

Interviewee: **Amanda Dinan**, Landscape Painter & Environmental Consultant.
An interview about ways of looking and seeing in the practice of painting landscape.

Interviewer: Nicola Visser

'It changes the way you see the world'
'The world keeps offering itself exponentially'
'A discipline in receiving'

Nicola Visser: Two questions - please answer whatever sparks your interest. When I look at your landscape paintings they have a capacity to open up a space inside me, a vast bright indeterminate field and I have the privilege of experiencing it from a point. It feels like a generous perspective in which I can make my own meaning. How do you see the landscape or look at it before painting?

When you paint, I imagine that there is a feedback loop where an idea flows to hand, hand to paint, to canvas and then eyes that look and sense - perhaps more sensory loops in play - the body decides the painting too. Can you talk to that? - perhaps even standing back to look and zooming closer to the canvas. So the practice of eyes in painting.

Amanda Dinan: It's good to talk to you. It's taking me back to something I have lost touch with. The ones that really sing I paint what I see in my heart what I experience in my heart itsits not driven...its not driven by visual precision. The colours I choose and the shapes I create, they are not a replica of what is there but I think all artists do that in various ways - they are very few of us you know who work with it realistically. Certainly artists do but those that I celebrate tend not to - and they take shapes down to their broadest denominator and give a feeling to a shape. Ja, I guess in that time that I was immersed in my painting. That is what I was doing - was moving what was in my heart and celebration of landscape into a concrete formconcrete form ...strange word - my paintings don't feel concrete.

But to answer your questions - the process of painting and mixing colours - and putting it on the canvas. I have heard this a number of times, when artists are really into the zone - you start off painting and then typically you set out your basic measurements and points in the canvas and then there is a switch and the painting starts to drive the process and it becomes an intuitive weaving and it starts to move quite quickly and there is an amazing kind of explosion within one's own heart at that. At that, things start to flow and when artists talk about being blocked -or being

stuck they struggle - people don't always get to that point in the process and that's the thing - and it's certainly what I have learnt and experienced in painting. Something like, you need a process - in life - a process of breathing in and breathing out - one also has to step away and be immersed - in that process of absorbing the environment and not just always giving to the creative process - the artists way - they suggest artists make a date with themselves for recharging their creative process.

But when you first mentioned that you wanted to talk about the process of seeing - I thought about that. *When I am drawing and it doesn't even take very long*, I am just working in my sketchbook. *It changes the way that you see the world*. So driving down the street and you might watch humans in their interactions. I am sure it's the same in dance and movement. You are watching the world for those strange moments, and you see it in human interactions - or in the way a dog is poised at the step, you see the trees in a different way, or the way the light filters through. And you slow down a bit and I look and I constantly see these kinds of little shutter moments. The more you draw and the more you paint the more the inspiration flies for sources of material and things that you want to actually paint.

NV: Mmm

AD: Because of that process of seeing and when I am out of it I think oh I should get back to it and I don't know what to draw. But I think when you are in process *it just flies and hits you from all directions that thing of seeing*.

NV: *It keeps offering itself*

AD: Yes . *Exponentially* exponential offer.

NV: Our ordinary body ..incoming... downloading! You talk about the frames and these instants - is there maybe or maybe not - something in the way that you might be using your eyes in that moment - some particular way?

AD: Ja, I think even that first response to the question - about my painting - some of them may have been experiments with that. I am a bit out of the zone. There are different techniques and some lend themselves particularly well to details and I have worked with those tools. It's more about celebrating colour and tone and detail and working to very certain beauty to the canvas and it does require a great deal of concentration. I am thinking of a particular painting I did of Slangkop with the lighthouse in the background. It was a yoga pose on one of the rocks. There was so much detail in the shape and form of the rocks and getting their shape and translucence and form and it was a beautiful process creating that painting. And it was very much made by -...it was a different way of seeing. A devotion to bringing in the exquisite beauty that was captured in

that particular image and that takes it to being a very visual process rather than the broader canvases which are open from the heart.

NV: I am hearing so much the way that you use 'celebration' often and 'devotion'.....there is another quality or state under your absorption of the environment and your attention to it. I am just going to go back again because I am curious about it - as I am finding it in dance - what are the conditions - are there conditions for absorbing the environment?

AD: I think its just opening my heart Nicky *its love*

AD: Ja - love for the world and openness in one's heart - that's the condition -and if you lose that from my perspective you lose the ability to create and to.... (Pause)

NV: And to connect i suppose.

