



FREA BUCKLER: ON FOCUS, LIGHT, POSITIVITY AND POSSIBILITY

Once again we catch up with Smithson artist and spontaneous screen printer Frea Buckler, who after building a studio in her back garden has discovered a new sense of focus and space for ideas to evolve. We discuss scale, structure, light and satisfaction as she brims with a new energy, which has no doubt been instrumental in such a positive and fruitful year so far.



Hi Frea, it's great to see you in your lovely new studio! How has this new situation developed or changed your way of working?

I wouldn't say it has much, but I have realized by being here that my way of working really requires concentration, so it's nice not to have any distractions. I'm really focused now and feel excited by the possibilities of having this time and space. The only shame is that I am limited on scale here, I can't work very big, so I will still be doing some printing at Bristol UWE.

Scale is something you were interested in playing with, are you still planning on producing some larger works?

Actually I'll be doing that over the next couple of days. I have some 1m x 1m paper cut ready and I guess I'm going to treat it the same as all my prints, with no plans, just working intuitively and in the moment. More like a painting, but it will be a bit scary because the scale is so big, there will be more at stake, but I find that exciting. I think the most interesting things happen when you step in to that unknown space. The new studio has been really nice for that way of working, and I think my work has been better for it.

When we spoke before, you talked about your prints reflecting behaviours and states, so I imagine this new found focus, and having more head space has probably changed your work subtly?

Yes maybe slightly, I need to be careful though because I don't want my prints to become too resolved, I think this is the danger of being too concentrated. But then again the process of screen printing, and having to race against the drying ink means I do still have to work quite quickly, so I never have long to make a decision anyway. It's all about balancing the two and navigating a path between chaos and control that we talked about before.



What do you do with works where you aren't happy with the decisions you have made?

I try to persevere with works, I'll do three or four colours then look at them and if I think 'this one is not going to work' I'll find a way of recycling it. I might cut them up to look at different compositions, or use them for postcards or address labels. I do think it's important to get rid of work you're not happy with, it's a purifying process, I have learnt that.

You were in the recent RA Summer show, congratulations! Tell us about the experience of being in such a prestigious show?

Thank you, it was really great. It's a nerve-racking process because there are three rounds to get through, last time I got my work selected but not hung, which was like falling at the final hurdle, but this time I got in, which was a really validating experience. I met some interesting artists, and lots of people saw and talked to me about my work, it felt like a great achievement. My piece, 'Glide 3', was also hung above a Tracy Emin, which was really cool!

The two exclusive series of works you created for Smithson for Art Car Boot Fair 2016, sold out at both the London & Hastings fairs. Why do you think these were so successful?

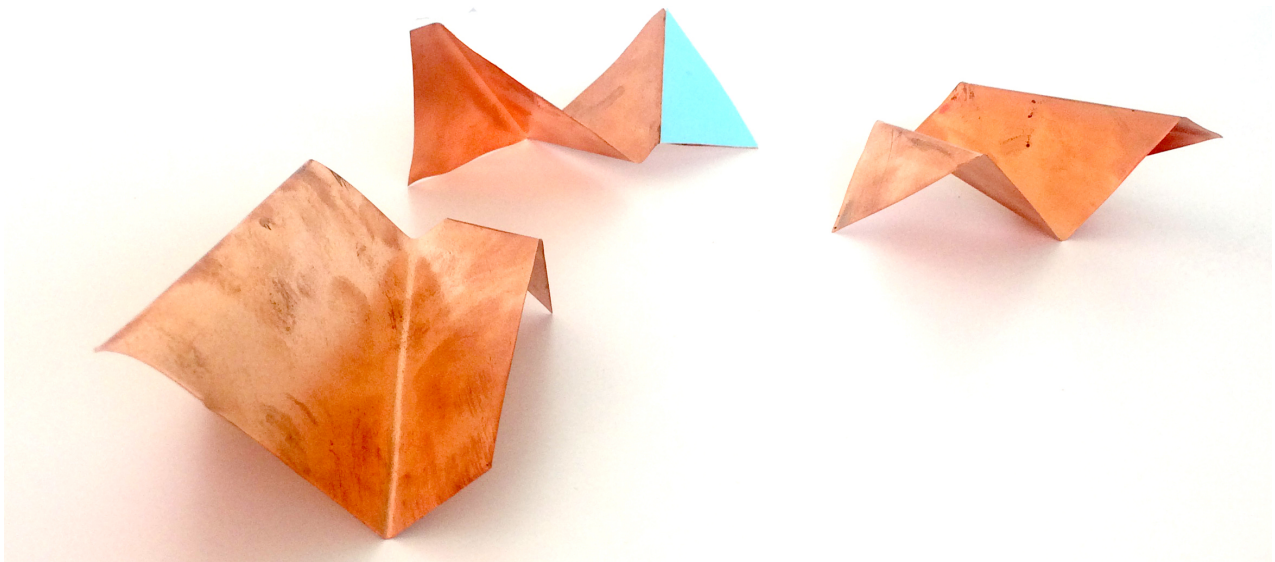
From what I understood of the fair I knew I wanted to create something that I could sell for a low price, and I liked the idea of doing an edition of 20, 20 x 20cm prints at £20. The small scale, the one off low price and the fact they sold out made both series feel really special.

