



## **Anthony Marshall: Artist**

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Anthony Marshall has been a professional artist/photographer for over thirty years. He has undertaken numerous art and design projects with multinational companies, national and private collections including Laura Ashley, Hallmark, Epson, Chatsworth and RIBA. His artwork has been exhibited in painters' galleries around the UK and sold in over fifty countries. His first exhibition, a photographic exhibition in Sheffield in 1980, was widely seen and well received; however, he was astonished to receive a number of letters from artists disputing the very idea of presenting photographs in an art show. The realization that creating with photographs as art was not accepted by all was to have a profound effect on him and it took time before he became comfortable with the label 'artist'. Anthony draws inspiration from the physical world he inhabits, both natural and man-made. His work embodies natural elements such as the quality and movement of water, botanical elements such as plants, flowers and trees and the urban environment of contemporary architecture. Constantly seeking out these elements provides him with the seeds for new ideas and works. He brings art and photography together to produce some visually stunning works. He takes images inspired by natural and man-made forms and transforms them through blending and interpreting colour and texture and, as the process evolves, so does his visual awareness of emerging qualities that continues to iterate through further reflection and making. His creative process involves exploring, selecting and combining towards his own unique interpretation of the visual image shaped by a love of fluidity, movement, and pattern seeking from the world about. His fascination with reflection is shown in the images below all created with the iPad apps is pivotal in his 'painting with light' an immediacy that promotes a fluid and improvisatory way of art making.<sup>2</sup> He has written about the artworks he has created since being diagnosed with prostate cancer in January 2018 in the illustrated book 'Improvising with Light'.<sup>3</sup>



**Water Reflections ©Anthony Marshall**

**Architectural Abstracts ©Anthony Marshall**

*Q: Tell me about your practice and how you got started.*

I took my first photographs when I was six years old and continued throughout my teens and into adulthood, up to this stage self-taught. In my early thirties, I made the momentous decision to leave my very people-oriented job and try to become a professional photographer. Initially I submitted some of my landscape photographs to a number of the top photo-libraries in the UK and they were accepted immediately. The problem with this sort of work was that it did not allow me to work in the art sector, so I have gradually drifted across to the point where I have worked full time in the creative industries. It's a way of life so practicalities come into it, accessibility, and getting to the right place at the right time. At the point of being in front of something (say) water reflections it's just a fleeting moment that creates beautifully abstract patterns, if you have the right natural elements working together, wind speed and the direction of the light etc. I see a pattern emerging which is moving fast and constantly changing. I'm already going through the processes in my mind, how and what I might do with this image. It's taken me many years to have that sort of pre-visualisation technique on multiple images.

Serendipity also plays its part and you can never be sure how different sketches will work together, experimentation is the key and sometimes it creates happy accidents. The overall content, texture, colour and lighting in all the original sketches profoundly affect the final artworks. Sometimes whilst you are improvising, something different happens - that's serendipity. I wasn't trying to make a Jackson Pollock look alike. It just happens...

I have four specific artwork areas: "Architectural Abstracts" Contemporary architecture has fascinated me for many years and I endeavour to find small elements of design from the facades of contemporary buildings, then bring these elements together to create abstract artworks many of these buildings are constructed of steel and glass so I can continue my exploration of reflections. It depends on the design elements of each of the buildings as to whether I make my artworks from an individual piece of architecture or explore multiple buildings in the same area or City.

What interests me is viewing the world in reflection, which fundamentally changes the way I see and understand the environment that I am exploring. I have over the years created many artworks exploring the movement of water, these images draw their inspiration from the extraordinary properties of water. More than two thirds of the earth's surface is covered with liquid water. Pure water has no colour, taste or smell. A pinhead-size drop contains about one billion billion molecules, and these strongly attract each other especially at the surface, where their mutual attraction forms a strong skin known as surface tension. Under the right conditions this creates the illusion that the water has changed viscosity, allowing complex abstract patterns and colours to form for a fleeting moment on the surface. These reflections are constantly changing which is both mesmeric and metaphysical, the changing light and wind speed on any given day only adds to the dynamic.

*Q: Take me through the process of taking a photo and using an iPad to change it.*

A: Although my work starts with a photograph I think like a painter. My compositions are minimalist and use the visual language of shape, form, texture and colour. They are created using a very fluid intuitive technique of image capture, improvising with the light on any given day, then making composites by blending two or more images. Maintaining the integrity of the high-resolution sketches throughout is paramount as they will be used at a later stage to create the large exhibition artworks. In essence, this means retaining the file size of the original photographic sketch throughout the entire process.