AD: ja mmm

AD: Its a helpful conversation actually.

NV: When you talk about being in the zone, I am assuming - it ends up that your body is making the decisions for you. I remember a friend who paints - she knows what colour to make - or when the colour is right because more saliva arrives in her mouth. And what is more, the woman near her said: Yes that happens to me too. I have been noticing saliva as an indicator of when something fits!

AD: I haven't noticed that (laughs) but there is a tremendous joy, the peace, in finding the right expression. If that's not coming together then something is wrong. With the motivation actually the mind's or internally....I am looking at a print here on my wall by Jack Yeats the brother of William Butler. I don't know if you know his work at all - he - its very quick fast work working with tremendous layers of paint and generous brush strokes and palate knife movement. His works are working class in Ireland, their activities, and more mystical ones of horses in wooded landscapes. I am really drawn to what he is not showing. it precisely so but it is precisely not so - and the horses are lovely and very, ja, there is a celebration a love and a joy in the way he is working with colours and form and who knows what he was thinking or feeling -when he produced this particular painting (of a forest?) but it draws one in - one becomes part of it.

NV: mmm

AD: I dont think i have much more to say

NV: Thank you - its enough - its so beautiful. Perhaps maybe I just tell you where I am coming from in terms of dance. It's a practice where one moves and one witnesses and then change roles. And most of my work is with people who are not trained dancers, and the underlying principle that the way you witness others will convert or loop into the way

you witness yourself moving. So how do you witness yourself to give yourself most freedom? and then I really have been enjoying the little attention to the eyes -as an invitation into that space of like you said, absorbing the landscape. What we do in natural life or conventional life or in survival - different reasons - habitually, we come in and grab a form or an image or want to name something. When we do that when we watch people dancing we miss out on a lot of things- other information- and later when we witness ourselves - it will confine our possibilities to a limited realm. So its to find out how to encourage a receptive way of being or seeing so that there is *more* available and to try to move away from privileging one thing over another (and thereby reducing choices or switching into habitual modes - slowing options) and just to make it so simple simple - soften under your eyes, or let what you see arrive into your back space. Little cues like that to keep opening the space of movement later. So when you say you absorb the environment it really speaks to that - a lot of what you are saying - about the heart and the love for the world and the resonance and how there is a connection and however you choose to form it with colour or body. The conversation is most lively - because of the way in which you are seeing and with less censorship - it is an ongoing experiment.

AD: As you were talking ja. — — there is a process in the art making process is letting go of ego and self that huge openness and receptiveness - you cant do it when you are attached to the outcome and ownership and whatever it is.

NV: Exactly

AD: I imagine with dance - improvised - dance that is not choreographed - you can't have a rigidity.

NV: ja fixity is deadly in some cases

AD: ja -

NV: Thank you its totally enough and for going into your going into your world.

AD: A long ago chapter

AD: Last year I did a painting that -was all wrong - I overworked it. I know exactly what was wrong. There was too much clutter in my head, too much conversation in the background. Too much input from others - too much consideration of what others think - too many questions - and when I look back at the painting and I photographed it at various stages and *really all I could have done was sit down quietly with it* - and that heart process was not there.

NV: Do you paint from photographs from memory or in situ?

AD: When I produced that huge quantity of work in a short space of time I was doing both. And the photographs I was working from, and the more particularly beautiful paintings I had sketched. I had stopped in the landscape and sketched - and then I had also taken photographs - and then it wasn't the sketch so much that I was drawing on but the memory of sitting and drawing mountains and feeling wind and hearing birds and smelling the earth. And it's that memory which I can find I can put in my painting - so ja - that combination is often the best - some drawing and being in the land. And when I am working like that other paintings, imaginative ones can pop up on the side - imaginary trees -

NV: Almost like the essence of the tree has arrived - the thingness of the thing rather than the thing.

AD: ja, the light of the land or whatever it is

AD: ja ja and that singing, that sound of the insects and that sound of the wind - that thing. The thing.

NV: When I listen to you speak I feel full on the inside of myself - the conversation goes to something so much greater.

AD: Does it remind you of things you also love?

NV: Yes - um - ah but I think there is a discipline that even if one is in an environment that is unfriendly - like this horrible rainy cold that there is a discipline in receiving because it has got something. It has a potency of some sort - so rather than shutting out let it speak. So YES - I do miss Africa (- wide arms).

AD: A discipline in receiving - that's lovely.