

collé

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Review Collé Interview

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What are your preferred pronouns?

She/her

Where are you currently based?

I live in Salt Lake City, Utah. I came to Utah in 1997 after my grandfather retired here from LA.

What year were you born? And where?

I was born in 1968, in London, England.

How do you describe your work and practice? Please answer in 4-5 sentences.

I am an analog collage artist, with a focus on the environment and the human condition. My environmental collages are abstracted landscapes, worked up from memory, of places that I've either seen briefly or that I know intimately. I'm an avid mountain biker and that exploration is part of the art. I tend to work in series, exploring themes in depth until I exhaust them.

What does collage mean to you? Please answer in 3-4 sentences.

It's nostalgic, as I have a lot of memories of seeing elements of the collage process growing up. Mostly I love the tactile quality of it, the smell of wood panels, the feel of the paper, and the process of cutting it. I love finding old paper because of the way it ages and I love the way light reflects off paper.

Do you have a distinct theme that you try to always communicate throughout your body of work?

I think if I had to choose one it would be my love of the earth. I find it incredibly distressing that so many human priorities do not take the health of the planet into consideration. Sometimes I believe that making art about the environment is important and could make a positive difference and then I go through phases of feeling hopeless and thinking it's a pointless drop in the ocean and that I should have trained in something more impactful.

Your work is a sensitive exploration of wild spaces and neglected environments. How do you reconcile abstraction with the physicality of these landscapes?

I suppose I want to make something that is a response to landscape, as opposed to trying to duplicate it. Being in wild spaces is so much more than just what you see. It's that, plus all of the other sensory experiences; the temperature of the air, whether the air is moving or still, what the light is doing, the sounds of insects and birds, how the grass or dirt feels and smells. Then there are all the body's reactions to the environment, both physical and emotional. Also, with pieces like the Wildfire Series I am working from my memory of a place before a fire, layered with an imagined representation of the fire and also its destruction. So my process puts all of these memories into a melting pot and then I follow my intuition and let the scissors do the work.

Do you have a repeated ritual, rhythm, or strategy when it comes to your process of making?

As I mentioned before, I work from memory, either from a glimpsed view or from a wealth of layered memories of a place I've visited numerous times. I hold the images of the place in my mind as I work and those blend with other sensory and emotional memories. Once I start choosing and cutting paper I usually get into a flow state where the collage almost seems to create itself.

In terms of materials and imagery, what do you typically acquire for your art practice?

Because most of my work is color based abstraction, I'm not usually looking for images, but I'm always on a hunt for colored paper. I prefer to use older found papers as I like the way paper ages. I like the inconsistencies and the fact that each piece is a one off. I find this makes it more precious and so I consider and value it more. Reusing paper is also a conscious environmental act which contributes to the theme of my work. Having said that, I do also purchase art papers, as I can't always find all the colors I need. Especially a particular blue that I include in some series of my work.

Your collages incorporate carefully layered fragments with restrained yet impactful palettes. What role does composition play in the emotional or thematic tone of your work?

I think that working with a limited range of options can help the creative process. I like the challenge of describing an environment with straight sided shapes and color. It means that I focus very much on the details, and small changes of angle, scale or color tone become very significant. Balance is also key, rather like riding my bike, I'm always making minute adjustments to find a place of equilibrium or challenging that to create tension or instability.

Your recent works explore the impact of wildfires. How do you translate environmental urgency into a visual, abstract language?

I'm not sure that the urgency I feel or the actual urgency of impending environmental disaster does translate into the work. Sometimes I believe art matters and then I really struggle with that. I like to think that abstraction is like a language that you develop over

time. It's very personal and you can speak it fluently but you also know that other people will need time with your work to learn the language. You hope that in the meantime, they enjoy looking at it.

Growing up in alternative, arts-centered environments, how has that formative experience shaped your view of art as a tool for community engagement and storytelling?

I was lucky to grow up in environments where the arts were a language that was spoken around me all the time. So imagination and making things was very normal. I developed a very extreme school phobia when I was about six and by the time I was eight my mum decided to solve the problem by starting a small arts-centric school called The Looking Glass School. It was the 70's when people like Ken Robinson were rethinking education. I attended that school until I was fourteen and it really informed my love of nature, the importance of creativity and social responsibility.

I'm also the collage artist for The Work in Progress Mural project, a community project conceived of by my mum Jann Haworth, where we teach people (most self confessed non-artists) how to cut stencils and make portraits of women who have been catalysts for change. I then take the stencils and collage them onto large 8 x 4 ft panels. To date we have completed 2,000 sq ft of analog collaged mural. We just finished two panels that were commissioned by The World Economic Forum, for their 2025 meeting in Davos.

Is there a particular memory of the natural world that continues to inform your practice today?

I love the Utah desert, and there is a place just outside of Zion National Park called the Guacamole Trail. It's up on a mesa and the trail takes you over a variety of terrain, both dirt and sandstone rock. Some of the trail follows the very edge of the mesa and there are sections where you climb over huge boulders or squeeze through narrow gaps between rocks. But my favorite part of the trail is a small pond caught in a basin between the Navajo sandstone rock. Water is rare in the desert and this pond can disappear in the summer. Whenever my partner and I ride here we always sit for a while soaking the place in, seeing the sky reflected in the water and the huge red rocks of the park in the distance. It's my favorite place.

BIO

Born in England in 1968, Liberty grew up in an alternative, arts-centric environment that encouraged self-expression and creativity. Between the ages of eight and fourteen she attended The Looking Glass School, a small experimental school fostering the arts and environmental awareness. This formed the beginning of her love for art, outdoor adventure, and the natural world.

Liberty studied Foundation Art and illustration at Sydney Place Foundation, illustration at Bath Academy of Art and painting at WSCAD. In 1997 she moved to Utah, where she co-ran the 'Art Shack' at Sundance, teaching, exhibiting, and producing graphic design

for the resort. It was during this time that she made her first wilderness-inspired abstract collages.

Liberty is also the collage artist for The Work in Progress Mural, an ongoing large scale collaborative mural, currently almost 100 ft long. It features a gathering of women who are or were 'catalysts for change' in their particular fields. Each stenciled portrait is made by a member of the public—many by self confessed non artists— in workshops that she teaches with the creative director of the project, Jann Haworth. The most recent iterations of the mural are seven panels commissioned by The National Portrait Gallery in London for their permanent collection and two panels commissioned by The World Economic Forum for their 2025 meeting in Davos.

Liberty currently lives and works in Salt Lake City, Utah. Her abstract collages are a document of the wild natural places and neglected urban environments of Utah and Northern California. She has shown extensively in Utah, in group and solo shows, she is currently represented by The Phillips Gallery in Salt Lake City. Her work is housed in private collections across the United States, Europe, and Canada.