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Mat Collishaw: in the studio



Mat Collishaw lives and works in Camberwell, south London

Mat Collishaw is an English artist whose work featured, alongside pieces by Damien Hirst and Sarah Lucas, at the influential Freeze exhibition in London in 1988. Collishaw graduated from Goldsmiths in 1989, already a prominent member of the Young British Artist (YBA) movement. The 50-year-old,

who works in a wide variety of mediums, including painting, sculpture and video, had a major retrospective at the New Art Gallery in Walsall last year. He has also had shows in New York, Berlin and Geneva. Collishaw's work, which seeks to challenge taboos, explores subjects such as sexual desire and the influence of the media. Two of Collishaw's large installations, Seria Ludo and The Pineal Eye, are currently on display at Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal Water Garden in North Yorkshire. Collishaw lives in Camberwell, south London, with the artist Polly Morgan.

Fountains Relief is at Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal Water Garden until Oct 30 2016



Mat Collishaw

I always used to start the day with coffee and a cigarette. I've quit the cigarettes, though, and am on the e-cigarettes, so now it's just coffee.

I try to be at my desk at 9am every morning. There's a lot of management and administration stuff that needs doing, so it kind of helps if I'm at my desk in good time. It's useful that I live upstairs – just a case of getting out of bed and then it's all downhill.

First up, I like to do something that's creative – not too challenging. It's generally computer-based first thing in the morning: a photograph I'm adjusting or a collage I'm making in Photoshop, for example. And then after about half an hour, I'll take a shower and start responding to emails.

Maybe 90-95 per cent of the work that I do is in the design of it. I use electrical and mechanical engineers, who are very good at building stuff with me. I will constantly be there, making sure it all runs smoothly. Assistants are just an extension of you, really.



