



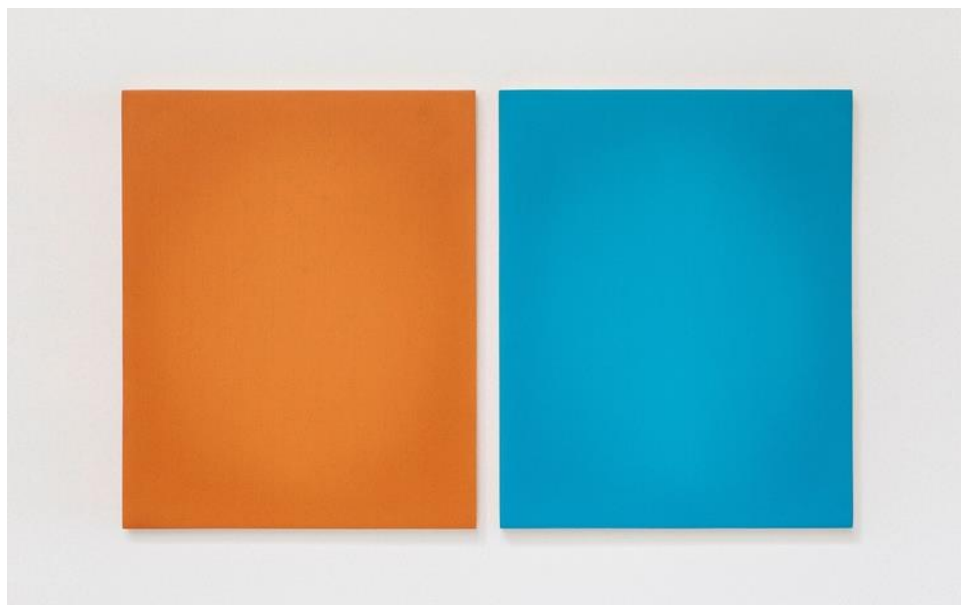
ABSTRACT COLOURIST ARTIST, ERIC CRUIKSHANK, TALKS TO REDBIRD ABOUT THE COMPLEXITY OF SIMPLICITY IN ABSTRACT ART.

Eric Cruikshank - Simple Complexity

What attracts you to a piece a of art? Do you like a painting because it offers you something that is different to your experience of life, or because it demonstrates another way of seeing the world? Do people in cities prefer pastoral scenes to concrete sculptures?

Abstract paintings are enjoyable because of their simplicity. We can like them for their colours and shapes and patterns without embarking on an in depth analysis. There may be symbolism with a painting that we can also enjoy, of course, but its immediate impression on us is almost always going to be, entirely visual. This is perhaps the main reason why people who live complicated busy lives like abstract art. If you live in a big city and are constantly negotiating yourself through traffic and people and lights and noise, having art on the walls with clean lines and bold colours can reflect a level of simplicity and peace that you are unable to get outside.

Eric Cruikshank's paintings have a huge amount of thought and process behind them. The process Eric uses to produce the finished pieces with their perfect colour gradients, is quite zen like. His painting technique is like an active meditation, concentrating on the look and feel of the medium, taking hours and hours of careful mixing and layering to achieve the flawless result. We really enjoyed learning more about him.



Untitled, 2013, Oil on Two Boards, 37.5cm x 63cm (with split)

You grew up in the Inverness area, can you tell us a bit about what this was like and how much of an influence this had on you becoming an artist, for example, do you come from a creative family?

My family has a farm about 30 miles from Inverness, in the Spey-valley region of the Highlands.

My childhood memories are very positive, where there was always encouragement for fostering an active imagination; either inside creatively, or exploring the freedom the farm offered outside.

My dad painted when he was young, and my mum was very musical, so they were such a big help in forming early self-belief in terms of pursuing art, supporting me through college and immediately after.

Working on the farm, both then and now, is incredibly challenging, as your day begins and ends being so directly affected by the weather. This brought an acute awareness of the shifting of the seasons, and also the beauty that surrounded me in the Highlands, which has been the primary influence on my own work, and in turn, how I have tried to channel this influence in pushing for a unique position within the field of art I am trying to find my place in.

Who are your top 5 creative influences and what was it that led you to becoming a painter as opposed to exploring other artistic mediums?