What new bodies of work have you been creating ahead of this years shows with Smithson?

I have been working on some new prints throughout the year, including the 'Zing' series and the collaborative 'Blink' edition, which I produced with Jealous & Smithson. These works have both taken a slightly different direction visually, they are more 'blocky' and centralized. I'll also be working on the large-scale pieces I mentioned before, as well as my new 'Zip' series, which uses lots of different coloured lines. I am constantly trying to change it up, I don't want to sit and keep doing the same thing over and over again, it's just not satisfying. I am always trying something different, like changing the shapes, trying to make things less coherent, or changing the colours of the backgrounds, and some things work and some things don't.

And I see you are still using gold leaf and metallic in your work?

Yes, I stopped for a while because the process I was using before was really fiddly and not that successful, but I'm now hand applying which is a really nice thing to do after the quite hectic, slightly stressful screen printing process. I enjoy sitting down and carefully and methodically applying the gold or copper leaf.



We talked about 3D being a possible direction for your work in the last interview. How has this idea progressed?

I have been playing with these little 3D structures where I take a flat sheet of copper and really quickly and instinctively fold it in to shapes. I have also been cutting up my old prints and folding them in to objects, which I enjoy because I can maintain the spontaneity of my making process, but I don't feel they are entirely resolved. This sense of spontaneity is a hard thing to retain in 3D work, I need to find a way of capturing it in my finished product, and also the colour element is important, I haven't found the answers yet...



The folding process is reminiscent of making paper sculptures in school.

Yes, I used to do a lot of that. It's that feeling that I'd say I'm trying to find all the time. It's that satisfaction, I love that, that's what I want to capture in my work. I like my prints that look like they could potentially fold into an object.

Maybe that's what why you feel satisfied with certain works and not with others?

Yes, it's true, it's like some have a possibility and others don't, and that's what might define their success? I don't want to make random, abstract art, it's about something other than just colours and shapes placed next to each other, it's more than that. In talking this through I have just worked out that it is the possibility that the image could be something, that's what I'm looking for. I'll bear that in mind while I'm working.

I saw your Tweet that says 'Some of my favourite prints are by sculptors.'

I find it interesting that there is something that connects print and sculpture somehow, maybe it's the indirectness of going through a process, rather than literally putting a mark on a piece of paper...

As mentioned, you recently produced the edition 'Blink' in collaboration with Jealous Gallery and Smithson. What interested you about doing this?

Yes, thank you to Smithson for facilitating this! I was interested in working with Jealous because they print editions for other people, as a screen printer I obviously questioned why I couldn't do this myself, but they reach a different audience and work with some great artists, so I think it's exciting to be involved and associated with them. We've been in touch previously about possible projects so it felt like a natural progression.

The printing experience itself was really interesting, it was lovely to go there, meet the team and see how they work and be open to going along with the process in front of me, it felt important to me that it became its own thing. I actually enjoyed watching someone else screen print my work, because it opened me up to new possibilities. They achieved these absolutely amazing colours, and Joss did an incredible registration job.

