

# GARAGE

## INTERVIEW: FRANCIS UPRITCHARD AND DURO

The Camden Arts Centre – a space where contemporary visual art collides with burgeoning talent – will open its doors to *Making & Unmaking*, an exhibition curated by fashion designer, Duro Olowu. Featuring over 60 international artists (including Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Claude Cahun, and Lorna Simpson) the exhibit will tiptoe on themes such as gender, sexuality, media and culture.

"The more I looked at a work that I was considering for the show – not necessarily textile based or straight-forward painting – the more the intricacy and the beauty of an artist discovering and realising what they are capable of on an intuitive level, came through," says Duro Olowu. "I am attracted to specific pieces that take the artist in a direction outside what is regarded as their signature style, things that even they may have overlooked or disregarded. There is an immediacy in many of these examples in which the hand of the artist is felt," he continued.

In light of the exhibition, which opens this Sunday, its creator Duro Olowu sits down to talk with featured artist Francis Upritchard about the motivations behind her work and what the iconic Camden Arts Centre means to her.

DO: I remember when I was thinking about the show and I was really thinking about the artist's private process to repeat something. And I can't remember how we met – how did we meet?

FU: I think Christopher and Peter Pilotto introduced us.

DO: Exactly, but I always loved your work. Because I actually put a piece of your work in a show a while ago in New York, but I never realized that you lived in London, though. I remember I was talking about this and I had no preconceptions. I came to visit you and your beautiful studio, and then you had all this stuff around. Was that all overwhelming for you?

FU: It was so fun! What was most overwhelming was the fact that you gave me a present that you said I wasn't allowed to refuse. It was too good that I was just blown away by that.

DO: Ah, really? I mean I walked in here and it felt like everything that I was trying to say about the show. The kind of processes that I was

Sculptures, paintings, sexuality, innocence and photography unite together for Camden Arts Centre's newest exhibition, "Making & Unmaking", which opens this weekend. Artist-slash-sculptor Francis Upritchard sits down with designer and the exhibition's curator Duro exclusively for GARAGE.

trying to bring out from the works that would be in the show was surrounded by here.

FU: It's funny because I had to work out that I was quite nervous about it, especially the big drawings, and the hats which I hadn't really shown and I was quite nervous about. It was actually really great to see your perspective on them.

DO: Why were you a bit nervous about the drawings?

FU: I had just always done them in private for a long time and I had this plan to get them out more. When you immediately were drawn to those ones on the wall, I had spent them up in Rome at the American Academy. I didn't want to take the whole sculpture studio, so I did three at a time.

DO: For you is that the basic expression of what you're trying to do?

FU: It's the fastest, which I really love.

DO: So you feel like you've achieved a lot?

FU: Well you get a lot of ideas down because I have a lot going on.

DO: What I also like about the works is your choice of color in the watercolor – they're completely unique, they're *your* colors. I've always loved artist studies. From Da Vinci to you. I've never seen these used before. Do you think about it when you do it?

FU: I was taught about color by my friend Luke, and he said to me that he had an exercise at art school which he thought was extremely useful where he was told to paint in his least favorite colors – in fact his whole year were. And then they all came up with their best work from that. I've always hated yellow and purple, and I don't really like orange either – I'm still struggling with that one.

DO: [Laughs] that's interesting as it's still showing up in the show!

FU: Yeah, and so I was right to make yellow and purple sculptures. And now many, many of my sculptures are yellow and purple.

DO: How did using watercolors come about? Was it from childhood?

FU: I really did a lot of ink drawings since I was around 15 and at school. I had a really great teacher who was a painter, and she got me into ink drawing. I don't really like the color of colored ink, so I went to gouache. I actually prefer watercolor to gouache.

DO: Gouache doesn't spread in the way that watercolor does.

FU: It's also very bright, because sometimes you can get these really nasty colors.

DO: When do you think you really started this whole thing, even from childhood? I know when I started sketching as a child and it became a repeated effort that I still do now. When did you start and how did it work?

FU: I didn't start drawing until way, way later because I'm extremely messy. I'm dyslectic and messy with my hand and I was told at school that if you're messy (or not coloring inside the circle), that you're bad at art. So I always thought I was bad at art but I also really liked making. I started sewing with the sewing machine when I was three.

DO: Amazing.

FU: Yeah, my mum taught me. She was amazing like that. Then I had a lovely elderly lady who taught me how to embroider when I was at pre-school. I was also making stuff with clay. So I think that's why I'm a sculptor because we were so encouraged as children to make things manually. And, of course: New Zealand is the land of D.I.Y.