Top 5, in alphabetical order - Anne Appleby, Rudolf de Crignis, Callum Innes, Brice Marden, and Agnes Martin.

It has always been painting for me, as very early on I fell in love with the process, even down to the smell of the oil, and the finished result, when it goes right, struck a chord that I couldn't match with any other medium.

You've described your colour palette as being 'tied to the Scottish landscape' but your paintings rely on the interpretation of the viewer and their perceptions of colour and place. Tell us a bit more about this and how different colours have different meanings to you.

The Scottish landscape is used as an initial starting point with my work, but my paintings are not about the literal presentation of this landscape, instead colour alone acts as the means to reveal the pictures underlying point of reference.

The works are deeply personal interpretations of a time and place, so I am aware they reflect how I have responded to this landscape, my memories of a time and a place.

But with the base design and colour harmony being grounded in the everyday, the works are in turn left open to interpretation, where the viewer is encouraged to readdress notions of their surroundings.

I am very interested in the effects colour can have on the viewer, and how it can be reinterpreted and re-appropriated; where the panels have the potential to resonate with, and relate to, each viewer. The memories and emotions I convey, over time looking at my work, can shift and be replaced to become the viewers own memories and emotions, as the colour becomes their own point of reference. I see my paintings as time based works, as they require prolonged viewing, to allow the surface to truly reveal itself, so hopefully the work can then touch each person on a personal level.

In terms of the meaning each individual colour has on me, they do hold different meanings, but this is constantly changing. When I am starting a piece, my main objective is to find a balance and energy in the tone, so my choice comes down to what works for the picture's design or the relationship I can build from a specific colour combination.

I am constantly trying to vary my methods of mixing and applying the paints, pushing myself to be able to use different colours, as each colour holds unique properties that lend themselves to the layering process. This has fed into a recent focus on the underlying colours of paint, varying the initial layers by building up fields of different hues, and how these can vary the final effect on the picture plane.



Untitled (detail), 2013, Mixed Media on Paper, 87cm x 70cm (paper size)

When it comes to ideas of perceptions of colour a couple of things spring to mind: synaesthesia, a condition some people have where colours are mingled with other senses such as sounds or tastes. Also; the ultraviolet sensitive cone cells that some birds have in their eyes, allowing them to see different colours to us. Are there any paints (such as UV paint) or filters you would like to experiment with in your work? How much do you want to experiment with perception of colour and place in terms of painting?

This is something that friends have spoken to me about before, and they have brought up cone cells; the different levels within the eyes of males and females in humans, and the effects it can potentially have on the senses, and the extreme sensitivity within some animals' eyes, but this has not filtered back to or had a bearing on my art so far.

There are some artists I greatly admire, and their art has a big influence on what I do, whose work primarily deals with these sensations, or who experiment with the different results they can achieve

using different kinds of paint, pushing the sensory effects they can then stimulate in a viewer, but again it has not affected my paint box as yet, as I like the flat matt nature of the finish with standard oils.

Creating a perfect colour gradient is exceptionally challenging and requires not just a high degree of skill but also patience. Can you talk a bit about the technique you use and your preferred tools? Are you tempted to use airbrushing or is the long process of building colour with brushes just as important as the result?

My painting process is a long one, and defined as much by the removal as it is by the addition of paint.

Firstly I measure and mix enough colour required for one complete layer, then marking out the shapes on the panel where the different tones will be applied, quickly block them in. This initial application of paint is fast and quite rough, and I work like this until the surface has a complete uniform layer. Then scraping and wiping as much of the paint out of the brush as possible, removing the paint, I methodically and systematically work the surface in alternating horizontal then vertical sweeps with the now almost dry brush. The paint begins to lift off the surface, blending the tonal blocks at the same time.

After each directional sweep, the brush is wiped, and the process begins again.

This can take many hours of continually working the surface and then wiping the brush, until the plane has a delicate thin skim of paint remaining, a veil of paint, that allows light to penetrate, hinting at something underneath.

I stop when the tonal shifts are just on the edge of disappearing into one another, where the surface holds the gentlest luminosity and movement, as the colour vibrates with a sense of inner light and rhythm.

The panel is then left for two weeks so the oil has time to dry, then the entire process is repeated, building up a uniform surface of many layers of ultra-thin paint. This needs to be done anywhere between 6-10 times, meaning the paintings can take anywhere between 4-7 months to complete, factoring in all the different stages.

