



Angela Bulloch in her Berlin studio in May 2011, another British artist who has chosen the city as her preferred habitat for art.

# Angela Bulloch

## Why did you choose to live and work in Berlin?

I had a big public commission and a lot of other work because one of my main galleries moved here. I wanted to make some new work and there were people I could do it with. Also I'd had to move out of my studio in London because of developers.

## Does the location of a studio affect an artist's work, or is it a continuation of, or a development out of, it?

There's no one answer to that question. Having a very large studio gives you a different kind of freedom, and time also. In London or Paris or New York you can't get that.

## Do you remember your first studio?

It was a room at the top of my parents' house, when I was a teenager. I did a lot of painting and drawing as a teenager, I didn't make too much sculpture there.

## Was the transformation from painting to sculpture a seminal moment?

I was always making things, but I didn't think of it as 'sculpture'. Yes, there was an important shift at one point. I felt like I'd got too good at painting and I was no longer interested in the illusion of it. I was more interested in concrete matters: objects, things that change, that flirt with time, also things involving music. I found a way to join up all of these things I'd been interested in, not in an illusionary way, in an actual way.

## You've been quoted as saying that you 'come from the forest and ... always wanted to live in the city' ...

I was born in a place called Rainy River, in the middle of nowhere in Canada. I turned my bedroom cupboard into an apartment, and I watched TV shows about people in New York. I wanted to live in the sky, in a kind of high-rise. Even as a young person I wanted to live in the city. You learn a lot from the forest about how to survive. I mean literally: how to dodge bears and stuff like that.

## Generally speaking, the bigger names in art usually live and work in big cities. What is it about cities?

That's where all the other people are, and where all the museums are. That's where culture 'sits'. That's where history is, too. It's also where you can work with people who can do things better than you can. It's the community of others.

## What are your sources of inspiration?

Other art and life in general. Quantity counts, but it is the quality of what you observe, and your reflections, that really count. Looking at art is like breathing. It's like reading, it's like writing. When you look at art, it's an experience that feeds your knowledge. It's history.

## Are you trying to evoke particular responses from your viewers?

No. I might act on my own feeling towards something, on how I've reacted to something, but I never try to imagine or tell somebody how they should feel or behave. That's not what art's about, really.

At the moment I have a solo show at the Berlinsche Galerie. They gave me a prize and I made an exhibition. I worked a little with the museum collection, and with a project of mine that has been ongoing since '92. I really built a new aesthetic. I worked with the architecture, I worked with the shifting of contexts, I dealt with historical things such as a manifesto for the Novembergruppe, which is very important in terms of Berlin's history and artists being political. I had my construction and then I built different things using three different types of graphic design and concepts, and using the museum as a construct, too. I made ten giant wall paintings as well as condensed versions of each of them made in a totally different way, as prints. It was like using formats, forms and different ways of seeing the same thing.

## You work with imagery from the films of Kubrick and Antonioni, among others. Is your intention to put your own mark on their work?

For a start, I work with specific quotations. But I translate this durational material into digital form, and I play this digital form in a completely different way. It doesn't look like the original at all because I've invented a structure from which to see it. Technically, I mean. That's one of the reasons I came to Berlin. I wanted to work with somebody to construct an RGB system. I made this three-colour, additive colour system into a cube, a large sculptural object, these cubes can be joined up to make a screen. I call them 'Pixel Boxes'. So yes, it's a direct quotation, but in such another form! My version has the capacity to change the scene – only once every second, so it has a totally different kind of rhythm from film, which changes at a much faster rate of twenty-four frames per second.

## And you leave it to the viewer to interpret these works?

No, I shape them, extraordinarily.



## You direct the viewer's imagination?

Yes. But often they already know the script because my works are quotations from films by someone else.

## So they're almost alien translations?

They are algorithmic translations.

## Would you say that your audience is the general public?

I don't know. I know who I make my work for, but then there's everybody else as well. I don't know how to tell somebody what to do or look at. My work is for people to have their own freedom. I make it for a select group of imaginary or actual people with whom I discuss it. In my mind I have a conversation with certain friends, other artists, people who discuss work and care about it. There are a dozen or so of them.

## Is art a popular activity or an elite one?

That's a kind of trick question. I make my work, and I think about that. Of course it's open for everybody to see it. In order to communicate, you have to have a feeling for the receptor. Since I'm just one person, I need to think in terms of something I can grasp myself. When the target audience gets too large, it's beyond what I can contain for myself. It's not useful to me any more to try and imagine what everybody thinks.



Interior of Bulloch's Berlin studio (above), where she uses technology to create dynamic and interactive installations. The artist (opposite) at her exhibition *Information, Manifesto, Rules and Other Leaks ...* at the Berlinische Galerie. 'I might act on my own feeling towards something, on how I've reacted to something,' she avers, 'but I never try to imagine or tell somebody how they should feel or behave. That's not what art's about, really.' The *Group Rules* series, begun in 1992, consists of a continuously growing collection of rules, regulations and norms.

**Do you feel elated when there is a big response to one of your works, or do you move on after you've finished it?**

I'm very happy with some of the responses I have, which are extraordinary, something you can never imagine.

**You've said that you're interested in systems that structure social behaviour. Is your art social archaeology, or does it exemplify the moods, sounds and colours of the city?**

It's less picturesque than that, more literal. I do think about people and how they behave within the context of museums. It's a relevant question to set within the work, so that others can experience it and have a feeling of being a part of the work because they're implicated. It's like bringing in a fifth dimension.

**Is there a subliminal social message in there somewhere?**

No. You're imagining that I behave like a politician or something, and I don't. I'm an artist.

**A lot of artists have political messages in their work.**

Yes, and I am one of them, but I do it differently. I have behaved politically very often. But with the construction of the work, this is a key point: there are many people who behave just as viewers. They look at a painting and then look at the next one. And the relationship between the viewer and the art is a prescribed one. This area, this exchange, between seeing something and understanding it – or it affecting you, or you affecting it – is an area that I'm interested in.

**Does it follow that contemporary artists have an extraordinary amount of power when it comes to social media? Does your work perform in that arena?**

I hope so! As a general point, art has an effect on the society within which it's working. That's true of all time periods.

**Speaking of power, and of influence, is there a particular person whose work has influenced you?**

As a teenager I was very inspired by Bridget Riley. I went to hear her talk about her work. And there are many colleagues, people I studied with, with whom I am still in contact. I don't really want to name names.

**I know that you don't like the term 'YBAs', but are there artists from that period whom you respect?**

Yes, certainly. I visited Sarah Lucas in her studio just last week. She has relevance for me. I don't like the term 'YBA' because it's so out of date. It was a phenomenon funded by the British Council.

**Do you see yourself going back to London?**

I go back regularly.

**But without equivocation you are a British artist?**

Without equivocation I am a British artist who is also Canadian.

**Where does art stop and technology begin?**

Well, for me art is the part that I'm interested in. I usually ask someone else to help me with the more technological bits.

**You're not a scientist yourself, of course.**

No, I'm simply a curious person, and it's that which leads me into things I don't imagine I will get into when I'm starting out.

