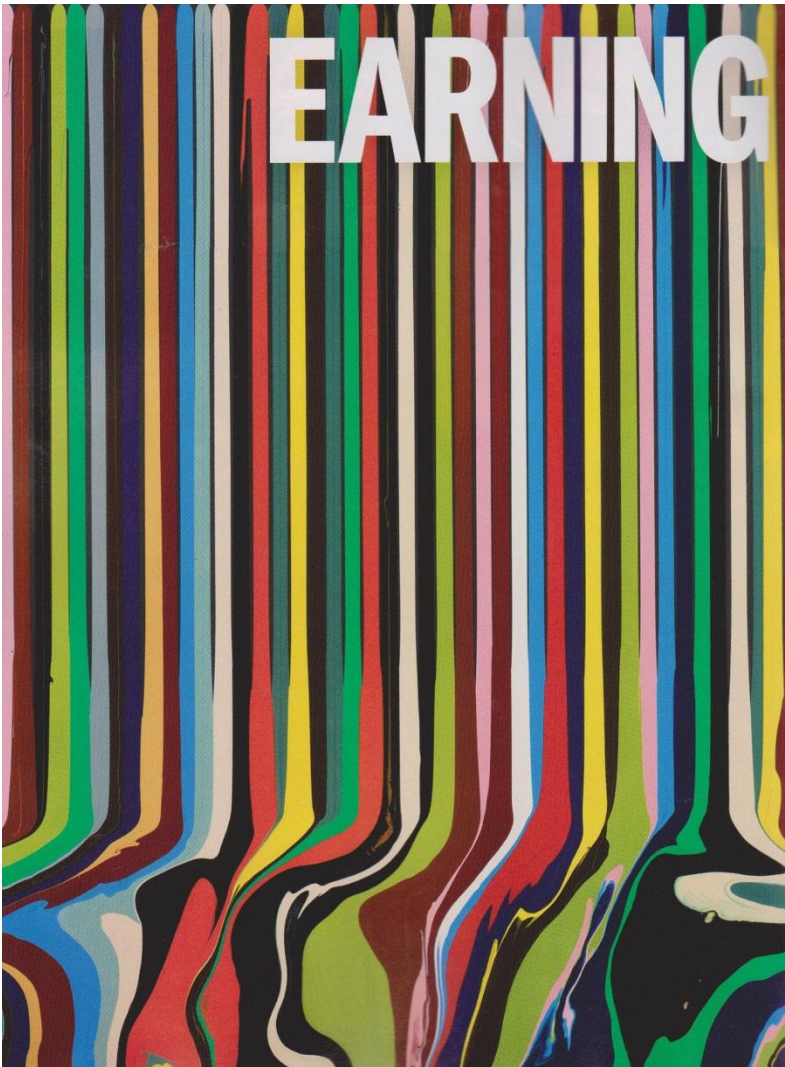


Title
Publication
Date

Earning His Stripes
Time Out Singapore
May 2012



EARNING HIS STRIPES

British artist Ian Davenport is known for his brightly coloured 'puddle paintings', in which paint is poured down a surface in straight lines and allowed to pool at the bottom. **Berwin Song** hears more about the method

Born and bred in London, Ian Davenport knows a good idea when he sees one. The acclaimed artist was studying at Goldsmiths College when he first developed his trademark 'painting' method – involving paint being poured or dripped down a surface in straight lines, and allowing the bright colours to mix together at the bottom – and he's been cultivating it ever since. It didn't take long for him to receive attention after graduating, starting with his inclusion in 1988's seminal 'Freeze' exhibition, curated by another Goldsmiths student, Damien Hirst. After a first solo show in 1990, in 1991 he received a nomination for the (pre-controversial) Turner Prize. As he debuts a solo exhibition of recent puddle paintings in Singapore this month, he tells us more about his technique and the ideas and inspirations behind it.

When did you create the first puddle painting, and what inspired it?

When I was in college I had been painting the paint pots in my studio. I allowed the paint to drip down the canvas to mimic the actual drips on the side of the cans, and over a period of time I became more interested in the drips than the paint cans. I started to allow the paint to flow and drip, and realised I was intrigued by the materials and the way gravity was acting on them. This was my starting point for developing as an artist.

How exactly are the puddle paintings created?

The puddle paintings developed from a previous group of works where lines of liquid paint had been carefully dripped down the painting surface using a syringe. Where the paint collected at the bottom, on the ground, it created very interesting puddles of paint. I thought it would give the pieces a dynamic contrast to the rigidly controlled poured lines section – and so the idea, and hence the title,



“I wanted to question a lot of the givens in painting – like, why do people normally use a brush?”

was born! The idea is very simple but as is often the case, it took a long time to work out the technical aspects.

Using a syringe, I can control the paint flow to such a degree that my focus can be almost entirely devoted to particular colour sequences. Although the stripes look incredibly even on close inspection, they run in to one another and fuse at irregular intervals. Changing the angle of the work will change the width of the line, and in some works I allow larger areas to pool and collect at the bottom to provide different compositional weights and variety. It is the tension between the precision and the letting go of some areas that is intriguing.

Was the decision to start dripping paint just an experiment that resulted in something that you liked, or a conscious effort to try to develop a new way of 'painting' without a paintbrush?

Earlier in my career, I was always experimenting with different ways of applying paint. Sometimes I used an electric fan, a dressmaker's pin, watering cans, a nail or an enormous brush; flicking, blowing, dipping, trying all manner of approaches. I wanted to question a lot of the givens in painting – like, why do people normally use a brush, or use canvas to paint onto, or just use oil paint? I thought there were other materials and methods I could try. After a while some groups felt more successful and allowed me to experiment but investigate specific areas.

Has your method behind these works changed or evolved over the years?

In the earliest of these works I was looking at the colour values of the poured stripes, and how they affected each other to build up and compose a completed painting. More recently I have been using other artists' works to inform my colour selections. It is not an overly dogged approach; simply by scanning a painting made by [Vincent] van Gogh, for example, and using a high-resolution computer, I can choose colours by moving across the field of the painting. The finished work is completely my own but still evokes a resonance of the referenced painting – and, perhaps more importantly, it surprises my sense of colour choices while being fun to make at the same time.

The works for the show in Singapore have been selected from [my output] over the last three or four years, and also include some brand new paintings.

'Ian Davenport: Between the Lines' is at Art Plural Gallery until 7 Jul.

