal of concrete for you and what made you feel you could transform it into something people want to live with?

In 1994 I started studying Fine Art in Southampton and became highly inspired by the city and its architecture. As well as appreciating Southampton as a whole, I also had a passion for the small detailed features – the way stone had eroded over time and the small sections of concrete path which were stained by everyday use. I loved the concept of viewing the city in a micro and macro way. I wanted to create abstract oil paintings that gave my view of the city, but painting in oils just couldn't convey the power I felt. One day at a building site I found myself looking at the raw building fabrics and had a vision of how they could be used in conjunction with the oil paint on canvas. By incorporating these materials, the feeling they produced was so much more powerful than paint alone - the end result was to literally take outside elements and include them in the painting itself. A year later I was using concrete with inlays of metals, wood and glass so much that I had completely abandoned the oils and was solely using the concrete as my 'canvas'. Once the ball started to roll on creating these "Abstract Paintings in Concrete" the natural beauty of the concrete just kept on coming through in each new piece - people were now starting to recognise the appeal in my work, which reflected what I was discovering in the unnoticed back streets of major cities.

How's it done? Please briefly talk us through the process of making preparing and making a panel.

Over the past 8 years I have adopted a number of different techniques to create the work. One of the best and worst things about concrete is its versatility - there are so many different combinations of how to use it with colour, form and texture - it's not just "what *can* I do with it" it's more a case of "what *shall* I do with it". The way the concrete is created will be dictated by my vision of the final piece. Sometimes it will be laid down flat then worked by hand with carving, grinding, acid etching and finishing. At other times, a mould is used to produce a particular shape or form. The only constant is that it is all made from the same ingredients – cement, sand and aggregate. I colour the concrete using the same techniques that the building industry uses in large scale industrial and commercial projects – I have merely adapted it to my own style.

You've been working with concrete for some years now, how versatile is it as an art material? Please tell us a bit about effects and finishes you have achieved with concrete.

Concrete can take on almost any form and texture - it has so many different combinations that I am almost overwhelmed with the number of ideas I have to work with. One of my first inspirations from Southampton was from a stained paving slab I noticed in the rain. The water glossed its surface, bringing out the colours and detailing the small aggregates. Over the years I have refined my use of industrial lacquers and varnishes to recreate this, showing off the concrete as I originally saw it. The other major finish I love from concrete is when the surface is ground and diamond polished to produce a natural lustrous sheen, revealing the shining gem-like aggregates within the concrete. There is no end to the number of colours and shades of aggregate, which when combined with pigmented concrete mix produce something which is exciting and new.

Much of your work has been destined for gardens and exterior walls, but now you're seeing more of it selling for interior spaces, is this something you planned or are buyers being more adventurous?

Over the past 8 years, the trend in the art world has grown and seen a massive change towards favouring more textured work. When I first started to produce my "concrete paintings" the concept was revolutionary and obviously a bit strange to many galleries and collectors. Today, having a piece of concrete hanging in your lounge is now seen as just as acceptable as a painting on canvas, the only difference being that the concrete is a little bit more cutting edge from a stylistic point of view.

Some of your work is extremely large, how does a wall support such heavy pieces?!

Firstly, in most cases the work isn't really that heavy – in fact, no more so than a framed mirror!

I use light-weight aggregate plus the pieces are very thin (aprox 15 – 20mm). This means that those up to the size of 2.5 ft x 2ft are light enough to be hung on picture hooks. Following technical advice from a leading manufacturer, special fixings are used on the larger pieces (6ft x 3ft). This means that even a plaster board partition can safely take the load well within the wall's capabilities and manufacturer's guidelines.

What type of interior spaces are your works bought for? Is it all large scale?

I have had commissions for a whole range of different spaces - everything from contemporary, prestigious, minimalist penthouses in London, to fashionable Edwardian rural homes. I do love the challenge of working with a large scale commission, but the smaller pieces can be very exciting too. Usually when I'm asked to create commissioned pieces for a home, the majority of the interior design work has already been done. This gives me the perfect opportunity to expand my normal points of inspiration and complement the design concepts of the home owner and interior designer – this always leads to new and exciting work. Talking through your thoughts together is a great way to generate new ideas and create totally unique work. Both parties may enter a project with set ideas in mind, but by working together the end result is – something stunning and individually tailored

to the client's brief.

