

CHRISTIE'S

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[OBJECT LESSON]

IAN DAVENPORT *on his DW drum kit*



Ian Davenport is
an abstract painter
based in London

Photograph: Shaun Bramsgrove. Illustration: Samuel Kerr

I have played the drums since I was a child. I grew up in Northern Ireland, and so I saw lots of marching bands with drummers drumming. That's what sparked it. I had a basic kit in my bedroom, and one summer's day, when my parents were out and the windows were wide open, I decided to really go for it. As I drummed away, I became aware of a background noise – which I eventually realised was the front-door bell. It was the local policeman. 'I've been ringing for 20 minutes,' he said. 'We've had complaints from half a mile away.'

This drum kit stands in my studio. It's a very straightforward set-up: one bass drum, some toms, a floor tom, a snare, a few more cymbals than is standard. It's a good American kit, a real beauty. You can pretty much do anything on it. And I like the way it looks. There are lots of fancy-schmancy surfaces you can have on the shells, but I prefer the plain wood. A musical instrument doesn't need to be decorative and spangly.

Lots of people say that there is a musicality in abstraction, and I do think that my paintings contain

something melodic. Elements are repeated or inverted, like a musical phrase. My stripe paintings are about metre and measure, a pulsing beat. I guess the idea of a repeated gesture has always been present in my work. My circle paintings are all about timing, a drummer's virtue. I pour paint onto a flat panel and let it spread out, turn it over, then flip it back. Then I pour another layer, but slightly inside, to make a round border. They look like the lids of paint cans, which is where the idea came from, but you could also say that they resemble the skins of a drum.

I like to paint on my own – and often there comes a point when I need to do something else. Other people might take a turn around the block, or play patience; the drums do it for me. If I stop and play for a while, I can remain focused and engaged while also getting some distance from the work. This is a loud instrument, but the studio is large and there are no houses close by, so I am not bothering anyone. ♦
'Ian Davenport: Colourscapes', an exhibition of new paintings, is on show at Waddington Custot, London, 20 September–8 November. www.waddingtoncustot.com