



06 APRIL 2009

### Spotlight on....Diana Cooper



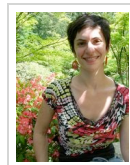
(Diana Cooper in front of *Out of the Corner of My Eye*, Staten Island, NY)

#### Do you have a daily ritual that prepares you to go to work in your studio?

No, I am not very good about incorporating rituals into my daily life. In fact, I always find it difficult to leave a place, whether it be my home or my studio. Wherever I am seems to be the place I want to be. But to facilitate the transition from the home to the studio, I will often start my day by making a list of what I plan to do that day. I fortunately have a strong work ethic that usually overrides the more disorganized and distracted side of my personality.



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LAUREN BRAUN  
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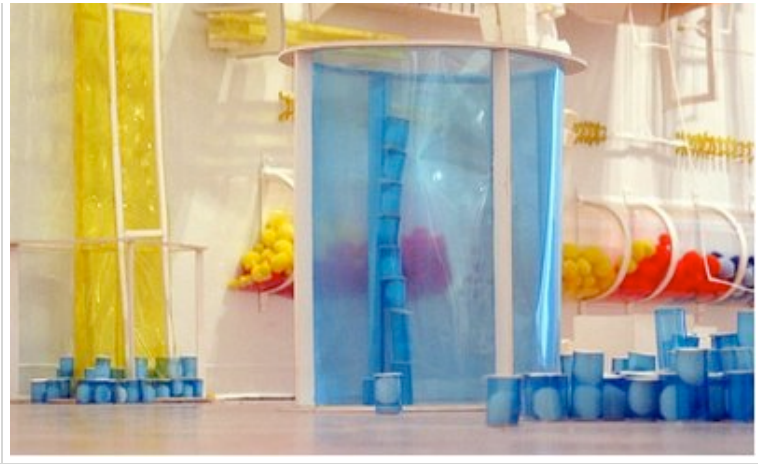
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(The Dispenser, 1999)

**Can you talk about your art practice? What kind of source material do you collect? How does a piece develop?**

I feel like there is little separation between my life and my art, which of course brings with it a host of problems, but it also means that when I am not in the studio I am not intellectually, visually or emotionally far away from my work. Aside from the act of making, looking is probably the most stimulating thing I can do. Also photographing things. Photography has become a sketchbook of sorts. Especially when I am traveling alone.

I buy art books, postcards of artworks, stuff that catches my eye and might inspire me or be used in an artwork. I am also frequently cutting photographs out the New York Times, and printing images from the Internet and pinning them to my studio walls.



(images pinned to the wall in Diana's studio)

It is difficult for me to generalize on how a piece develops because there are

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 Midnight Eggs: Chronicle  
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 Kimberly Belle, The Dinner  
 Belle Catering  
 Laurie Trok, Visual Artist  
 Lisa Forrest, Book: To the  
 Eaves  
 Lisa Forrest, Poet and Writer,  
 The Rooftop Poetry Club,  
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 Playwright  
 Margaux Lange, Art Jeweler  
 who works with Barbie  
 Mika Johnson, Filmmaker,  
 Arcanum Productions

many different ways in which I work. But perhaps most importantly is the fact that most of my pieces are linked together in some way, they feed each other. So even though I rarely start with a sketch or a preparatory drawing, I feel as though I am not starting from scratch. In a way, my work is simultaneously the sketch and the finished product. The process of making is almost always revealed to some extent in the finished work. A piece can start with a shape, a color or a simple set of rules or from an image or an idea that was only partially developed in a previous work or has been bopping around in my head for a while.

**Your work is so colorful, energetic and playful--it seems to me to be the work of someone who loves to experiment and is truly in the creative flow, did you ever have doubts about what you were doing or doubts about becoming an artist?**

I often have doubts. I wish this were not the case! But that is not to say that I don't love what I do. For me, art making is a transportive experience. I feel very lucky to have something that gives me so much and that hopefully gives to others as well. The making of each piece has its own story but almost without fail there is a point in the process when I feel like I will never figure things out and never be able to finish it.

I had a lot of doubts about becoming an artist. It was a very complicated decision on so many levels. Both my parents were artists and teachers. I was exposed to both the joys and hardships of growing up in that environment. I grew up with two conflicting impulses: to embrace a creative life and to flee it; art was what gave life meaning but was also what made life so difficult.

