

NATHALIE VIN - Q & A

Your name doesn't sound English.. Are you French?

I am French. I come from a wonderful region in France. Wild Brittany!

How long have you been living in the UK?

I have been living in England for 20 years now. As a young adolescent growing in France, I was fascinated by the UK. It was a real passion - my Meka.. my compass for the future.

Can I study with you or do a work placement at your studio?

I have only one placement per year in my studio. I usually work with people who graduated from the school of mosaic in Spilimbergo in Italy or professionals with an extensive experience living in London.

Where do you work?

I am very lucky to have a large and sunny studio here in London which allows me to work on medium to large scale projects. I also teach master classes four times per year so it helps!.

Your mixed media artworks are quite innovative in style, would you describe them as narrative or abstract works?

Your question gives it all really. My latest works especially have been described as being "abstract" and "narrative" all at the same time. Viewers find themselves in familiar and fantasy dimensions simultaneously. I like to set my work in parallel worlds tenuously connected to Earth and its evolution process. We can say that my work is neither narrative nor abstract, it is a combination of both qualities and can't be departed from one another.

I love the idea of an artwork hinting at a story but not spelling it out explicitly.

What did you study at college and why?

History of Arts at the University of Rennes in France.

Studying disciplines such as Archeology, the Greek, the Roman and the Byzantine eras had most probably a subconscious impact on my sudden interest for challenging materials such as mosaic a few years down the line... It is only a decade later that I started making mosaic as a hobby. And...

Fourteen years ago, I was grouting my first large mosaic piece with some black grout. The piece had completely disappeared under a thick layer of dark grout when some friends knocked at the door. Very enthusiastically they offered to help me clean it. As the piece gradually revealed itself, I was transformed by their genuine enthusiasm. That was my eureka moment...

That particular moment changed radically the way I perceived myself and I finally embraced this urge to create and be an artist.. I quit my job very shortly, left Paris and moved to Brighton in England.

When it comes to art, my fundamental activity is with fine art mosaics but of course my life informs my art and as such there has been a bit more to it. I've been since involved with gigantic urban installations, film works, documentaries which have been projected in streets, theaters, art and conference centers.

My most monumental example of this is 'THE GLOW PROJECT', an after-dark multi-media event where massive images (100 meters long x 30 meters high), contributed by local people and artists, were projected on to monumental urban surfaces to create a spectacular collective event.

www.theglowproject.com

... Ultimately, I think I just have a mind that really enjoys putting things together and orchestrating them into unity. This is the chief aspect of me at work every time I begin a mosaic, make a film or create events such as the glow project.

Last year, an American magazine specialised in mixed-media and mosaic asked me:

How did you discover your own unique approach?

In 2009 I began to work extensively with tiles that I hand-cut into circles of different diameters ranging from 18mm down to 1mm. I've always had a fascination and love for circles and spirals. They seem to embody lightness and elegance, echoing as they do the Golden Ratio. I found that their use allowed me to paint or create as I go. I realised that placed next to each other in good proportions of different sizes they almost afford me the freedom of the painter and his palette.

Can you describe your technique?

Mosaic is a continual challenge to an artist because of its inevitable gravity and permanence.

My aim is to somehow defy this essence, to overcome its gravity, and to make it light. To do this I find I have to constantly innovate with techniques, materials, patterns and shapes, and to seek ways of putting them together which maximise effects, contrasts and juxtapositions. For instance there is much to be had from the interplay of reflective materials and more grounded earthy tones, or the tension and contrast between hard and soft surfaces.

I always choose to work with the direct method as I need to see very accurately what I am doing. I do not hesitate to painstakingly sculpt every tile one after the other to create the perfect line. I never use grout because I find beauty in the gaps in between each tile and the shadows which can escape from them.

It is a time consuming process but I really enjoy the unique qualities it can give - the surface becomes very smooth and delicate, organised around the shaped lines. Lines are everything in my work, they embody lightness and illustrate the notion for me of the essential 'now' - that ever-fleeting moment when eternity is glimpsed but never retained.

