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18 March 2015
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Lisa Creagh Discusses Art in Non-traditional Spaces – Beyond the White Cube

March 18, 2015 by Frances Spiegel — Leave a Comment

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Lisa Creagh, digital artist and photographer, is 'Artist In Residence' at Jumeirah Lowndes Hotel, London. Lisa is the Jumeirah's second 'Artist In Residence.'

Jumeirah Lowndes Hotel organized the residency in conjunction with The Art Movement, an organisation that introduces outstanding artists to new audiences in relaxed and unusual spaces beyond the so-called 'white cube' of the traditional art gallery or museum.

When an art gallery or museum appoints an 'Artist In Residence,' we tend to assume that at that art gallery or museum, referred to by many as 'white cubes,' we will see an artist at work, and the artist's work will appear on nearby walls. In this case, we won't actually see Lisa at work, but we will see the finished products on display in a most unusual setting – the Lowndes Bar and Kitchen.

The question is: how does this unusual setting influence our perception of the art? Do we see it differently?



Lisa Creagh, *Floriculture* – Lisa combines Persian geometric designs and Dutch still-life flower-painting traditions using composite images of fresh flowers. Copyright image courtesy of Lisa Creagh, used with permission. All rights reserved.

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Lisa Creagh: About the Artist

A graduate of Goldsmith College in 1994, Lisa Creagh recently received a Masters in Photography from Brighton University.

After working in New York for several years, curating exhibitions and teaching digital imaging, Lisa returned to the UK in 2001. In 2003 she established The Brighton Photo Fringe, a network of artists operating in conjunction with the Brighton Photo Biennial.

In 2006, Lisa received critical acclaim for her outdoor exhibition *Tidy Street*. Tidy Street has a long and very interesting history, and residents of the street provided photos from their personal photo albums. With these, Lisa created window-sized light boxes which were lit up from 6pm to 10pm for the two weeks of the Brighton Photo Fringe 2006.

Lisa makes regular appearances on television and radio in programmes such as the *Claudia Winkleman Show*, and is frequently featured in prestigious magazines such as *Sloane Square Magazine*, *The British Journal of Photography* and *Time Out London*.

Lisa Creagh's Inspiration for *The Instant Garden*?

In ancient Persia, Nomadic tribes would throw down their colourful carpets to create 'instant gardens.' Lisa Creagh's photographic project brings together the visual language of still life and the stylised patterns of traditional decorative arts. Lisa combines Persian geometric designs and Dutch still-life flower-painting traditions using composite images of fresh flowers. Hand-made elements of traditional decorative arts are digitally manipulated to create captivating kaleidoscopic 'gardens.'

On her website Lisa describes *The Instant Garden*:

'The Instant Garden is an attempt to bridge the "hand-made" elements of highly detailed and painstakingly constructed crafts (needlework, lace making, quilts, crochet, etc.) with the techniques of digital manipulation and construction that have emerged with new twenty-first century photographic software.'

The Instant Garden has received a development grant from The Arts Council of England, thus allowing Lisa to develop the project further.

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An Interview with Lisa Creagh

Lisa Creagh spoke exclusively to Decoded Arts about her work and how we feel about art in unexpected places.

Decoded Arts: *What inspires The Instant Garden series?*

Lisa Creagh: *The Instant Garden was inspired by two very different decorative art forms. The first was Dutch Flower Painting, the second was Persian carpets. I first saw a collection of Dutch Flower paintings at The National Gallery in 2007. What interested me was the way people stood so close to the paintings, looking so closely at them. The detail is exquisite! When I discovered that each one was a construct made of dozens of individual studies I realised that this was an idea that could be reused for my own work.*

Persian carpets have always fascinated me but the Ardabil carpet at the Victoria and Albert Museum particularly inspired the composition of Floriculture 1 and 2. There's a surprising amount of scale, artificial space and illusion at play in these medallion carpets. Bringing these two seemingly separate art forms together was a challenge but ultimately I hope I've created something new.



The Ardabil Carpet, Persia, dated 946 AH, is on display at the Victoria & Albert Museum as no. 272-1893. Image by Crisco.

Decoded Arts: *Who are your artistic heroes?*

Lisa Creagh: *Hmmm...I suppose most artists in the twenty-first century. I would say Duchamp, because his ideas are still so pervasive and relevant. But Hannah Hock, Helen Chadwick, July Chicago and Bridget Riley have also been very important for me in terms of trusting my instincts and forging my own identity as an artist and a woman.*

Decoded Arts: *As your work is photographic, can you briefly describe the type of equipment you use?*

Lisa Creagh: *I alternate between an old-fashioned 6x7 film camera and brand new digital back to shoot the flowers. Film has much better tolerance for low light, but digital is so much easier in post-production. Everything is then scanned (if it's film) and retouched on a Mac.*

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Decoded Arts: *How do you create the kaleidoscopic repeating patterns we see in The Instant Garden?*

Lisa Creagh: *The patterns are based on drawings, either copied from Islamic, Celtic or other art works, or from my own imagination. I find patterns everywhere, from gravestones on Iona, to pillars in Italian churches. I made the guards in the Sistine Chapel nervous by drawing the floor. Everyone else was looking up and I was looking at their feet! Sometimes I'll find a beautiful piece of lace or a gorgeous book illustration. We are surrounded by wonderful patterns, most of which have lost their original purpose and meaning.*

Decoded Arts: *If the digital software that makes your art possible had never been invented, what form of art would you create instead?*

Lisa Creagh: *That's an interesting question! I was making collages from photographs before Photoshop came along and rocket-powered the whole process. Back then, I used to make photo-realistic paintings from photographic collages. I only stopped making paintings when the Lightjet printing came along and it was possible to create photographic prints from digital images. So I suppose if the software had never been invented, I'd be a painter!*

Decoded Arts: *When we see art outside of traditional spaces does it take us by surprise?*

Lisa Creagh: *Really 'traditional spaces' for art are churches, mosques, temples or the home. Museums and galleries are a relatively new idea, based on the palaces that once held large collections. I believe in art as a common language across class and culture so I believe strongly that it must work in lots of different contexts and not rely on the neutrality and artificiality of the white cube space. I think if you were to see a Kandinsky in a living room you would definitely see it differently to the same Kandinsky on a museum wall.*

Decoded Arts: *Do you think we remember it more vividly because we've seen it in an unexpected place?*

Lisa Creagh: *Museums and galleries have an important role to play in creating a separate space for us to enjoy art. But the Kandinsky was probably made with a domestic, not a museum setting in mind. Thinking about it this way, yes art has more potency outside the gallery.*



Lisa Creagh. E11. Digital manipulation creates a complex kaleidoscopic image. Copyright image courtesy of Lisa Creagh, used with permission. All rights reserved.

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Lisa Creagh and The Art Movement Take Art Beyond the 'White Cube'

The Instant Garden is colourful and vibrant, taking minute sections of still-life flower images and transforming them into beautiful, intricate and highly decorative patterns. Lisa Creagh successfully combines the two distinctive art forms of still-life and digital photography and the exhibition itself challenges our ideas about where art should be viewed - in the 'white cube' of the traditional art gallery or in informal, unconventional and friendly spaces?

Lisa Creagh's *The Instant Garden* is on show for an indefinite period at the Jumeirah Lowndes Hotel, 21 Lowndes Square, London, SW1X 9ES, UK.

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