Despite the time involved, and actually pushing to remove any evidence of my hand or imprint of technique, the possibility of using a machine instead of a brush has never really crossed my mind, as I really enjoy producing the work and seeing the surface evolve. Registering the colour shifts, and the effects the layers can have, is very rewarding, and I like challenging and pushing myself using standard painting tools to see the different effects and levels of control I can achieve.

There is a lot of control and restraint in your work, do you ever feel the impulse, while you're painting, to lose that control and restraint and just let the paint fly?

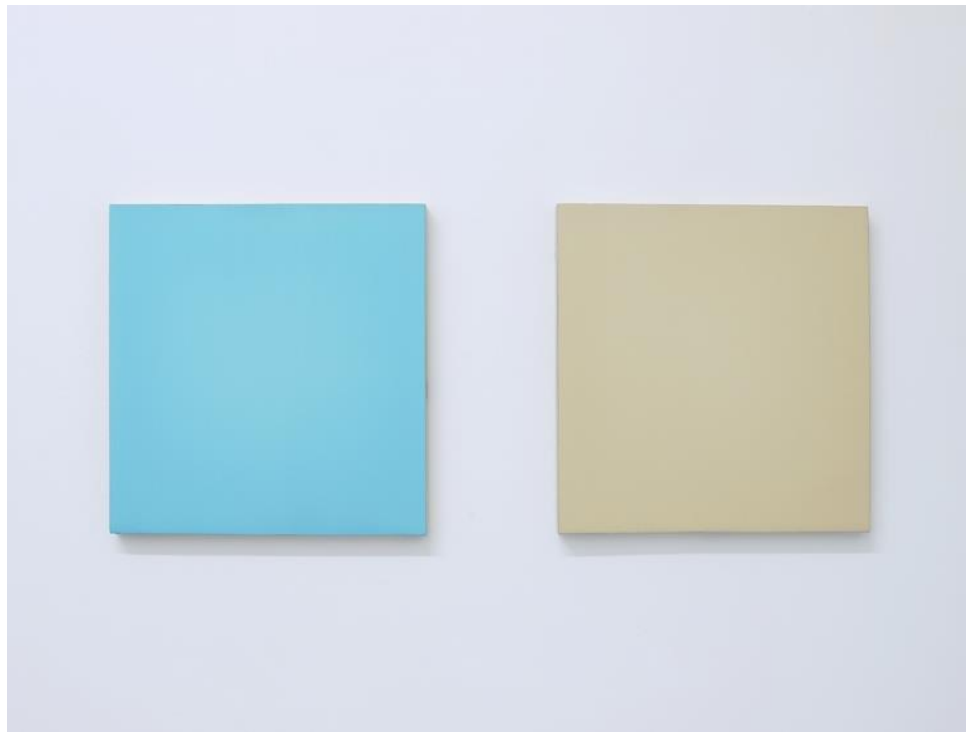
All the time.

Your layering aesthetic is particularly effective in your pencil drawings, which are quite different to your paintings in so much that it feels as though the textures produced from these drawings are more important than the colours. Can you tell us a bit about your drawings and how rewarding they are to make in contrast to painting?

The works on paper are such an important part of my practise, not only the works in their own right, but also the freedom they offer. With the control you asked about previously, these pieces allow a release from this, as they are immediate. Due to the speed of completion I can achieve (hours or days compared with months), when things go well, I can instantly react and push the process, or alternatively, any mistake or misdirection can be quickly changed and altered.

As the paper hasn't gone through the initial priming and sanding stages compared with the panels, the drawing process affects the physical nature of the paper as a support, as the pressure over time of drawing and then erasing can mean the pigment (of the pencil for example) begins to almost bind with the fibre of the paper.

The process relates strongly to the panels, with the layering you mentioned, and then removal. But with the paper works it is in the removal that sets them apart, as the paper holds and keeps a more direct mark, as regardless of how hard I work back from the initial stroke, something still remains, making it easier to explore shape and form within a set design before moving to the panels. The panels look to capture a moment in time from the landscape, but the paper works try to capture a moment in time in their completion, an immediate direct energy.



