

KATY
DOVE



VICTORIA
MORTON

*Artists **Katy Dove** and
Victoria Morton discuss their
practices and collaborations
in a three-part conversation*



Left: Katy Dove, 'Upcountry', animation, installation at BBC Scotland, Pacific Quay, 2009-2010

Right top: Katy Dove, 'Upcountry', 2009, animation

Right below: Katy Dove, 'FACE', detail, 2009, intaglio etching over Hosho chine-collé on paper. Edition of 20. Commissioned for Dundee Contemporary Arts Editions series



Victoria talks to Katy about her new commission

KD BBC Scotland approached me about making an animation to project in their new building at Pacific Quay over the festive period – it was a brief I could interpret in my own way.

I had been taking photographs of winter landscapes over the years but had never known how to incorporate those into my artwork before. The commission was an opportunity to bring them in as backdrops to my animation work. That was the starting point. I was trying to create something that had a celebratory feel, as well as capture the atmosphere of this time of year, not in an obvious way, but thinking about colour, movement and flow.

VM It feels quite different because there's no sound. I'm more aware of the movement on the screen because it's independent. It really does flow...

KD I decided not to use sound partly because of time restrictions, but also because it was interesting for me to separate sound and image. In previous animations sound and image have had an interdependent relationship. It's always good to break away from a habit and try new ways of working.

VM Sound often defines movement, but this animation feels open and quite free.

KD There is something about these winter landscapes that suggest a stillness, slowness or contemplative atmosphere – but also a harshness too. In snowy landscapes things can seem more defined visually and aurally.

VM How did you feel about showing the work in the BBC building? I don't think I've seen your work outside of a gallery space, with the exception of your projection of "YOU" in Italy [*Glasgow In Viaggio*, Museo Corta Alta, Fossombrone, 2004] that was shown against the night sky.

KD The new BBC building has an internal stepped 'street' that rises through the building. I was keen to project in this space but there were restrictions because of daylight from skylights. Ewan Imrie [who also worked on *Sun By Ear*, Katy Dove and Victoria Morton, Tramway, 2007] helped identify good projection spaces. He came up with ideas I wouldn't have thought of, and was very aware of how light

works in a building. We chose a space over four floors where the same animation was projected on each level but unsynchronised.

VM There's a drawing in the BBC animation that was also shown in your Stirling show [*Now Is The Time: Katy Dove and Simon Yuill*, Changing Room, 2009].

KD It was a fast turnaround from making the Stirling show to making this animation, and inevitably certain elements creep in from one show to the next. I like that it's a continuation in the flow of the creative process, rather than stopping one body of work and making a new one.

VM Rather than feeling like stills from an animation, these drawings seem diagrammatic, like a description or explanation of something. They're different from your other drawings.

KD They were quite specific. Four of those images are etchings, two are watercolours. They were part of a series I made that started with research into Norman McLaren. McLaren made a publication called *Six Audiovisual Musical Forms* in which he described different but recognisable musical forms using diagrams and texts. I was keen to do my own version, but in a more abstracted way – to take elements of the way he had worked and interpret them in a way that was personal to me. My six works were intended as a series of graphic scores that contain elements related to music.

VM The drawings felt expansive, like the animations; they suggested not only actual space but also mental space.

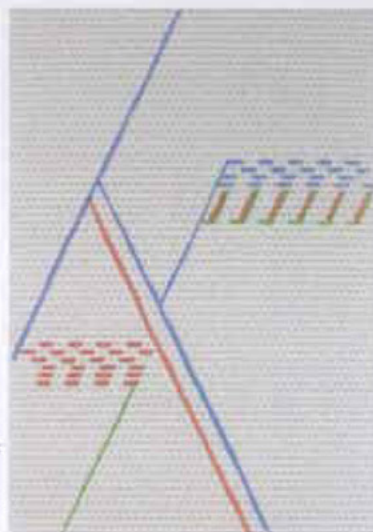
KD I am keen that my work encourages the viewer to enter their own mental space – there is this openness. It relates to a psychological way of interpreting the world.

VM I could see how these works on paper related to the other part of the exhibition.

KD Yes, *Now is the time* was a collaboration with Simon Yuill, which opened up ways of working that I would never have dreamt up alone. Simon's interested in computer programming and when I was planning the work for the show I was keen to work with technology. McLaren was working with technology, and I was interested in looking at new edges in technology now. Our collaborative work was an interactive piece where people could 'play' a series of musical instruments that would affect the movement of the projected animation. Collaboration is actually quite a new area for me. Making work has been a solitary practice in the past, but I've made a conscious decision to move away from that.

VM The drawing and animation side of your practice is very much your vision. Whereas the music side of things allow for the collaboration to happen.

KD Working with Simon was the first instance where the animation had become more collaborative.



