

In the studio

Mustafa Hulusi

Mustafa Hulusi is an artist and curator who first gained recognition for the group show 'Expander' that he curated at the Royal Academy of Arts in Burlington Gardens to coincide with the first Frieze Art Fair in 2004. The poster design for the show, a bold starburst graphic, has become a recurring subject in his work, which explores and questions publicly consumed visual imagery.

What's going on in the studio at the moment?

I'm preparing work for two shows: in Max Wigram's gallery I'm showing a series of the 'Expander' paintings in jewel-like colours, plus black-and-white posters. I also have work in the Republic of Cyprus pavilion at the Venice Biennale – a series of large three by two-metre paintings based on photos I have taken of fruits native to Cyprus. So I've currently got two temporary studios, one in Hackney and another in Venice.

What's the story behind the 'Expander' graphic?

I was thinking about how to create a poster for the show which would have the maximum visual impact. I saw the design on the cover of a book belonging to a guy behind me in the post office queue, which I then had reworked by a graphic designer. People see it as a kind of sun or some philosophical statement relating to the light of God, but it's not intended to have a specific meaning. I want there to be lots of space to negotiate around the motif.

What's interesting is that when the posters appear on billboards and among the overload of advertising imagery on the street they seem quite calming, but in the gallery their effect is the opposite.



The artist with some of his 'Expander' paintings

Nine to five, or open all hours?

My painting process isn't hands-on. I work with a small team of technicians who paint the works, which is one reason why I don't have a permanent studio space. It's also becoming more difficult to find affordable studios in east London as the Olympic frenzy is prompting landlords to sell their buildings. For me, a studio isn't for experimenting, it's a place for finishing and viewing work. When I was doing my degree at Goldsmiths in the early '90s, everyone had minimal rather than messy spaces, and that has rubbed off on how I work. When there isn't a show to prepare for I can exist with just a phone and a laptop, but studios are essential for artists – you need some-

where to see how your work is developing over time and in different lights.

On the speakers?

If anything it will be Resonance FM. I prefer spoken word. If I listen to music it will be non-pop, maybe South American folk or something Persian. But it's just as likely to be silence.

Couldn't work without?

My technicians. It took months to fine-tune the process of making the 'Expander' paintings, which have up to eight coats of paint, applied through stencils. Without my technicians, I'd be a sunken ship.

*Interview: Helen Sumpter
Mustafa Hulusi is showing at
Max Wigram Gallery, May 31-Jul 7
(see West End Listings).*