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The  
Guardian

**Artist Rachel Whiteread urges young: don't give up on your dreams**  
*Turner prize winner reveals how drawing gave her comfort in lockdown*

Vanessa Thorpe



*Rachel Whiteread beside one of her sculptures. The world had been 'turned on its head' by coronavirus, she said. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty*

Rachel Whiteread, one of Britain's leading visual artists, has urged creative young people to hold on to their dreams and skills in the face of the pandemic and spoken of the solace she has found in drawing.

"I really want people to carry on doing what they were doing. It is important they don't give up on their dreams, and they follow through with what they have trained for," Whiteread told the Observer. She was commenting on an advertisement put out last week by a government partner organisation encouraging artists and performers to consider switching to a career in "cyber".

"There's been an enormous amount of frustration and desperation this year, but people have also slowed down a bit and perhaps looked at their inner self and done a bit of contemplation. This has been helpful for everyone, not just artists, whether they've started knitting or cooking," she said, adding that the world had been "turned on its head".

"We're only just realising how horrendous it is going to be for young people, and it does remind me of the 1980s. When I left college in 1987, at least I was able to go on an enterprise allowance scheme and had a studio, although I had to do other temporary jobs as well."

In a rare interview, Whiteread, the first woman to win the Turner prize for contemporary art, talked about the arresting abstract drawings she has made in lockdown, and also described the new sculpture that is to be revealed and put up for sale on 23 October.



*Blood Red and Pink Triangles (March–Sept), 2020 by Rachel Whiteread, one of the artist’s new works produced in lockdown.  
Photograph: Prudence Cummings Associates/© Rachel Whiteread, Courtesy Gagolian.*

The artist, 57, from Ilford, Essex, found fame in 1993 when she filled an entire Victorian terrace house in the East End of London with concrete. International success has followed, including the controversial internal cast of a library that stands in a Viennese square to mark the losses of the Holocaust. Next week, Whiteread is the subject of a New York gallery’s artist spotlight. Her work will be digitally showcased by the Gagolian on its website.

The bright new drawings take the characteristic form of netting or lacework. “These drawings are very mesmerizing, I think. I have used net motif before, sometimes even nets themselves, but I thought I would again because it seems right when we are all feeling trapped. Although I was in the countryside, it felt very claustrophobic sometimes. Making them was calming. It is a form of meditation.”

Whiteread and her family travelled to Wales at the beginning of lockdown and stayed for the summer. “Pretty early on, I thought I ought to start making something, so I ordered some watercolour paper and took some lights and a heater into this rustic old barn – and then realised I couldn’t work in a place like that at all.” So she

moved back to the kitchen table, clearing away her work at meal times.

“I draw all the time, mindfully and not so mindfully, in little sketchbooks, and I take some paper with me wherever I go. This was different though. I was in a domestic setting all the time but in another place.”

The change of location changed the art, Whiteread thinks. “When I work in my London studio I put the drawings up on the wall as I finish them. This time I just put them aside and then kept going back to fiddle.”

The images take the names of the vibrant colours she used, and for Whiteread they are a record of a strange summer. “My drawings are like a diary. I can generally say where I was when I did it. It’s about where you are sat and how you are feeling. These mean lockdown to me. Being in Wales and the birds singing,” she said.

“Early in lockdown the weather was incredible and the colours reflect that. There is yellow and silver, blood-red and greens. Then, quite specifically, there is a pink and grey drawing because there was an amazing sky going on.”

The sculpture to be unveiled this Friday is a cement and resin hand-cast of a pin board, or noticeboard: the most analogue thing she could imagine.

“It is a good contrast to the confusion of all the screens and phones we have been using,” she explained. “They’re still there, as a kind of information patchwork, in doctors’ surgeries and displaying community advice. They are comforting and something people respond to.”