

# The San Diego Union-Tribune

## VISUAL ARTS

### At Lux, Andy Harper adds intricate detail, own language to different pieces of art

BY JESSE OLESON

DEC. 7, 2017

It was a bit of a trek for Andy Harper to get to Encinitas. Harper, a United Kingdom-based artist, hopped across the pond and then a continent to serve for a few weeks as artist in residence at the Lux Art Institute, where nearly 20 of his oil-based paintings will be on view until Jan. 13. Until Saturday, he will also be painting six original pieces that he'll add to the large collection of work that he's amassed in his career.

The most famous pieces of Harper's portfolio are a series of large paintings that show intricate details and vivid forms that are unrecognizable — unless you know what to look for. By looking at his work, one would never expect it to be an interpretation of a different piece of art using intricate forms. Those works include a Japanese print, a piece from painter Peter Lanyon, and other notable paintings that Harper uses for inspiration. "I would establish the basic composition (of the already completed painting) and then bring the image and composition into my own language," said Harper, who has exhibited all over the globe, most recently at the Danese/Corey gallery in New York, Morgen Contemporary in Berlin and Page Gallery in Seoul.

Another unique aspect of Harper's art is the diligence in his preparation and his ability to turn a piece around quickly. To prep canvas or wood, Harper primes the surface again and again, in addition to using oil paint mixed with linseed oil. "There are no layers to this paint — it's like a transparent membrane. It is a highly prepared slippery surface primed seven, eight, nine, 10 times so that I get this very smooth surface," said Harper, who lives and works in West Cornwall and is a part-time lecturer at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Depending on how he manipulates the paint with the medium, he has a day to a week to work. Once the paint sets, it's set. This creates a fluidity to his artwork and also means he must be extremely careful with each movement of his brush or, when the situation calls for it, a car window squeegee. "It's a series of precision marks that I make to that membrane, and once it sets and begins to get gelly, I'm out of there," said Harper, who in 1999 received a master's degree in visual culture commendation from Middlesex University and in 1995 received a master's in fine art painting from Royal College of Art.

Harper's most recent work is on the meditation of symmetry, where a mark on one side of the painting is reflected on the other. His symmetrical work is done on a much smaller scale, on 2-foot-by-2-foot canvases. At his core, Harper likes to challenge himself and his art. "It was a test of my language. You could do it once and it looks very free and flowing, but can you repeat it?" Harper said. "And after I did one line of symmetry, I added a second."

Again, Harper was challenging himself and translating other art into his own language.

As a sneak peek of what Harper is creating while in residency, he said this: "I'm trying to pair what I see as the extremes of my work together with this kind of small and large painting." To illustrate, he drew a picture. The drawing had one small box on top of a much larger box, both representing his paintings. Harper plans to use his smaller symmetrical work directly alongside his large paintings.

"I'm intrigued on this sort of idea of dividing up a painting into something structural," he said. "If I don't like the way it looks, then they will just be separate paintings. But that's what I've been thinking about — about head and body as if one (painting) is thinking and one's physical."