

ART

Shifting sands

Hannah Champion's new sculptural works are delicate and fragile creatures placed in an imaginary environment. Tamzin Lewis is intrigued



Hannah Champion still calls herself a painter. But for her new exhibition, *Shift*, the paintings are just the beginning. Once she completes a picture, Hannah thinks about how to cut it, tear it, fold it or scrumple it up.

She then assembles it as an entirely different object using pins, tapes and nails. You may think that this is a way of destroying a perfectly good painting, but for Hannah it is about taking her work to the next level.

"I started deconstructing old paintings," Hannah says. "Some of them I had spent months on so it felt quite uncomfortable, but I seem to create more interesting work when I am put in the position of being uncomfortable."

She adds: "Sometimes it is quite brutal, and I have totally destroyed work and other ones are more carefully deconstructed, pulled apart and teased. It is a direct way of working. My work is mainly about what I can do with painting. I need to be on unsettled and unsafe ground to turn it on its head."

Hannah has been artist in residence at Newcastle's Vane gallery since January, creating work in the old offices of Commercial Union House. In the run up to her solo show she has been given free rein of the gallery space, which is a continuation of how she worked during a Malaysian residency in Kuala Lumpur four years ago.

She says: "When I was in Malaysia, I started to work more expansively, thinking about architectural spaces and how to intervene in a space. I could work on the floors, walls and ceilings with a direct application of paint. It was a physical way of working in the space."

"At Vane I am treating the gallery like my studio space. I am not trying to place work in the space, instead I am making work for the space. I am looking at subtle ways at intervening and hope to activate or charge the space."

Using ribbon collected in Malaysia and tape bought while showing work earlier this year in Berlin, Hannah is creating flowing, sculptural works

from paper and canvas. Her methodical work blurs the lines between painting, sculpture and installation, with tiny sculptures drifting across walls, hanging from ceiling tiles or creeping around corners.

"How do you make a flat piece of paper look sculptural and three dimensional? How can I most transform it from its original state?" Hannah asks.

"I try to manipulate what you can do with flat surfaces. What excites me and drives me to make this work is the direct immediacy of how I can work with the materials. I am really interested in the reflective qualities of the work in the gallery."

Hannah, 32, was born in Middlesbrough and studied fine art at Loughborough University. She has won a scholarship to study an MA in fine art at London's Chelsea School of Art this autumn. She has also been invited to exhibit as part of a Royal College of Art group exhibition in October.

When I first interviewed Hannah six years ago, her large paintings on aluminum were partly inspired by the underwater world observed during diving trips. The influence of brightly coloured coral reefs and shimmering fish is much more subtle now, but reflections are still crucial in her new body of work.

Hannah says: "I've got to accept that there is a strangeness coming from some of my pieces. Some do feel like little creatures or entities. Trying to animate work is an interesting area to be in."

"But the problem is that when you take a piece out of the space it was made in, it can feel like it has died. It doesn't exist in the same way anymore. And once you archive a piece it may not look like anything at all. This is new territory for me."

Shift by Hannah Champion is at Vane, First Floor, Commercial Union House, 9 Pilgrim Street, Newcastle from August 16-September 15. Hannah will be in conversation with artist Danny Rolph on September 1 at 3pm at Vane for a Contemporary Art Society event. Visit www.vane.org.uk for more details.



Hannah Champion is exhibiting her work at Vane. Photo by Simon Hobson. Pics (left) of Hannah's pieces by Colin Davison.