The fluorescent pink and yellow really scream out, they are so bright. The print almost reminds me of a light box...

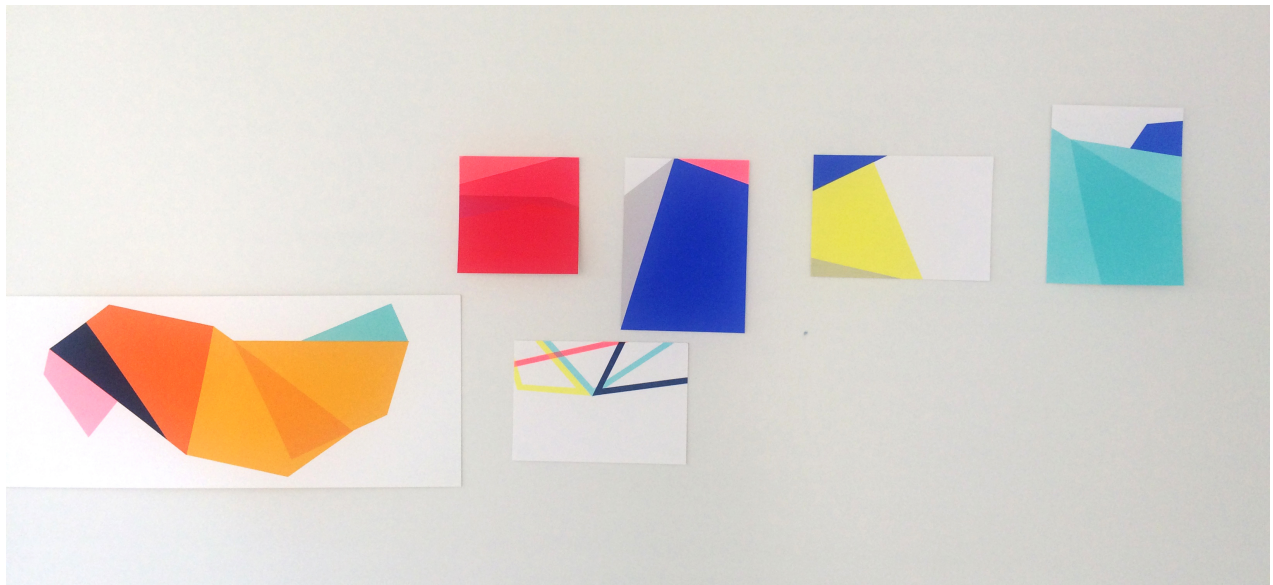
I called it Blink for that very reason! I have actually been thinking about light boxes recently, light is something that I definitely want to bring in to my practice. I've been looking at James Turrell's work and I think it's gorgeous, I could imagine doing something with light. Sometimes I imagine my solo show, I suppose the vision of your solo show is all the things that you might do, in one space, and I guess that is a metaphor for the rest of your practice.

I have noticed a change in your titles. Before they all had a sense of something structural like 'Wrap' and 'Unfolded', now they have titles like 'Glow', 'Blink' and 'Dazzle'

This is the light element subtly coming into it. It felt like a natural evolution, I like the idea of light emanating or pulsing, so there's still a sense of movement or energy. It started with the 'Zing' series, the word 'Zing' suggests a positive feeling, and I think light also suggests positivity. It goes back to the connection with behaviours, and I always want this connection to be positive. I want to convey the best aspects of our feelings, I mean maybe the morose years will come, but I'm pretty happy now, so why would I start making negative work? They are pretty instinctive title choices as well, so it all must come from somewhere.

It's interesting because at the beginning of this interview you seemed unsure if there had been much development or change in your work, and since we last spoke I think there definitely has been really positive and exciting changes.

(Laughing) That's true! It's nice to hear, because often you are so up close to your own work, and the process is so organic that you sort of morph through it like mercury slipping from this space to that space. I don't know what's really happened along the way so it's actually really good to sit down and discuss and reflect upon it. I have had a few revelations today.



Freya Buckler's artwork is available to buy from Smithson Gallery

Browse available works here:

<http://www.smithsongallery.co.uk/collections/freya-buckler>