Something I rarely talk about is the fact that my first love was dance and I danced, improvised and choreographed from a very early age. It was the improvisational and expressive nature of choreography and its relationship to music that attracted me to it.

**You are using a variety of very interesting techniques-- building onto the surface of the picture plane, paper cut-outs, drawing and repetition, 3-d elements that cascade down the wall onto the floor. Do these techniques occur naturally through experimentation or have they always been inherent in the way that you work?**

No, these techniques have not always been inherent in the way I work. I was first a painter. But I was a painter who always loved drawing and especially collage. I do remember wondering why everyone so slavishly adhered to the square and rectangle when making drawings or paintings and why it was assumed that paper equals drawing and canvas equals painting. These rules seemed arbitrary and unnecessarily confining to me.

The impulses to experiment and to improvise are at the heart of what I do. But as I get older, I have begun to realize that the 3-d nature of the work, and in particular, the spatial and experiential aspects, really hark back to the years when I danced. It wasn't until 2005 that I became aware of the connection. In fact, it was a dancer/choreographer who brought it to my attention. For instance, for me the thousands of black paper arrows in "Swarm" evoke sound and

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movement, and in "Orange Alert UK," the central spider/starburst form is the visual equivalent of a piercing alarm. There is a synaesthetic component to these works. In a way, I feel like I am trying to make visual art do things it is not fully capable of doing: to evoke sensory reactions not generally associated with it.



(image: Swarm, 2003-2007)

**You use materials like pom poms, pipe cleaners, post its, foam core--  
How did you start using these particular materials?**

Each of the materials you mention has its own little history and in some cases the histories overlap. In general, I am attracted to everyday objects such as post-its and sharpie markers that exist outside the context of fine art. Since so much of the work I do initially grew out of my doodling, it initially seemed natural to use materials that like the doodle had humble origins. Sharpies, post-its, pushpins, staples, scotch tape all fell within this category. Also, starting with something that isn't particularly special offers more potential for metamorphosis. I am rarely attracted to commercially produced objects that are too specific and identifiable. Pom poms and colored pipe cleaners, on the other hand, attracted me partly because I didn't know what the hell they were for, and that reminds me of my attraction to the interior of security envelopes. In security envelopes there is so much attention to color and detail, and for what? For me, there is poignancy in this. There are all these intricate patterns and colors inside a security envelope that you don't even see until you tear it open it and then once you've opened it you throw it out and forget about it. The aesthetic impulse and its relationship to futility fascinate me.

But to return to your question, most of the materials I use possess two qualities: familiarity and malleability. The pom poms, however, do differ from the rest. I first encountered them when teaching art to elementary school students. I taught in an outreach program for seven years in Spanish Harlem. These saccharine colored fluffy balls initially repelled me. But I eventually incorporated them into my own art. I think I am attracted to things that don't quite belong. Part of the interest for me lies in the act of mediation. The pom pom, like the felt I use, has the added benefit of being tactile, of mixing up the sensory experiences of seeing

mony jarboe-photographer

Shady Grove

Wintering Writer: Lisa  
Forrest

WORDS TO LIVE BY

*Insist upon yourself. Be Original.*

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

*I really think it's important to be in a situation, both in art and in life, where you don't understand what is going on. --John Cage*

*Listen Carefully: Every collaborator who enters our orbit brings with them a world more strange and complex than any we could ever hope to imagine. By listening to the details and the subtlety of their needs, desires or ambitions, we fold their world into our own. Neither party will ever be the same. --Bruce Mau from "An Incomplete Manifesto for Growth"*

*Every set that I did in the gym, every repetition I did on chin-ups or on squats with 500 pounds, I never said to myself, 'Oh my God, another rep.' I said, 'Yes! Another rep, another rep,' because that will make my dream turn into reality.*

