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Home is where the art is: what Paula Rego, Lubaina Himid and other artists hang on their walls

Who are the painters' painters, the sculptors' sculptors? Five artists tell us about the works that adorn their personal spaces by Tim Adams. Interviews by Imogen Carter and Killian Fox



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Art is more often a conversation than a monologue. Great and not-so-great artists have always wanted to surround themselves with paintings and objects that can speak to their own creative efforts. The most famous example of this desire perhaps is Henri Matisse, who as a young and struggling painter bought a small canvas by Paul Cézanne, *Three Bathers*, in Paris in 1899, for the then enormous sum of 1,200 French francs. He pawned his wife, Amelie's, jewellery to help fund the downpayment and paid the dealer in ongoing instalments. For the subsequent 37 years Cézanne's painting would be the first thing Matisse looked at in his studio each morning.

Other artists have been more eclectic than Matisse in what they chose to surround themselves with. On the death of Edgar Degas in 1917 more than a thousand of the paintings he owned were auctioned, including masterpieces by Ingres and Delacroix and Van Gogh. The first Royal Academician, Joshua Reynolds, lined his walls with Rembrandts and Poussins, in the belief that some of their genius might rub off. Lucian Freud had a Corot over his mantelpiece, as well as numerous works by his friend Frank Auerbach in his house on Kensington Church Street, London.

Not all the work that artists decide to live with is chosen for its profundity, or its market value, or its directly inspirational qualities, however. Often, as the interviews with contemporary artists on these pages suggest, the paintings and sculptures and drawings they co-exist with in their homes and studios have a sentimental significance; they are gifts or collaborations or a reminder of friendships that have been important to their life or to their practice. Like the rest of us, I guess, they have ongoing struggles with William Morris's dictum – "have nothing in your house that you don't know to be useful or believe to be beautiful" – and they live with the results. **Tim Adams**

[...]

Michael Landy: 'If everyone thought the way I think, the art world would be out of business'

THOMAS DANE GALLERY



The ground floor of Michael Landy's house in Shoreditch, which he shares with his partner and fellow YBA artist Gillian Wearing, is a large, open-plan space with desks at either end and a sofa in the middle. Serving as Landy's "thinking studio" (his "working studio" is up the road in Bethnal Green), it's where he develops the ideas for his work, which ranges from large-scale installations interrogating western consumerism to small-scale botanical drawings. What's striking about the studio is the fact that it contains almost no artworks at all. The one exception, hanging above a fireplace, is a sketch by the Swiss artist Jean Tinguely, whom Landy counts as a key influence – Landy's most famous work, *Break Down*, in which he destroyed all his worldly belongings, was partly inspired by Tinguely's self-destructing 1960 work *Homage to New York*.

Tell me about this drawing. Why have you chosen it?

I got it as a present when I had a joint exhibition with Jean Tinguely at Tate Liverpool in 2009. It was a really lovely gift, and I've got history with Tinguely. In 1982, when I was a textile student in Loughborough, I went to see an exhibition of his at the Tate. He made kinetic machines out of bits of junk, and it was an absolute revelation to me, as a young person, to see people laughing and interacting with these machines. I've tried to harness that feeling in some of my own work.

This looks like a sketch for one of those machines...

This is for *Heureka*, a piece of public art he made in 1964 [it now stands by the shores of Lake Zurich]. He didn't make many outdoor pieces, but this was about 8m tall and had moving parts – he's trying to create a sense of movement here through his marks [on the paper]. It's a hard-ground etching, you can still see the impression of the plate around it. I never met Tinguely but this kind of represents my whole relationship with him.

This is the only artwork hanging in this studio. Do you notice it every day?

No, I don't really notice it, though sometimes it'll pull me in. I prefer things that I find neutral, I don't want anything that's too in-your-face. I don't have many artworks. I've got etchings upstairs, my own etchings, but they don't ask anything of you. I don't have things up in my studio, I don't have references, or postcards. People wouldn't really know I was an artist. It's like I'm trying to get rid of any signs of human existence, eradicate it altogether.

Why do you have so few artworks on display?

It's something to do with order. That's why I like to destroy things. People think of destruction as some kind of disordered mess. I actually think I'm trying to create order out of destruction.

You've destroyed other people's artworks as part of your work. How did they react?

Gary Hume gave me a clown painting before I did *Break Down*. When he heard I was going to destroy all my worldly belongings, including artworks, he said: "Can I have that painting back, Micky? I'll give you another one." I said OK, and he gave me – he told me afterwards – an inferior painting. After he saw *Break Down*, he said he felt mean-spirited, so he gave me the original painting back. I destroyed it in front of a German film crew.

So you did own some artworks prior to Break Down. Were they on your wall?

No, they were in drawers or boxes. I've never had artwork on the walls. I do have artworks again now, but they're all in boxes.

Are you happy to have them?

I forget about having them.

You don't get that glow of ownership?

No. It's funny, because I'm a maker of things. If everyone thought the way I think, the art world would be out of business.

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Would you feel upset if somebody stole this Tinguely drawing?

Not particularly. Not because I don't...

...not because you don't like it?

Yeah. It signifies a lot – about my relationship with Tinguely and how he really inspired me to become an artist in the first place.

If Gillian wanted to put art on the walls upstairs, would that bother you?

It wouldn't bother me. But she's never mentioned it. Which is strange because we've been together for 25 years. We've certainly never had any of her art on the wall. But she keeps more things than I do. I don't really keep my own work.

Does she have a similar sense of order?

No, Gillian's messy. But over 25 years I've kind of curbed that. When we first went out together, she couldn't keep tops on pens, or tops on bottles in the fridge. We share a studio in Bethnal Green: she's upstairs, I'm on the ground floor. She's been on her own in there for the past few weeks, so I'll have to phone ahead to be sure it's clean, or reasonably clean before I get there – for my own sanity. She has to do a quick tidy up.

If you could have any artwork in your house, what would it be?

I'd like Tinguely's *Homage to New York* – to be able to put that on in my front room watch it destroy itself all over again in 27 minutes. Although I'd have to clean up the mess afterwards. **Killian Fox**

Michael Landy's new show, Scaled-Down, is at Thomas Dane Gallery, London, 1 Oct-17 Nov

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<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/aug/26/home-is-where-the-art-is-what-artists-hang-on-their-walls-paula-rego-rachel-warren-lubaina-himid>