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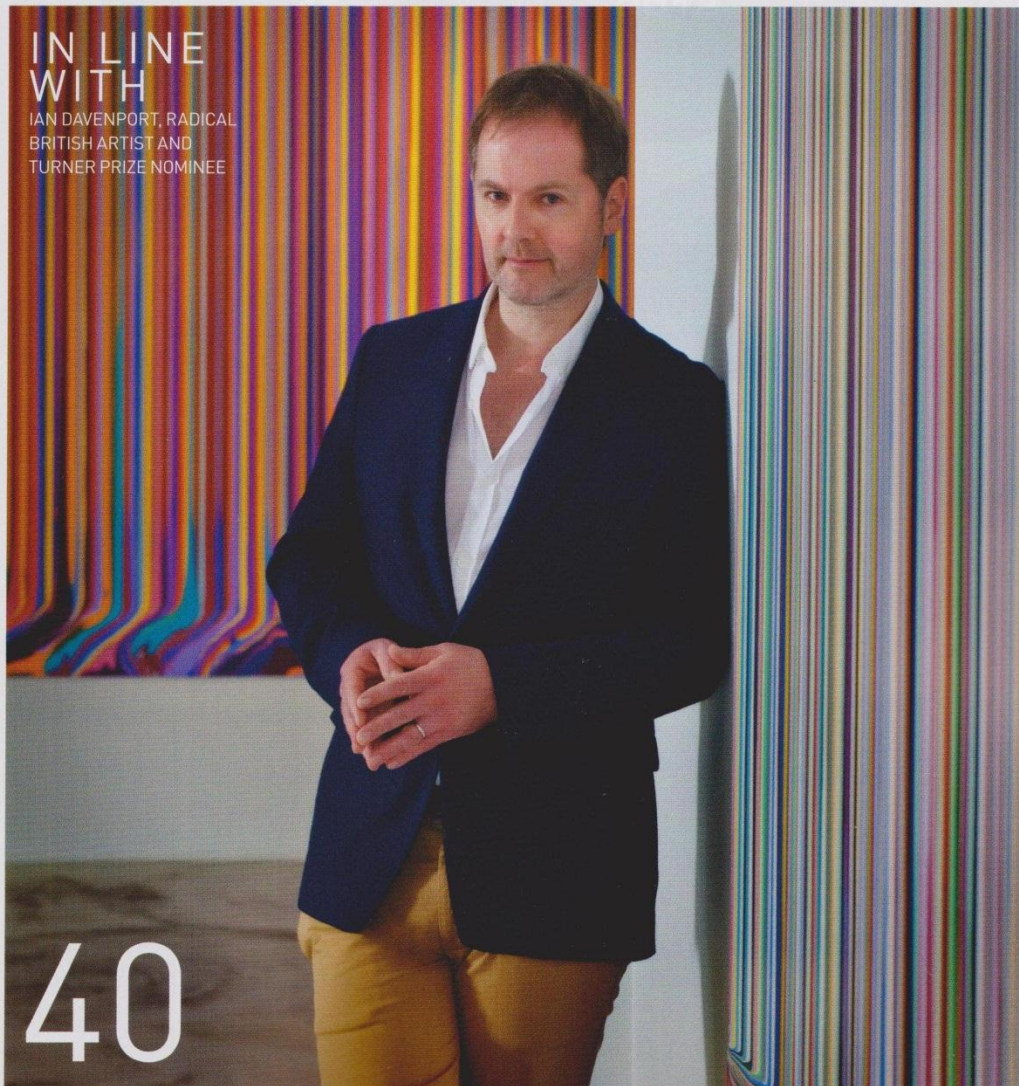


Primer

HAMILTON

WINDOW TO THE WORLD

IAN DAVENPORT / GUCCI AND THE ARTS / THE GLENLIVET / COBIE SMULDERS





Fluidity in the Lines

IAN DAVENPORT MAKES A SPLASH, OR RATHER A SCULPTURAL ARREST OF PAINT ON THE ART WORLD

In South London, below Southwark Street's Western Bridge, is one of the UK capital's largest permanent art installations by Ian Davenport. Part of his continuing explorations of his Poured Lines series, the work is seen by millions of passers-by each year. One cannot help but ponder the nuances of turning gallery art into street art, and the reverse that's happening in the art world today.

