

# In bed with... Deborah Poynton

// 05 OCT 2018 133



Size does matter! Don't get us wrong: we're talking about the colossal size of Deborah Poynton's paintings. The South African painter invites you to step into another world through her large and impressive paintings on display at ICAIO in Port Louis.



Based in Cape Town, Deborah Poynton, 47, has been painting since young. After hosting multiple solo exhibitions in South Africa, Germany and the USA, she stopped by in Mauritius for the opening of her 3-month long exhibition. We met with her to find out more on her fascinating work.

**So you are quite a distinguished artist, you've got a Wikipedia page and even a Google knowledge graph!**

**Tell us something that's not yet on the Internet.**

The man I paint most often is my partner... I don't know

if that's already on there... maybe it's on some gossip website. I have two children. I'm a very efficient housewife. I love looking for weird, second-hand, sort of mid-century items on **Gumtree** and stuff like that. I'm obsessed with things, like houses, that have nothing to do with art. I spend 7 or 8 hours a day in painting... yeah... I think that is enough (laughs).



Deborah in studio with one of her models, Ilsa Boswell, and her two sons. The painting on the right is on show at ICAIO. – Photo Credit:

David Goldblatt

**Tell us about your paintings?**

I think of a painting as an imaginary space. My works don't depict real places, they are totally constructed, and so I use photographs to take elements. And I suppose I am driven by the need to connect, and I do that through painting. I create this space, with my imagination, and I invite you, with your imagination, to enter it. And that's why they are so big. I want you to have the feeling that you can step in. And I like them to be beautiful because I think that's a way of pulling you in.

## Why do you make art?

I make art because I had a very difficult childhood... a lot of horrible things happened... just bad luck basically. And from quite young I started making beautiful little landscapes and pictures to comfort myself. I think nothing has changed since then. It became a need... a pathology actually... it's keeping me out of the 'loony bin'... no actually, we shouldn't use that term... the 'mental health hospital'.

## So it is a therapy?

It's a therapy, it's a drive, it's an obsession...

## Your painting style is mostly

## hyperrealism. Why have you chosen this particular style?

It invites you to enter this space in your imagination in a very compelling way. So it is quite intimate and confrontational, which I believe is a good tool for connection. I like the fact that I have to spend many hours a day doing it. It sort of gives my life purpose and meaning. I also love the beauty of it... I think it is entertaining to look at a beautifully painted piece of art... of course, conceptually, there needs to be something else happening as well. But I do think that beauty is a good start to entertain people and draw them in.





On show at ICAIO.

**If you weren't a painter, what would you be? A protea flower, a princess, a penguin, a president or a pilot?**

A protea flower... definitely. Then I wouldn't have to think anymore... I could just relax and enjoy the sun and the wind and the rain.

## Which legendary artist would you say inspires you the most?

**Pieter Bruegel the Elder.** He painted crowd scenes in the 16th century... like it was just scenes of peasant life in his time. What I really like about his paintings is that he seems to paint people as part of the cycle of the seasons and nature. There is no moral. Like if he paints two people fighting, it is not sentimentalised, it is just very plainly shown. I also love his landscapes. He also did a series called *The Tower of Babel*, which is from the Bible. They're so cool, they're like these huge crazy towers... you can hardly believe these things were painted over 500 years ago.

## What's your painting process? How do you go about choosing a subject for a painting?

I get an idea, it's like a little feeling, and you can't force these ideas. They kind of come to me, like when I'm going on a walk or whatever... And often I'll sit with them for weeks or even months and then I'll see something that I think will be a good fit for that idea. After that, I'll start taking pictures and doing little

sketches, and then I'll start painting basically. I don't plan too much because I like to leave room for change while I am actually painting it.

## **What music plays in the background as you paint? Beethoven, Gotan Project, Beyoncé, Coldplay, Michael Bublé?**

If I had to choose from those, then it would be Beethoven, without a doubt. But I actually don't listen to music when I work, I listen to podcasts. And it can be about anything, just as long as it is not about art.

## **How does that inspire you?**

It doesn't... it just distracts me. I mean, what I do is like knitting. I'm inspired when I decide what to paint, but when it comes to the actual painting process, like that brown curtain for example, I might as well be sitting and knitting a jersey. It's very time-consuming and boring, so I have to entertain my mind... Otherwise, I would go insane.





Land of Cockaigne 5 – On show at ICAIO.

*“We see others and the world through a filter of self. I can never know what it’s like to be you, or occupy the space in the world that you occupy. But through art, we can go somewhere new together.”*

**Do you need to be inspired to work?**

I don’t. I just sit down and start painting... I don’t have to

be inspired to work. That's a myth that you've got to let go of very quickly if you're going to become a professional artist. You just have to keep going no matter what. This whole inspiration idea is so overblown.

**Finally and most importantly, of course, concerning the theme and title of your exhibition: *You, Me, There, Here*. Could you tell us the meaning behind this?**

I called this exhibition here in Mauritius "You, Me, There, Here" because I wanted to reflect on the function of painting. Our brains are primed towards making sense of an image. We are so good at this that even a few nearly abstract lines will form a landscape in our brains. In a couple of exhibitions, I explored how complete realism and near abstraction are pretty much the same thing. They both create a space for the imagination outside ourselves. If I paint a space, a landscape, I am inviting you to experience that space too... I'm inviting you to join me in your imagination. We are all stuck in ourselves. We see others and the world through a filter of self. I can never know what it's like to be you, or

occupy the space in the world that you occupy. But through art, we can go somewhere new together. When I paint a landscape, I can offer you a meeting place, away from you and away from me, not here, not there. It's indescribable. And while I am painting the landscape, and imagining it into being with each tiny brushstroke, I am feeling closer to the you who is going to look at it and enter it in your imagination.





Lost and Found 1 – On show at ICAIO.

*Be sure to check out her masterpieces. Deborah's art exhibition is currently showing at the **Institute of***

***Contemporary Art Indian Ocean (ICAIO) in  
Port Louis*** until the 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2018.

**W: [deborahpoynton.com](http://deborahpoynton.com) | [icaio.org](http://icaio.org)**

All images © Deborah Poynton. Courtesy Stevenson,  
Cape Town/Johannesburg and ICAIO, Port Louis.