Untitled, 2015, Oil on Two Boards, 30cm x 70cm (withsplit)

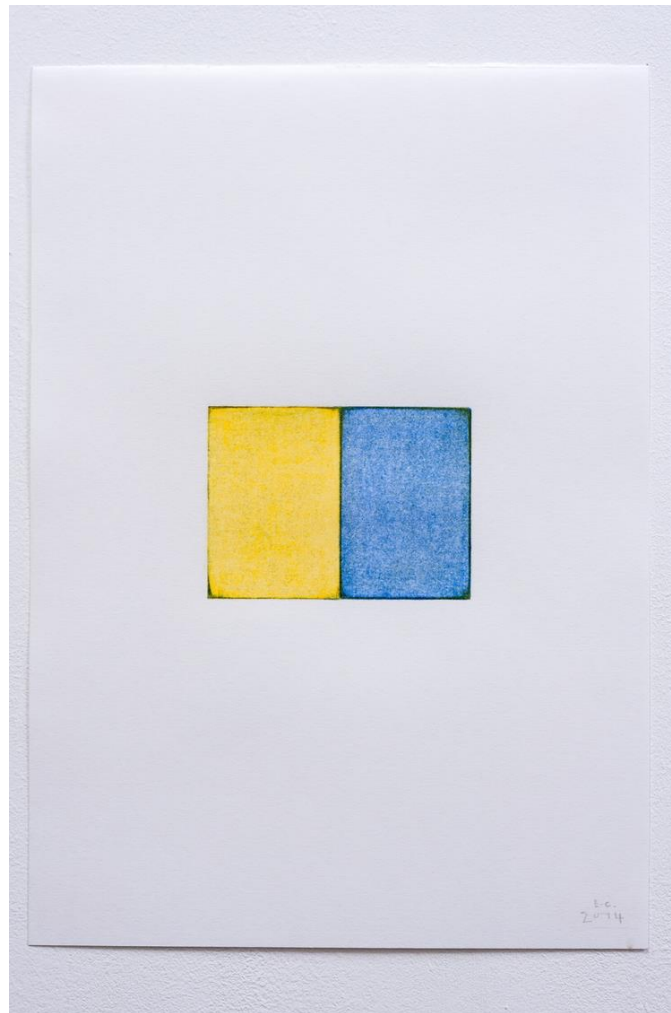
You have exhibited your artwork all over the world. Can you share with us one of the most challenging experiences you have had travelling with your artwork?

Aside from budget restraints, my painted plane is so delicate, that packaging the work is a real challenge, and the worries between waving the paintings off here to unpacking them in a Gallery abroad are large and constant.

Do you feel there is a noticeable difference between how your work is received in the different places?

The biggest difference is the shift in the conversation, as the audience that I have experienced abroad seem more comfortable around work like mine - but it really does make a difference that in so many European countries there is a large network of established galleries and collections that specialise in minimal abstract art, so work of this nature is well promoted and understood.

The response here still surprises me at times though, as Britain has such a strong history of abstraction - but it is understandable as well - as work that asks questions of the viewer can mean you won't always like the answers



Untitled, 2014, Coloured Pencil on Paper, 28cm x 19.5cm(paper size)

Can you tell us a bit about what you're working on now and next? Your solo exhibition in Shibukawa, Japan in 2016, for example, sounds like quite an exciting prospect!

I have two solo shows planned for 2016; Japan in May, then Germany towards the end.

The former will be an exhibition of a new series of coloured pencil on paper works, the latter will be an exhibition of new painted diptychs.

Both are artist run spaces, and both are run by really talented, enthusiastic, generous, encouraging artists; making the planning easy, and the prospect very exciting.

For it being such a solitary pursuit, you meet a lot of people being an artist, and a lot of times, these people share your biggest passion in life - art - making it easy to start a conversation, and so inspiring with where that conversation can go and the new things you can learn.

Bonus Question: If you could choose any other profession and instantly be brilliant at it, what would you choose and why?

Tennis pro.

I have played, on and off, since I was 9 years old. Just love the game, and watching the matches now, with the level that the players have pushed each other to, I find it such an exciting sport regardless of my own level, so I wish I could be so much better at it.

Eric will be exhibiting his work in Bonn, Germany and Shibukawa, Japan next next year. You can read more about Eric's work on his website here: <http://www.ericcruikshank.com/>