This is where the improvisation kicks in. Now I have a new set of well-balanced composed photographic sketches to add to my archive. I call them sketches because none of the images at this stage would stand alone as an individual piece of work, they will only make sense

when combined with other images. This is where I start to fundamentally change the sketches, intuitively bringing images together from my archive (around 1000 images) to try to create a finished piece of artwork, modifying shape, form, texture and colour. I usually start by changing the texture, and to this end I used a couple of my apps to create a series of textures to choose from. I will then add textures to both foreground and background images. Then I need to decide on the key foreground image, this is the one that will have the right compositional content, then blending a number of background images on to the foreground image (composites), also introducing some colour changes. I don't make a written or mental note of any of this work, I am just improvising with the material in my own archive.

The last stage of this work is finishing, in other words what am I going to do with this work. At some stage I will make a book but first I will be thinking about an exhibition and what form that might take. I have retained the file size of the original photograph throughout, which means I could make artworks over a metre wide. I have had a great deal of experience in transferring images onto a wide range of substrates such as textiles, metal, hand-made papers, ceramic, leather, silk and glass. If I take a conventional route of making a paper print and framing that would be fine, but by transferring onto glass the artwork could be both back lit and also lit from the top and sides. They can also be used inside or outside, which means that it would be in itself interactive, changing with the light, instead of just being passive. Therefore, they continue improvising even after the artwork is finished. I must also be aware that every time I use a different substrate, I will need to modify my artwork to suit a different process, lithographic printing, digital printing and textile printing etc.

*Q: What effect has using the various iPad apps had on your creative process?*

A: The most important aspect about working with the iPad is that it allows you to develop your image ideas in a less complex digital environment. Working with software like Photoshop, Painter, Lightroom and others became increasingly complex slow and cumbersome. Every time you have to stop to think through the next series of technical moves within the software this is detrimental to your creativity, by breaking the fluidity of the moment. It's now about continuing the improvisation letting your unconscious mind take over to intuitively concentrate on your own creativity. There are six apps all of which have been designed to do different things. I don't necessarily use them for the original intended use. All the technical aspects I already know (tacit knowledge) it's now about continuing the improvisation letting your unconscious mind take over to intuitively concentrate on your own creativity. I call this process 'Improvising with Light'.

One of the extraordinary things you can do with the Pad is that I will sit down maybe after breakfast and I've just got this new body of work in there that always excites me because I don't know what I am going to do with it. I will sit while having a coffee with the iPad and start playing. There are things now I know instinctively that I can do that I know will be really interesting. And you don't have to stop doing everything else and go into a totally separate room and get your overalls on and start throwing the paint around. That is, I think, a great boon., And there's a digital pencil in my bag so I can draw with that and even that is now digital so I can program it to do certain things. It is just amazing to me.

When drawing using the iPad, there is an immediacy because the hand and the eye work closely together, whereas before, with the old systems you used to have to type in lots of things and use lots of buttons. Now there is a sense of unity between hand and eye and your brain. The appeal of the iPad is that there's no barrier between the close connection between the eye and the hand.

Recently I was diagnosed with Prostate Cancer, which damaged the third vertebrae in my spine which affected the motor side of my body, which meant that I could not walk. I had many scans including MRI Scans of my spine, it had never occurred to me that searching for patterns of cancer in my own body would ever take place. I asked my consultant if I could

download the MRI scans to my iPad, eventually incorporating these scans into a piece of artwork, by blending the scans of my spine with the skeletal outline of my favourite winter trees in the Botanical Gardens Sheffield. Creatively I found this a powerful statement which has had a very positive effect on the way I view my ongoing illness. I was offered chemotherapy but after considerable research and discussion with my doctors I decided not to go ahead, because of the possible side effects. It was vital to me to continue working at the highest level possible, as I had many unfinished art projects - books, exhibitions and teaching. Once the initial diagnosis and treatment (Hormone therapy) had begun, I found myself for a time in Ashgate Hospice and was then transferred to Broomcroft House for palliative care. For a number of years before my illness, I had been working on a new project which was to explore the possibility of using the iPad as a creative tool. Over time it became clear to me that the iPad was indeed a game changer. One of the benefits of working with the iPad was that I was able to continue to work on this project even whilst being immobile. This was achieved because I had an archive of over 6,000 images to experiment with. I spent 6 months in Broomcroft House and gradually took over control of my recovery. Starting to walk again and continuing to work creatively I am convinced it was the power of creativity and the fundamental need to continue working that eventually led to me walking out of Broomcroft House six months later and returning home.

