



Emma Hurst

South Stoke Idyll Installation, May 2024

In the symbiosis between art and agriculture, Emma Hurst acknowledges the intricacies of her own creative practice and identifies with the rhythms and methods of traditional and modern farming practices.

This installation, created for the South Stoke Idyll exhibition, is site-specific and temporary. The tensioning of the canvas is an integral part of the planning and concept, ensuring that the work interacts with the architecture and reflects the landscape it inhabits. The final installation has managed to achieve Hurst's vision from conception, thanks to the kind help of Janey Gardner, Matt Bodimeade, and installation assistance from James Stewart. Their generous input has been invaluable to realising the work.

Hurst's shared studio with fellow artist Matt Bodimeade, situated in Offham farm, serves as a bridge between her art and the agricultural landscape that surrounds her.

This connection informs her creative process, which begins with the ritualistic act of pulling the canvas from the roll and ripping off the desired amount. Intense colours of powder pigments are mixed and released into water, creating mesmerising vats of colour that beckon exploration.

Laying out the canvas on the ground, or in this case hung with ingenious pulleys, Hurst begins to paint colour onto the raw canvas, each stroke imbued with intention and spontaneity. As the colours soak through to the underside of the canvas, staining each fibre and providing a resistant counterpoint to its materiality, Hurst begins the meticulous process of folding the material. Homemade tools aid in the precise folding, then squashed tightly, sometimes driven over, leaving behind permanent lines within the structure of the canvas that echo the rhythm and method of agricultural practice.

The concertinaed lengths of canvas are left to dry solid, each fold a testament to the intricate dance between control and chance that defines Hurst's artistic practice. Once dried, the process is repeated, and another colour is introduced, layering upon layering until the artwork emerges into its final form. Importantly, there is no front and back to Hurst's paintings; both sides are painted until she feels each surface can stand up to the scrutiny of her aesthetic inquiry.

Conscious of the repetitive action in her making, Hurst pushes the unknown terrain of creativity, teaching her muscles to move in a certain way, breathing and not breathing, while working and responding to the reality unfolding before her. This organic process is how her pieces emerge into being, each one a unique exploration of form and texture. Controlling the speed and time of her engagement with a piece, as well as altering the physical distance she has from it while working, are methods Hurst uses to exert some control over her studio practice, ensuring each creation is different from its predecessors yet building on an ever-increasing library of work.



Emma Hurst's past installations, have been curated in a manner resembling exploded collages. The term "exploded collages" suggests that the components of the installation are arranged where they appear fragmented or dispersed, resembling the scattered pieces of a collage. This unconventional presentation challenges traditional modes of artistic display, encouraging viewers to interact with the artwork in dynamic and multi-dimensional ways.

By disrupting traditional expectations of how artwork should be presented, Hurst invites viewers to engage with her work in a more active and participatory manner. This approach reflects the experiential and experimental processes inherent in her artistic practice, where the boundaries between viewer and artwork are blurred, fostering dialogue and introspection.

Viewers are invited to walk around and through Hurst's installations, gaining new perspectives akin to those experienced on a long rural walk. The landscape changes as one navigates around the artwork, revealing new visual compositions, meanings and depth that echo the complexity of the agricultural landscape itself.

Through her immersive exploration, Emma Hurst challenges the dominance of visual perception in contemporary culture. Her work offers a new perspective on painting, sparking questions about decision-making processes. How do farmers and artists navigate choices, colour, and aesthetics? How do they balance efficiency and creativity in response to changing landscapes?

Traversing through the performative and labour-intensive nature of her works, Hurst's practice, and the realities of modern farming, we find solace in the shared journey of adaptation and innovation. Through the exploration of her practice and with agriculture, Hurst invites us to reimagine creative expression and engage with human interaction with the natural world in a deeply personal and transformative manner.