Katy and Victoria talk about their involvement in the band Muscles of Joy, which includes artists Sophie Macpherson, Anne-Marie Copestake, Charlotte Prodder, Jenny O'Boyle, Arika Porteous and Leigh Ferguson.

KD You have to let go of a certain amount of control, but that's a healthy thing. Working collaboratively with music is something I'd done previously, with soundtracks that other bands have made, or I've made recordings with different musicians, mixing the tracks myself. But working with the band is the first time I've performed, made music with other people.

VM ...bands do seem to present very different types of collaboration. Working in Elizabeth Go [a collaborative group which included Sue Tompkins, Hayley Tompkins, Sarah Tripp and Cathy Wilkes] involved making art performance, film and installation, it was important to us to feel free in the moment. There are some similarities to Muscles of Joy, but with Muscles of Joy, we are making songs and tracks that we want to repeat in performance, and make different arrangements of and record which is perhaps a more traditional way of working. Then again, it feels completely experimental compared to other independent bands I have played in. Possibly because when you use improvisation with no chord structure as a starting point, the end result is unpredictable and sometimes more based on rhythms that can be made using any sounds.

KD There are eight of us writing together, rather than one person bringing their own song - very labour intensive but in the end it pays off. Because of that we've developed a sound that is personal to all of us, which I don't think is a common way of working.

VM I think we've been brave to perform the music at quite an early stage. It's taken time to get to know each other's musicality and I like the fact that it's an egalitarian set up and there are no fixed roles.

KD Some of us, myself included, were quite new to playing instruments, song writing and performing our music live. I'd worked on soundtracks but had never

performed these live in front of an audience before. We were all learning to do all these things together. It was a steep learning curve.

VM The whole approach to how Muscles of Joy began making music meant you had to throw any prior musical learning out the window. It was about making sounds that fit with those made by each other. Maybe recently though because of our increasing use of guitars, a little bit of music theory has crept in. The fact that there's not a given structure doesn't matter. There is an open-endedness about the arrangements, which is not defined. In other bands you might find a dominant sound early on and stick with it but with Muscles of Joy songs evolve constantly. It's not necessarily intuitive - that makes it sound naive, which it isn't. It's to do with having an inherent musical ability and finding a way of expressing that with the instruments we've got.

KD It's interesting the way the band has formed. At the beginning we were very nervous, just making noises really. From that, two years later, we're actually writing songs and performing them.

VM The other thing that's unusual is that we all sing. People already had a strong sense of the power of voice, coming from the Parsonage Choir [based in Glasgow]. It maybe took a while to find new ways of building harmonies and lyrics, but it feels that's happening now.

KD Discordant sound is something quite important to the band.

VM Sometimes it's just as well. [laughs]

KD The live performances have been important in bringing things together and consolidating ideas. When you put on an exhibition, you're forced to resolve things by an end point in time, and to present something that you feel happy with. That experience is important to me in terms of learning parts and gaining the confidence to perform. Without the performances we wouldn't be where we are now. Although there are eight of us we're not always able to perform together. Every gig is a different line-up. It's a challenge, and you have to rethink songs. Each song feels like it evolves because of that.



Above:
Victoria
Morton,
studio view,
work in
progress,
2010

Katy talks to Victoria in the latter's Glasgow studio

VM It does feel like an awkward stage. The work we're looking at here just needs that final push to come together. It's exciting but also quite tense because I can't quite conceive of the exhibition as a whole in my head. Since this is the first opportunity I've had to install across several galleries I'm thinking about it as a chance to present a series of situations. I've been quite interested in the fact that Inverleith was a house.

At the moment I'm taking quite an inclusive approach and it's possible I may show some photography and more sculptural pieces as well as paintings.

The process of making the paintings is quite involving and built of lots of tiny areas of concentration and contemplation. Another type of work has been developing, what I call the 'supporting surrounds'. I want to expand that in the Inverleith exhibition, where paintings seem to contain the energy of figures, and sit with other elements in a system of support and collapse. The fact that the gallery is a house seems to lend itself to that thinking. I'd like the house to feel like it's inhabited.

I've started incorporating other structures, into

my work which is something that initially came out of living in Italy, where my studio took on a specific significance. It was a very rough and ready space, but after working in isolation there for a whole year it took on a psychological aspect – the buildings contained the paintings, but it also appeared in the paintings – everything folded in on itself. That influence is still there in the new work and I recently started working with these old Italian bedheads. I'd been living with this furniture: its shape and heaviness was something I'd been looking at, sleeping on and photographing. Gradually I was thinking that I should just use the objects themselves.

KD These bedheads here?

VM Yes, they're art deco bedheads.

KD They don't immediately look like bedheads. To me they looked like placards, announcing something.

