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Artist Profile: Emma Coulter

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Working within the expanded field of painting, sculpture and spatial environment, Emma Coulter creates large-scale installations that portray a visual language through stimulating colours and striking patterns. The artist has presented her signature work in Melbourne, Sydney, New York, Byron Bay, Berlin, Bochum, and now Brisbane. Emma talks to us about her love for colour and scale, and her latest work *Spatial Deconstruction #21 (Portals)*, now on at the Museum.

What made you decide to become an artist? Were you creative as a child?

Becoming an artist has been a long and considered journey, and in many ways it's not something that you choose to become, but rather it is something that you are compelled to do, because there isn't any other options or choices in the end! Thankfully, I was always encouraged to pursue my creativity from a young age, I remember spending many a lunch hour in the art room at school trying to finish off my projects. The hard work paid off when I landed a place at QUT to study visual arts as a young school-leaver, and then subsequently I also completed a Bachelor of Built Environment at QUT. I consider these two undergraduate degrees as formative training that informs the in-between place of spatial practice and painting that occupies my work.

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Your arts practice delves into the Op art aesthetic of neonic colours and bold geometric patterns. Where do you get inspiration from?

Colour has always been an idea that I've been working with over many years. I consider it a conceptual device, and I like to challenge this idea that it's 'easy' or that it's not intellectual. Colour is in fact very clever, because it actually has the ability to traverse both 'high' and 'low' culture. I believe that through this aspect of colour, my work can be accessed at different entry points.

Specifically, my spatial deconstruction work is a direct response to each site and place that I am working in. Through analysis of the site, the idea for each work comes from the distinct features of the space, and then I impose my language on it, as the space becomes the canvas for my artwork. I work repetitively with a restricted colour palette. This is deliberate, as for me the colour becomes a medium that I can manipulate, as it starts to operate in a similar way to language. That is, that the colours, when placed together in a certain way, create words or sentences, and form certain responses as a consequence. The scale is very important. That is, that it is of human scale, bearing a distinct relationship to the body.

Interestingly, over time, my work has evolved from a gestural based painting practice to a multifaceted painting and spatial practice. The ideas have become a lot more considered, and this is reflected in the outcome.

You've presented your *Spatial Deconstruction* series in other Australian cities. How does it feel to create the latest version of this work, in your hometown of Brisbane, for the first time?

It is so exciting for me as an artist to be showing my first *spatial deconstruction* work in Brisbane, my hometown where I grew up, and in the city where I undertook my formative education. It's terrific on so many levels! I feel extremely honoured to be considered as a significant female artist coming out of Brisbane.

Being curated into *NEW WOMAN* also holds specific meaning for me, as I do hold dual roles as an artist. Having a young family and being a female artist, I have often thought about all of the unpaid labour of motherhood and cultural production. Whilst my work would not be read as overtly feminist, it does feel like the genre that I'm working in—large scale and site-specific installation—is predominantly held by male artists in Australia, so I feel really proud to be a female artist working in this area.

I recently had a short conversation with one of my art history lecturers from QUT, who pointed out poignantly that I was actually, '*right back at the point where I started*'. I think that this sums about many thoughts and feelings of how it feels to be showing here at Museum of Brisbane, but mostly I just feel really proud and honoured.