

Studio visit *Rowena Dring*

Using fabric to paint landscapes. Photography **Katja Effting**



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In her large two-room workspace in Noord, an old Singer sewing machine presides over the rest of the equipment in Rowena Dring's studio: a three-monitor computer, a pair of yellow headphones and two gigantic amplifiers. The room is also full of tables and chairs; one corner contains large drawings on rolled-up tracing paper

landscapes at Elizabeth Dee Gallery in New York. In a piece for *Art Forum International*, Martha Schwendener pointedly remarked: 'By stitching together the worlds of textile and painting, Dring cleverly forces fabric into the realm of "high art".'

Ever thought your grandmother was an artist, stitching together her



Her appliqués on stretched canvas are elegant compositions with clearly defined shapes and graphically arranged colour fields

and there are stacks of carefully folded multicoloured fabric everywhere.

But you'll usually find Dring, a 38-year-old British native who has lived here for more than eight years now, hunkered down in front of the Singer, sewing tiny coloured swatches on to a canvas, to make large-scale scenic 'paintings' out of fabric.

'It's literally deafening to be sewing all day,' says Dring, who was first recognised internationally a few years ago when she presented her textile

own clothes for a few pennies? It took Dring ten years, a masters' degree at the prestigious Goldsmiths College (also attended by Damien Hirst) and many years working in the challenging environment of an underground studio complex in London to come back to a craft she'd actually learned at home: sewing.

From a distance or when they're reproduced in a book, it's easy to mistake her work for pop-art style two-dimensional paintings. Her appliqués

on stretched canvas are elegant compositions with clearly defined shapes and graphically arranged colour fields in the manner of Julian Opie. Upon closer inspection, though, one comes to recognise the material originality of Dring's work. Basically, she uses fabric as paint.

Her compositions are the product of an incredibly time-consuming endeavour that involves much more than simple quilting skills. In fact, it requires state-of-the-art technology and begins with a photograph taken in another part of the world. She shoots the pictures herself and then spends whole weeks retouching the images on her computer, to turn them into blueprints for her canvases. She later transfers the printed image on to tracing paper, with each coloured section numbered as part of a master sewing pattern.

'Then, my friends come in,' she says. 'They help me cut out the pieces. To keep going, we listen to music,' she says, laughing and pointing to a stack of CDs. 'Though it doesn't sound like it, it's actually really entertaining.'

The results might remind the viewer of the traditional role of women in the family but they're also reminiscent of the industrial look of Andy Warhol's serial works produced at the Factory.

Although her 'sewing-by-numbers' technique involves many hours of solitary work and then teamwork, these projects also take her out into the world. She always looks forward to the next trip she'll make to gather photographic material. Over the past few years she's travelled across Germany, Cambodia and the Wild West. For Dring, landscapes are constructed entities that mirror our culture and history. With her sewing machine, she creates a tangible reflection of that oft-conflicted experience.

Catherine Somzé

Major institutions

How to use the listings

★ Means the institution is recommended.

NEW Denotes a new opening.

▶ Before a date denotes a closing date.

How to be listed

Please send all listings to listings@timeoutamsterdam.nl by **13.00 on the 12th of the month** prior to publication. Information must include any admission charge, times, dates and a telephone number that we can publish. Listings are free but, as space is limited, inclusion is not guaranteed. Late or incomplete submissions will not be included.

ARCAM

Prins Hendrikkade 600 (620 4878/arcam.nl). Open Tue-Sat 13.00-17.00 (closed 30 Apr). Architecture Centrum Amsterdam is focused on promoting Dutch contemporary architectural design now and in the future. So it makes sense that it's housed in one of the most space-aged looking buildings on the IJ waterfront. The centre organises tours, forums, lectures and exhibits to address topical issues related to architecture.

A City for the Future – A Climate-Friendly Metropolis Following the publication of the Amsterdam Environmental Centre's study, 'Working together on a climate-friendly city', this joint production with the Centre explores the goals and challenges of 'sustainability' for architects, builders and their clients. ▶23 May.

CoBrA Museum

Sandbergplein 1, Amstelveen (547 5050/cobra-museum.nl). Open Tue-Sun 11.00-17.00 (closed 30 Apr); €9.50, students €5, seniors €6.50, under-5s free. Named after the Copenhagen-, Brussels- and Amsterdam-based art movement that produced groundbreaking abstract artists such as Karel Appel, this institution presents cutting-edge work in a light-filled building designed by Dutch architect Wim Quist.

Juul Kraaijer Drawings, bronze sculptures, photographs and videos by the well-known Dutch artist, who received the Thérèse van Duyl-Schwartz Portrait Award at the opening of this exhibition in January. ▶13 Apr.

Born in Georgia Contemporary art from the Caucasus. While in terms of form, these artworks integrate well into the Western art tradition, their content reflects their origin in a region constantly tormented by wars and crises. ▶14 June.

Foam

Keizersgracht 609 (551 6500/foam.nl). Open daily 10.00-18.00, Thur, Fri until 21.00 (closed 30 Apr); €7.50, students/seniors €5, under-12s free. The city's premiere museum of photography, presenting works by legendary international photographers and emerging local shutterbugs, too.

Richard Avedon: Photographs 1946-2004 A travelling retrospective offering an extensive overview of the works by one of the most important fashion and portrait photographers of the 20th century. ▶13 May.

Huis Marseille

Keizersgracht 401 (531 8989/huismarselle.nl). Open Tue-Sun, 11.00-18.00 (closed 30 Apr); €5, students and seniors €3. This monumental 17th-century house alone is worth the visit alone, but the photography