DO: [Laughs] well it's all around you. Just going back to the work of the show, that's also why you have the embroidered hats. They look playful but they also have a certain intensity – an aura that is very powerful. Do you think it was done like that because of what you learnt as a child?

FU: I just have this strange feeling with sculptures, especially that whatever your intention is that you're making, it will always come out – sometimes it had something to do with intensity or even with time.

DO: The sculptures are really very beautiful. And it really is a sculptor. I make clothes so I really know the difference. I think your idea of making, using different fabrics or the way you use ceramics, really translates because they have starts, they have body. It's very hard to do. The whole idea of your color sensibility translating into your ceramics, into your drawings, into your paintings, you must know that not many people can do that successfully.

FU: I just really have no conception [laughs]. It can be quite embarrassing sometimes, but you just have to let yourself be free and do your own thing really. But sometimes I'm like, "Do I really have to make small hats now?"

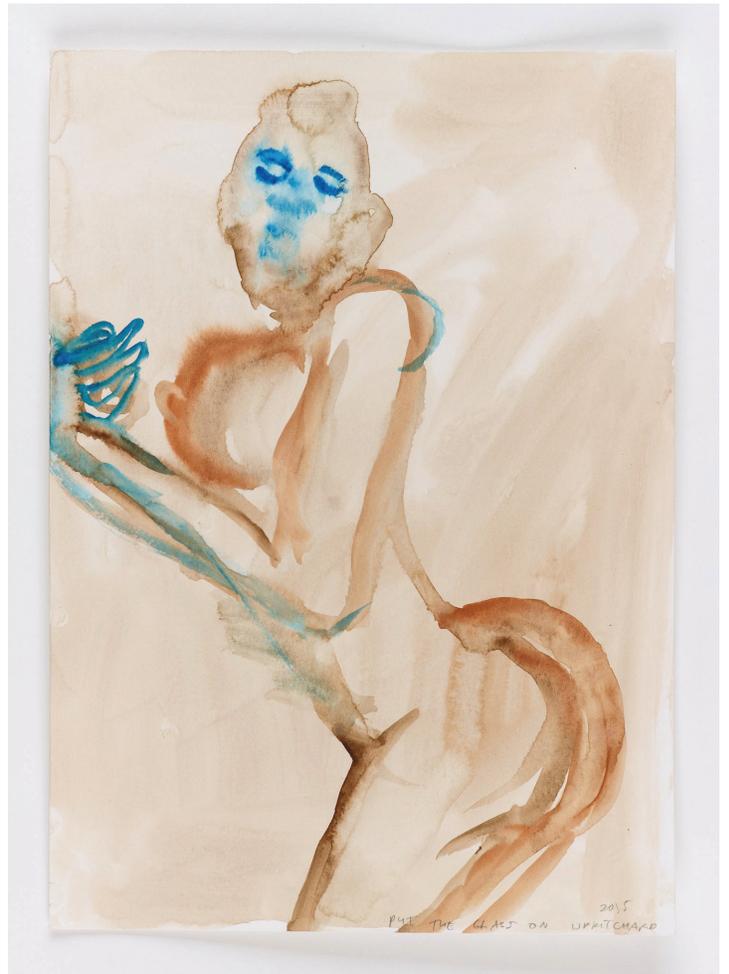
DO: Do you ever feel like you have to justify your ideas to yourself before you start working?

FU: I try to. I try to often just smack my own hand. But no, that's not the point. But you do sometimes kind of think, why?

DO: And later does it seem to make sense?

FU: Yeah, usually. Also, I was thinking about why I wanted to make hats and of course it's because it's an extension of the body.

DO: And you do make sculptures that are almost like mannequins(?). Like the female forms and the male forms? I feel, with your work, is that one piece demands the presence of another.



Francis Upritchard, *Untitled*, 2015; courtesy of the artist and Kate MacGarry, London

FU: I don't often show things alone. Very rarely.

DO: Exactly. What kind of female artists influenced you?

FU: Well, my first great female artist love was Eva Hesse. Like, real love. She died way too young. With all the latex and all the glass fibers.

DO: Exactly, and does that apply to you?

FU: That's why I feel totally comfortable using ceramics, colored cloths, even though ceramics aren't too good for you if you breathe in too much of the technology. I don't do it too often if I can. I try to use PVA glue mostly.