What are the processes you use to create? Do you visualize your art before creating? Or does it evolve as you're in the creating process?

The design is the most important part of creating a piece for me. If a design is not well balanced or not well thought out then no matter which technique will be used, the piece could end up being a complete failure. I spend a lot of time drawing, thinking about the perfect balance and proportion for it. Then I think about techniques which will represent best the idea I want to express. I then work organically and intuitively and always feel that I know the next move in advance.. Sometimes I can change my mind and I am not scared to deconstruct/ reconstruct again. It has to suit perfectly what I have in mind and I don't hesitate to use a hammer, screwdrivers and scalpels!! Hours of fun!

What are your main sources of inspiration?

It's probably easier to say what I'm NOT inspired by!!! So many things!... religions, history, art, philosophy, music, film.. the list is long!

I realised with time that in my own work I was drawn to expressing philosophical notions: Permanence and Impermanence, Man versus Nature, Life and Death, the Future and our responses to it. And as always, my challenge is to find techniques and ways to create an immediate impact and a space for the viewer to think about what it means for them - ultimately create an emotion.

How do you know when you're done? What makes you step back and say, "This is it; this is exactly what I want?"

It is an intuitive feeling.. I know when it is done.. but I have to admit.. it is always hard to stop!!

What's the most enjoyable or satisfying part about creating a work of art?

To design the piece and see the final result! Only joking!

I need the physical contact with matter.. it is almost like a physical need but in general, after one month of intense diligent work, it all becomes very painful and laborious as I never make my life easy.. I can be quite crazy and fussy when it comes to the level of precision I want to achieve..

I have discovered that I was seriously tenacious and didn't like to surrender in front of a technical problem.

On average how long would you spend creating one of your pieces?

A small piece could take between one to two months, larger pieces can take up to a year. I always work on two pieces at a time so I can clear up my mind and stay focused on where I am going.

What kind of creative patterns, routines or rituals do you have?

Vast amounts of caffeine and most of the time Steve Reich or Nico Mulhy playing in the background .. These composers help me concentrate and connect from within. That's a routine, rituals of mine..

When do you do your best work?

After spending time with some close friends can really stimulate my creativity.. going to a museum or an art gallery or - after blowing over a very hot cup of coffee .. no order.. just moments of connections with myself and things of life!

Do you use symbolism? If you do what are you wanting to accomplish with that?

I sometimes use symbolism to express a universal idea but I do it less and less nowadays.. For the moment, I prefer to let ideas and matter speak for themselves.. Different moods for different type of works I guess..

What are your intentions and ideas behind the work you produce?

In all my work, I prioritise the "idea" before matter.. Matter is just an accessory really, not the main ingredient. I use all kind of materials from lego's, meteorites, hologrammes, lenticular objects, photo-luminescent materials, sculpted wood, clockwork mechanisms to express as closely as possible the idea I want to embody. In other words, I bounce from an idea to another without using automatically the same material, I like to innovate constantly with new materials and techniques. The idea of studying one type of material for a long period of time is not how I see my work.

What art do you most identify with?

I see myself as a mixed-media artist using mosaic extensively.

Do you see your work as autobiographical at all?

Everything I create comes from the core of who I am - what I study - what I am the most fascinated with, so I guess my work is autobiographical..

Do you have any advice for a keen mixed media/mosaic artist starting out?

Find out what it is about your work that is absolutely yours and hold onto it no matter what knocks, rejections and well intentioned advice may come your way.

Be your own harshest critic and the person you most try to impress. Strive to learn and improve your work constantly. That way you have a lifetime of working away making yourself happy when you see each improvement... much better than judging your success on arbitrary judges!

Take your work seriously but don't forget to indulge how wonderful the whole process is! Work hard and most importantly enjoy it! It's a privilege to get paid to do what you love but it can also be a lot harder work than most people realise so look after yourself while you're doing it.

What are your intentions and ideas behind the work you produce?

To consistently make an improvement whether that be in technique or idea, to push myself to be better each piece... to feel excitement about each one and what I might be able to do next!