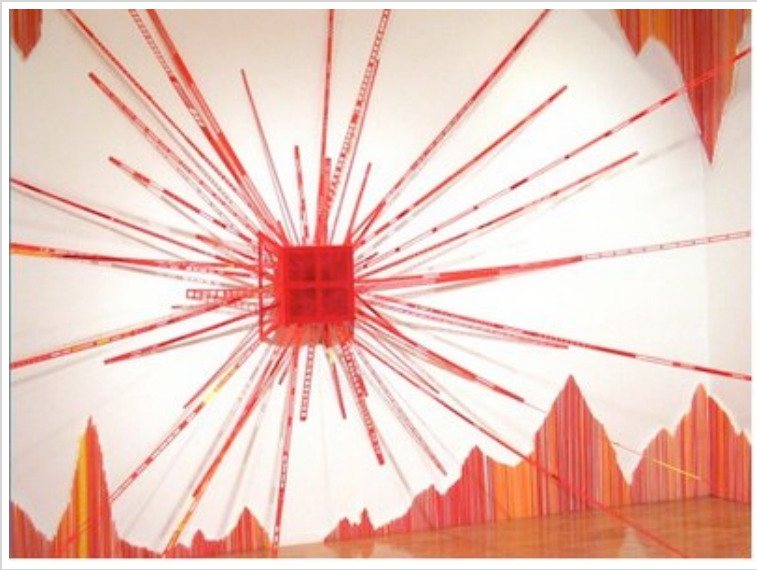
--Arnold Schwarzenegger

*Enthusiasm is the electricity of life. How do you get it? You act enthusiastic until you make it a habit.*

--Gordon Parks

*Man's mind stretched to a new idea never goes back to*

and touching.



(image: Orange Alert, 2008)

**Since your work is non-traditional, is there a location outside of the gallery setting where you would like to see it exhibited?**

My first response to your question is what does the term 'non-traditional art' mean these days? I guess I feel like so much of contemporary art could be described this way. That said, I have just completed my first permanent public artwork, so I have just experienced exhibiting outside the gallery, and it was extremely gratifying. I made a 107ft long piece at a new public school in Staten Island using wood, MDF, Nida-Core, acrylic paint and glass. It was commissioned by New York City's Percent for Art Program and the NYC Construction Authority's Public Art in Public School's Program. Making an artwork in a place where people rarely encounter contemporary art was very meaningful to me. It made me think of the time I taught in Harlem. Looking back, I realize that was the most meaningful day job I have ever had. I installed my piece in two stages and was working on it while the building was being finished and the school year was about to begin. So I interacted with construction workers, bureaucrats, security guards, custodians, teachers, students and parents. It was great to hear their reactions and questions. In the future, I would love an opportunity to make a work inside a hospital or outside on a busy street.



*its original dimensions.*

*--Oliver Wendel Holmes*

*Inspiration exists, but it has to find you working.*

*--Picasso*

*We are shaped and fashioned by what we love.*

*--Goethe*

*Great art is the outward expression of an inner life in the artist.*

*--Edward Hopper*

*They say that time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself.*

*--Andy Warhol*

*A work of art is above all an adventure of the mind.*

*--Eugene Ionesco*

*Gardens are where people and the land come together in the most inspiring way.*

*--Robert Rodale*

*20 years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream.*

*Discover.*

*--Mark Twain*

*You've gotta fake it till you make it.*

*--Tyra Banks from Next Top Model*





(image: Out of the Corner of My Eye, 2008-2009)

### **What inspires you?**

So much! Let's see, other artists' work of course, a good conversation, architecture, construction sites, films, nature (especially trees), and industrial design and engineering, what I see on the tarmac at an airport or in a hospital. Perhaps music is number one, I honestly don't feel like I could get through the day if I did not have music. But to be more specific, recent sources of inspiration have been Gaudi, the IBM History Flow Charts of Wikipedia, Stephen Holl's MIT Dormitory, Ohad Naharin's dance "Max," Sol Lewitt's letter to Eva Hesse (1965) the recent documentary on Louise Bourgeois, "Man on a Wire," and Julian Schnabel's "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly."

### **What project(s) are you currently working on?**

Since I just completed "Out of the Corner of My Eye," the Percent for Art Installation in Staten Island, I am a bit in transition and trying to change gears so that I can get started in the studio again. It has been at least two years since I have had a normal studio practice that was not overshadowed by an impending deadline. I am looking forward to being aimless and alone in my studio for a while!

### **How do you get through artist's block?**

I listen to music and start singing along very loudly!

### **What is a typical week in your life like?**

I don't feel like I have typical weeks at the moment but I am working on creating more structure in my life. I have always found living in NYC extremely distracting and inspiring at the same time!

### **Are there any words that you live by? or a particular philosophy that you believe in when it comes to life and art and pursuing a creative form of expression?**

This might sound somewhat contradictory but I try to be both open minded and true to myself. I also try not to take the easy way out.

[Diana Cooper](#) lives and works in New York. To see more of her constructions, visit her [website](#)!

AT 8:13 PM

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