What would your ideal living space look like?

I am a lover of contemporary open-plan design with natural light and textures, so my ideal space would need a lot of glass. I enjoy the use of materials as concepts, such as how something like glass is used in a structural way for walls and floors even though it is perceived as weak and fragile. I think this comes from the way I love my work - as people perceive concrete to be heavy, dull and bland so what I produce is vibrant and sensual. It is all in the eye of the beholder.

Colour-wise I generally choose earthy, calm tones and allow the artwork to set the atmosphere of the space. I find juxtapositioning materials fascinating - the new and the old, crossing contemporary styles with traditional craftsmanship of wood and stone.

Is your creativity at all influenced by other artists, designers and applied artists? (If so please name names!)

I think you can't help but be influenced, not just by other artists but designers, architects, glass blowers, cabinet makers and anyone with a passion for what they do. When someone is passionate about something you just can't help but have it wear off a bit on you. My artistic influences started with Rembrandt and have moved all the way through to artists like Anselm Kiefer, Antoni Tapies and Antony Gormley's work.

Although your work is labelled with serial numbers not titles - so viewers have only their own response to what they see - your ideas spring from the natural world, please tell us a bit about this.

Originally I used Ordnance Survey Map grid references to name my work - each one related to the place where I had gained the inspiration for the piece, but over time it became so complicated that the system was impossible. What it did teach me though was that by having a serial number the work was fully open to interpretation. With no words or titles the viewer only sees what he or she wants to see rather than try to connect to a preconceived idea. This for me is very important because it reflects my philosophy about my art and life in general - if you see dull boring concrete, maybe that's your out-take on how you view life; if you look beyond to discover the inherent beauty contained within, then maybe you see the positive side of what could be within bland daily events?

Who do you principally design for: the client, yourself or the space?

I started predominantly designing and making for myself, creating work that existed in my imagination and needed to be materialised. The work was then shown in galleries and sold to collectors. I have found though, as mentioned earlier, that by opening yourself to the influences of interior designers and home owners you can combine your inspirations and tastes to create something which would be impossible if you tried it alone. Working with a set design scheme creates a set number of limitations as to what you can and can't make, and it's exciting to push yourself within those boundaries.

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You prepare digital proposals for the client, please tell us about this.

When you mention the word artists to many people they visualise an unpredictable, stubborn person solely intent on producing work for himself – the only problem with this is that very few clients are happy to hand over money for a commission without knowing what it will end up looking like - or even like?! That is why I have devised a “digital proposal” concept as part of my working practice.

Following interest from a client, I arrange a meeting with them to discuss their thoughts and concepts and show them a piece of my work to touch and feel – most have only ever seen it online at www.artrageous.co.uk. Once I have established their general likes and dislikes I look at the layout and surrounds of the proposed hanging area. This is very important as the space itself will have factors in it that need to be thought of – the atmosphere of the room, the lighting, the colours and mood of the rooms leading in and out. From this point I measure the hanging area and take a digital photo of the space from a number of significant views. Over the next few weeks I throw around a number of potential designs for the final work in my head, then eventually create three of them “virtually” on the computer. The “virtual artwork” is then scaled down to fit the digital pictures taken of the installation area ready to be shown to the client. Although the final work may slightly vary to the proposal drawings, they are very close and give the client a realistic image of how the final installed work will look and feel.

What does it cost to commission a piece of work from you?

As with all things the price of the commission will vary with the size and amount of work required to create it – this could be anything from £500 upwards. Each project varies, but I’m always happy to look at a commission and give a no obligation quote.

Please tell us about your latest collection.

My latest collection of work is very sculptural and has really progressed from the squarer ‘canvas-type’ shape I have made before. It takes advantage of the more structural nature of concrete, with exposed metal bars; wooden beading and architectural curves – in general, it stirs up a mixture of references from ancient tribal artefacts to large powerful structures that dominate the city. When installed the sculptural element of the work exposes the wall behind incorporating it within the design, revealing both exciting negative as well as positive spaces.

Where can we see more of your work?

Work can be viewed in a number of galleries across the UK, details of which be found on my website – www.artrageous.co.uk along with and an updated image gallery of my latest work.

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