"The installation took about three months in the factory to create," Davenport recalls. "It took nearly two years to get all the permissions and work out all the techniques for it, but it took three months of intensive work in the factory. We had to do tests on the materials. I had to learn how to work in a big factory. It's also interesting to see the audience. Those people that visit an art gallery to see your work, that's a limited

audience, and those people who are on the street looking at your work, that's the wider audience. They are two different sets, and it's fascinating to see how they respond to your work."

Yet Poured Lines seems to experience equal appeal on the street and in the gallery, as is clearly demonstrated by the crowd that's turned up for his solo exhibition in Singapore with ArtPlural gallery. Davenport opines that it's partly because colour is something that people respond to very powerfully and easily. His work is as much about researching and investigating new techniques to bring out a new painting and at the same time exploring new responses to different combinations of colour in each work.

Many of his creations incorporate diptyque techniques with multiple backgrounds that create an illusory effect

through colour balances and contrasts. While many people may assume the works are little more than just a random mix of colours that Davenport thinks up, there is really more to them, including references to classic paintings – one such work has colours that are derived from a series of frescoes by Raphael in the Vatican museum.

Poured Lines bears a certain Pollockian appeal, though perhaps less visceral, violent, or abstract. Where Jackson Pollock lets loose with a syringe, Davenport prefers to let gravity do his work. But he counts Pollock as an immense reference and inspiration; likewise, the similarity of technique to spin art practised by Damien Hirst, Mark Chadwick and Annick Gendron, or the spot paintings that Hirst's studio produces. "There's something about



THE YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS (YBA)

The British visual arts movement that would later become coined as the YBAs were made up of a number of artists, many of whom had graduated from Goldsmiths College during the late 1980s. Known for their use of shock tactics and witty deployment of materials, the YBAs contributed to much of Britain's art scene during the 1990s and even today. Notable members of the YBA movement include Michael Landy, Gary Hume, Ian Davenport, Damien Hirst, the late Angus Fairhurst and Tracey Emin. Many of these had been taught by equally renowned artists such as Michael Craig-Martin, Richard Wentworth and Mark Wallinger.

After the Freeze exhibition, Charles Saatchi developed a strong interest in the YBAs, and sponsored a number of them, in particular Damien Hirst. In 1992, he would put on a series of exhibitions called the Young British Artists, which drew much media attention to the group.

the way [Pollock] controls paint, and how he also lets incidents happen. I'm really interested in that balance between control and accident. What Pollock does is a very sculptural approach to painting," he muses.

Like many of the other Young British Artists, Davenport attended Goldsmiths towards the end of the 1980s. Known for its ultra-leftwing approach to education and for turning out an abundance of Turner Prize winners, the school has an energetic, open mood that Davenport recalls fondly. "When I came to do my interview, someone had built a cannon and they were firing eggs out of the top floor and there were these eggs just flying out and I don't know if it was art or if someone had gone bonkers!

"We were always arguing with our tutors about approaches to making art, and what was interesting to people. One student went off for three years

"There's something about the way [Pollock] controls paint, and how he also lets incidents happen. I'm really interested in that balance between control and accident"

photographing people in London on the street and I didn't even know he was a student until we were putting together our graduation shows."

Poured Lines emerged out of his interest in sculpture. "I had gone into a very sculptural approach when it came to painting. The idea for Poured Lines came as I was looking for a subject; I was just painting things around me and I became fascinated by the paint drips on the ink pots. Eventually I became more interested in the dripping than in the painting, so the object became the subject. Then I started to investigate a particular approach and how to paint

around different backgrounds."

The pooling and blending of paints at the bottom of his works came about purely by coincidence. "I was just painting in the studio and I noticed how the lines dripped down and as they flowed on the floor they made this puddle, and I thought that was amazing. I had to find some way to get it on the painting," he explained. "It sounds simple, but it took me about three years to figure out how to do it, exactly. There are artists who have created drip paintings or stripes before, but it's really about finding your own approach and language within that whole history of art." 