My Artworks utilise experimental digital photography blended together with painting and drawing as a hybrid medium using an iPad Pro and seven commercially available apps. I am not trying to create a representation of what's before me, but an interpretation. At the heart of my work is the creation of an archive of around 2000 abstract paintings, drawings and photo-sketches. I call them photo-sketches because none of the images at this stage would stand alone as an individual piece of work, they will only make sense when combined with each other. Many of the artworks you see here are a blending of multiple images gathered over an extended period of time. Although many of my works start with a photograph I think like a painter, my compositions are minimalist and use the visual language of shape, form, texture and colour, improvising with the light on any given day (Complex Simplicity).

*Q: How is your current iPad work influenced by experience and knowledge?*

A: I remember the days when all my files were scanned to 300 dpi because that was the standard thing because that's what the printing industry demanded. That's a huge file size that required a huge amount of scanning and refinishing. That has changed dramatically as the real digital age started... in the late 1970s early 80s. You need the technical stuff. An artist needs to know how to apply paint to canvas. The old masters had to be chemists because they had to mix their own colours, they had to be scientists because they would experiment; they also needed special aids in order to do stuff so it has always been there. But now we don't need that anymore but actually sorry guys we do. Because I have done hundreds of exhibitions and dozens of books, I have a technical, commercial skill. You have to have that if you are working for clients. You can't just produce an image there- and they say that's lovely we thought about having it on that wall! I say well it's the size of a postage stamp. Every single image I do will already be able to be worked up to at least a metre square.

*Q: Does the iPad change the process in any particular way?*

The most important thing was to research and find the seven apps I now use, this was a gradual process of trial and error, the problem here is sheer volume of new apps arriving each week with a huge duplication of affects. Most of the seven apps I now use have been around for some time, which means they have been developed and upgraded for a number of years. I chose each app to fulfil a specific role and to integrate with the other apps I use, there is real complexity here experimentation is the key. Working with the iPad has completely changed the way I think about creating art, it's about fluidity and the direct connection between my brain and fingers. It's extraordinary to think that this is just the beginning and where this technology could go in the future.

*Q: What have you learnt from other artists about the different ways people use the iPad?*

A: I have over the last few years run iPad Workshops, most of the people attending these workshops are painters together with small number of photographers. Coming from a painting background is a very good place to start to working with iPad because there are a number of painting apps to choose from and many opportunities to use transferable skills. But in my opinion photographers have the most to gain from working with the iPad, because of the extraordinary amount of control over your original image and opportunity to experiment and interpret. Starting from a photographic background is more complex because you need to create a substantial archive of original images, to give you the raw material to work with. It is fundamental that this imagery is intuitively produced and you have a clear idea how you will blend these images together with your paintings and drawings.

*Q: I think would be really interesting to try to understand the tacit knowledge being used. It is important to recognise that talking about it does not necessarily cover the whole ground of what you are doing.*

A: I think you have hit the critical point there- that tacit information. At one time the Sunday Times, like many newspapers had their own archive of imagery. It was a commercial asset they used to sell to other people. In charge of those assets were people who were not necessarily artists or photographers but what they could do is – you could send them a pile of photos or transparencies- 4-5 hundred at a go and they just knew! I watched these people and wondered how on earth they did that? They knew instinctively when they had chosen the right one. That is very hard to do on your own work. If you look now at what is happening because people are doing all this stuff, but no you have put your socks on over your book- You need the technical stuff. An artist needs to know how to apply paint to canvas. The old masters had to be chemists because they had to mix their own colours, they had to be scientists because they would experiment; they also needed special aids in order to do stuff so it has always been there. But now we don't need that anymore but actually sorry guys we do. If you have to put on an exhibition---Jackson Pollock knew how to do it. Other people happen on it and think they can do it...It was a black art: it is very difficult to know what people are looking for but you know it when you see it.

*Q: Were they able to talk about it?*

A: Not in so many words but they were able to do it and they found it. If it was for a client there would be key words. Key phrases they were looking for; after that it became much more difficult to pin them down. From my point of view, I could feel quite comfortable once I had seen how they were operating. Interesting it was about 10 years later when I was doing this project with a company and I created the world's first ever image database- before then it was just data and no image attached. I extended that- so instead of searching on key words, it was searching on colour, mood, shape, design and you could put in a search phrase- I am looking for a shot must be landscape, moody, a tendency towards blue, and you'd feed that in and it would come up- amazing. I created it- employed software developers who worked to my spec.

*Q: And does it still exist?*

A: Yes. Parts of it exist on the Internet. As it was initially conceived the company thought they could market it but it never took off...but the concept was really interesting. It was me as a creator thinking –this was what I would like.

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<sup>1</sup> Photograph by Christine Marshall

<sup>2</sup> In Search of a Pattern: A. Marshall: <http://tony.7thwave.io>

<sup>3</sup> Marshall, A. (2018) Improvising with Light. Bob Books' book of the month September 2018.