DO: And her work seemed to be very consciously diverse, which is a bit like your work. She died young but she didn't spend ages in that period of her career doing one particular thing.

FU: Because actually she was so young. I was 16 when I was looking at her work and thought, "Ah there's so much work." But then you remember she died when she was 33 or something. When I was 15 I thought she was an old lady [laughs]. Of course, looking at it now, that's crazy. She had a crazy color sense, too.

DO: Yeah, and like her blackness of the rubber things.

FU: Really weird colors.

DO: Do you think also that what you bring to the equation has to do with your life – your traveled life. So where you live, where you grew up, where you traveled?

FU: Oh, definitely. In New Zealand there is a really strong conversation about what it means to be Marie and what it means to be Pakihān (which is the name of the white people and actually means 'white ghost', apparently). It's quite a racist term, actually. Quite derogatory. That's a big part of art though: the conversation of what a white artist can do and what a white artist can't do. I find that extremely interesting, and so coming to England gave me a little bit more space to do that. I was also obsessed with museums when I was a little girl.

DO: So your passion was really fed by these museums? Which is why I think museums need your art in there. What kind of museums were you going to? Did you go on your own?

FU: I found a dead rare owl when I was a child called Morlpork, and I took it to the museum with my brother and they got it stuffed. So I had this really big connection with the museum, which was a natural history museum. And when I was a kid we had the Len Lye Centre. It's actually the Govett-Brewster Gallery, but they own the centre. I saw lots of other white artist's works too. And that was really quite interesting, being able to see how they work. But they were presented in a very cool, interesting and forward way in terms of how other cultures work.

DO: One of the things I'm always conscious of is why do people feel that if they're painting a subject someone needs to look like they're from a certain part of the world? I make clothes so I don't think about art like that. Your water colors – especially the ones we're featuring at the show itself – are really interesting, that you can't really identify some genders, and certainly races. But it's done in a very sophisticated way. It's a real talent and not many people can do what you do. You do it very freely. Is it something that crosses your mind?

FU: Regarding gender, definitely. When I was at art school I tried to dress like a boy and had short hair. I had a boyfriend who liked dressing like a girl.

DO: [Laughs] I think I need to see a picture of that somewhere!

FU: He was very beautiful and we looked like we were from some religious cult.

DO: [Laughs] the cult of love.

FU: I also loved things like Kathy Acker.

DO: And in a way, I think I see that in your work. It appears approachable. There's an undercurrent that makes you ask all these questions. I think also, as an artist working at your studio in Hackney, which is also very multicultural, you're always buzzing. And you're surrounded by things that you can always pick up to make something new. Do you feel pressure in the art world to do more museum or gallery shows? Do you feel also the need to be involved in the private side of the art world or the comfortable and constitutional side?

FU: I've been really lucky: Working with Kate MacGarry has been very incredible, and we've been working together since 2003. And she is a super gentle, non-pressuring person. I don't get the, "Oh, you have to make another five of those" or anything. She's really good at helping me with museum shows. I don't actually feel like that when I'm showing with her that it's any different really. There's a different kind of support with museums, but it doesn't feel so different.

DO: Yeah, it doesn't really feel like that when people go into a museum



Francis Upritchard, *Fun Fez*, 2015; courtesy of the artist and Kate MacGarry, London

to see the work the way that you did. It's the access that I always liked. That particular building [Camden Arts Center] for me is incredible, because it's almost like a school but then it's also like something out of the Bloomsbury set.

FU: Also there's the ceramic stuff downstairs.

DO: I know! Which is really almost what draws you in and then you go to see all the rest. In a way, I see all the school kids walking through there and the incredible shows they've had for the past 50 years, and I think this is actually a place of discovery.

FU: I've discovered many things there. There were so many artists there.

DO: I know and you feel that! It's interesting what you said about the museums being so important for you growing up because I think that's the best thing about museums. But isn't it great that so many years later your works are in those museums?

FU: Yeah, I've just opened a show in New Zealand which celebrates 20 years of work.

DO: Were you a kid?

FU: [Laughs] no! They wanted to call it a retrospective and I was like no way!

DO: Can you tell me three bits of music that you always have playing in your studio?

FU: Connan Mockasin, who is from New Zealand, and Will Oldham – and at the moment Phil Betty.

DO: And what about a film that has always been joyful for you to watch?

FU: I really loved *District 9*. I love anything sci-fi, really.