VM I like the idea that they have a hard surface, where the paint is being pushed forward, as opposed to painting into a canvas that is much softer. The painted parts don't necessarily have to 'become' images; they can be more like actions or be graphic and direct. I've enjoyed working manually with objects, rather than to always be in this quite crumpled up space of trying to figure out what's happening within the more complex paintings. I went rummaging in a warehouse in Pesaro, a place just outside Fossombrone, and after a bit of negotiating, a guy there pulled out all of these bedheads.

KD Within your work or process do you ever refer back to experiences like that, these starting points?

VM I don't think that warehouse experience would come into the end piece, but the original, personal connection about existing in a particular place is important. For me it makes sense to bring the paintings into a real life situation.

KD A domestic one perhaps.

VM Maybe. The Gardner Residency in Boston [2009] influenced my thinking too. The way Isabella Gardner installed in the museum galleries is quite different. She displayed masterpieces with historic artefacts alongside travel trinkets, lace, dress fabric and musical instruments. There's also a vast book and letter collection.

KD Was the Stewart Gardner Museum originally a house?

VM No, but Isabella Stewart Gardner did live there. The building was designed under her directions. It's very decadent – completely audacious. She lived on the top floor, so it did feel like a private home.

KD I remember you sending me pictures, it felt quite an overwhelming environment with colour, pattern and texture everywhere.

VM Initially I had a bad reaction to the museum, then it clicked that she had taken everything including the architectural features out of its original context and recontextualised it in her own very original way. I appreciated the attention to detail and the powerful female sensibility – she placed a mosaic of Medusa in the central courtyard – of including portraits of strong women like Mary of Mor. I was particularly interested in a primitive altarpiece from Rimini commissioned by nuns for their worship. The book collection was also wonderful. I looked through a very early edition of Dante's 'Inferno', which was the first to include illustrations and an interpretive text. I also asked

to see a book of Dürer's woodcuts. The prints are so exquisitely clear and precise. It'd been mostly kept shut so there was almost no light damage.

I came away from the residency thinking I should make work using all the research that I did there but I wasn't entirely sure how. I think it's only just filtering through now in this new work.

KD Inverleith House is also a very unique space. When I was thinking about the work you'd be making for this show it did strike me what type of approach you'd take in contrast to somewhere like Tramway, which is such a massive grand space. Your large scale paintings lent themselves well to Tramway, but Inverleith House is a much more personal space. I wondered how that would affect your work.

VM The intimate focus that Inverleith House offers suits my work at the moment. The galleries should allow me to pace how people encounter the work - there is less distance to utilise but more opportunities for grouping relevant pieces together and extending the composite parts.

KD When I look at your paintings I feel like there's a sense of infinite impossibility. With the inclusion of geometric shapes in your work, geometry feels more defined - in some ways an opposite. It's interesting to see those two things together - your brain is switching from the infinite to the more restricted space.

VM That's a good comment! I consider the paintings like confrontations with people: sometimes very organised, sometimes a tangle of mixed messages. With painting, your brain can get quite tired of detail. It can cancel itself out. Sometimes not much just seems like enough. It also can make sense to show a clear picture. Working like this allows me to play with issues of representation. So for the Inverleith exhibition I can't have everything operating at the same level of intensity and involvement. I'd like to build a narrative between the pieces without each work functioning in the same way. I also feel as though I've reached a certain endpoint of working with huge amounts of detail.

KD I was wondering about your relationship between music and your work.

VM I don't think that music is the subject matter for this work anymore although there will always be some references. It's as if it has become completely absorbed. There have been specific times when a piece of music has had an important relationship to a painting. But with this work it doesn't feel like that. I can relate musical ideas to the paintings - ideas of composition, atonality, the feeling of drumming, of being in the middle, in control and out of control at the same time - the kind of mental space you talked about earlier.

KD The colours in this one remind me of Acid House - that ultra vibrant colour. With the very detailed paintings I wonder where they began. I'm interested to know about these starting points.

VM I like the beginning when anything feels possible. Unless I've decided to work with a specific image then usually I just begin in quite an enjoyably absent minded way, choosing colours, putting down a base. The drive is sort of physical. Then I get invariably caught up in a kind of game of the mind - the disruption and formation of potentiality. I question what a painting can represent theoretically, putting myself fully into it then taking myself fully out. I question what a painting can represent subjectively, then decide to forget about

all of that and have a kind of direct and automatic, engagement with the materials. The process goes round in circles like this! The painting becomes the sole focus for many strands of reflection and concentrated attention. I'm trying to get to a point where there's something forming and disintegrating at the same time.

Katy Dove, residency/exhibition in Rennes, France, February-April
Victoria Morton, Inverleith House, Edinburgh, 14 March-2 May
Muscles of Joy, Glasgow International, Stereo, Sunday 18 April

Below:
 Victoria
 Morton,
 'untitled',
 2009, oil
 painting
 on wood,
 metal bin,
 paper