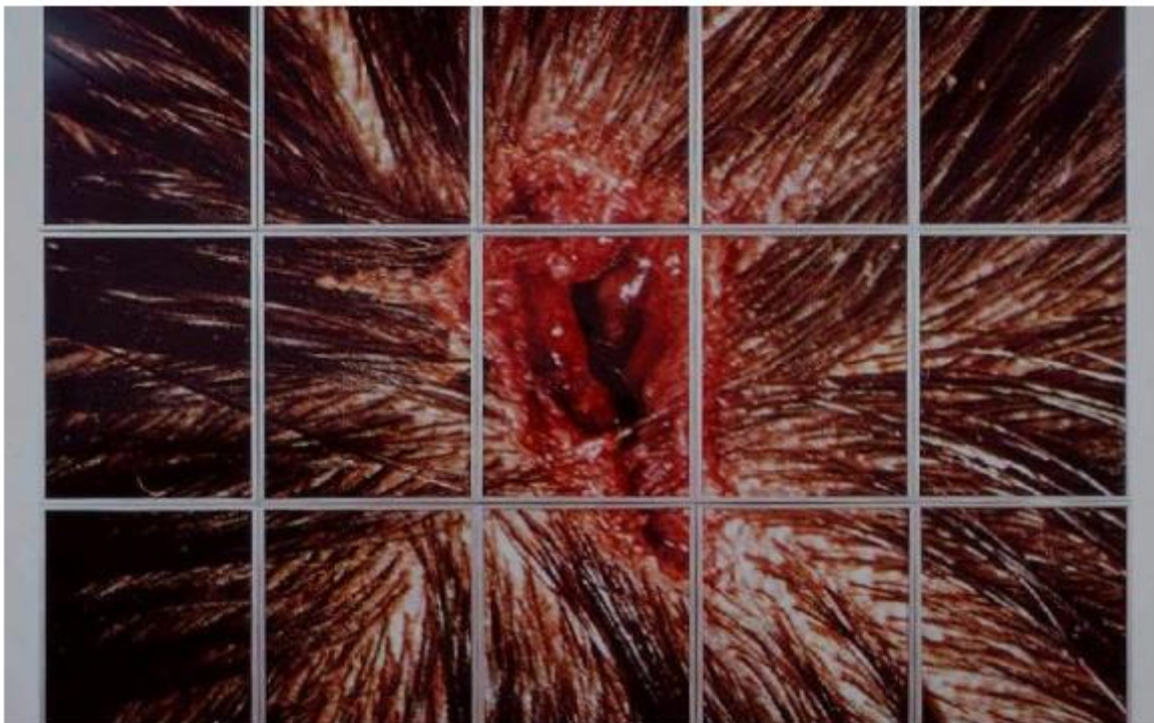
Seria Ludo, 2016, Mat Collishaw

My studio is an old pub. A lot of the features of the pub, such as the wooden floors and some of the wood panelling, are still there. I've ripped out the bar and all the dividing walls and built a large white wall, which I can hang my artworks on. The space is roughly 1200 square feet.

The studio is too bright for me. Quite often I'll have to black out the whole studio because there are windows going down two sides of the building - even at night, there are street lights illuminating the studio - so if I'm dealing with certain optical illusions or projections, it helps to have total blackout.

For many reasons, the studio isn't ideal. But it's local and there's a basement, used for storage both of artworks and of everything that I need to make those artworks. There are a vast range of things in the basement, from projectors to nuts and bolts, an area for boxing up prints and cutting prints and doing graphic-style work.

Lunch is definitely a distraction. I just can't stop doing what I'm doing. Usually when I've fixed my lunch, whatever it might be, I'm then back at work again, eating while I'm doing something.



Bullet Hole (details), 1988, Mat Collishaw

If I'm doing something manual, I'll just stick the radio on and then ignore it. Like a lot of people, I just like the company of it and you never know, something might come on that you tune into to. Generally, though, I just tune out pretty quickly. If the radio is not on, there's a void there and I like that void to be filled with somebody prattling away.

I'm quite chaotic and messy, not very efficient. But I also realise that we all benefit from being efficient, so I reign myself in and impose an order on what I do. Everything has to have a place it can be returned to because otherwise it's chaos. Embarrassingly I do take pleasure in being efficient when I'm working because then you can address the problem, rather than muttering, 'where are the f--king scissors?' You can just get on and do it.

I work on multiple things at a time. And I work in a wide range of media, so it could be oil painting or it could be something that is dependent on 3D painting. Keeping lots of plates spinning is a certain way of maximising the amount of stress I'm under, which I like because if there's a problem to solve, your adrenaline is stimulated to some extent. A mild level of stress is conducive to working because it means you're in a heightened sense of awareness.



Seria Ludo, 2016, Mat Collishaw

I know that a work is finished when it looks exactly like the final images from the design stage. I will do something and I will look at it and I'll refine it. You're just paying attention to those things that bother you about a piece, the thing which jumps out at you. So address the things that are screaming out loudest and then you reach a stage when nothing offends you too much. At that point, the piece appears to exist autonomously; it has its own life beyond you. Then it's ready to go.

The artworks on my walls are like portraits of friends. I have works by Damien Hirst, Sarah Lucas, Jake and Dinos Chapman, Tracey Emin, amongst others. It's like having pictures of your mates around the house, just a reminder of them.

Most of my inspiration comes from reading books - pretty old school. Obviously there is a lot of media online, though, particularly for the more science-based journals. I generally make notes when I'm reading. I'll either write things down on my phone, photograph a particular bit of text or pencil mark a book.

Artists' block is for amateurs. If you're going to be professional about it, you have to instigate a system, which deals with artists' block. For me, it's just making notes all the time, or collecting scrapbooks of images and drawings in books. I have a library of things I've built, which interest me, for whatever reason, across a very broad section of media.



Insecticide 13, 2013, Mat Collishaw

Good things generally come from doing stuff. It's when you're doing stuff that you discover something else and you can then scrap everything you did before. A lot of the time things come about by accident. Unless you're in the process of doing something, those accidents aren't going to happen.

If I can't avoid it, I will take our dogs, Tony and Trotsky, for the evening walk. This is a mildly stressful form of relaxation, as there's always some potential issue for disaster lurking: one of the dogs running off with a sausage from a picnic or whatever.

I now get a lazy eight hours sleep a night. I used to keep a lot later hours back in the Goldsmiths days, though.

