

The universal language of geometries is the focus for Damien Poulain

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Influenced since his childhood by advertising and billboards, Damien Poulain developed a style that draws from graphic design, architecture and other cultures.

Art as an interdisciplinary exploration

Damien Poulain's art is a combination of techniques, disciplines and mediums which generates a style affected by artistic and personal influences. «My family was not in the art world, and I did not get any artistic education. Growing up, the only examples of art I could witness were the advertising posters on the walls of my hometown». Influenced by the work of artists who used to bypass the boundaries of art and draw from other creative languages such as advertising and illustration, before entering the art world, Poulain started to explore his artistic sensitivity through graphic design and illustration. The big letterings, the geometric patterns and the colors of billboards can still be found in his murals, small-size paintings and textile artworks. His multisectoral activity marked by a mixture of disciplines – such as design, architecture and mural painting – and materials – from textiles to spray paints – is the result of an interdisciplinary exploration: « I do what feels right at the moment and the more I explore through different mediums the more I see myself. It is an evolution».

Minimalism, design and architecture in art

Most of his influences and sources of inspiration derive from first-hand experience or stem from curiosity. Every material he comes in touch with, from paper to wood, from plaster to concrete, represents a challenge and an opportunity. Poulain's artistic and personal growth has been marked by a four-months stay in Milan, where he had the opportunity to study and work alongside artists and architects who didn't enclose their art within the constraints of categorization, such as AG Fronzoni and Bruno Munari. In that period, he investigated minimalism, design and architecture and the way they can be put in dialogue and interact through art. The recent confinement months enforced by the French government provided Poulain with an occasion to further research materials and new techniques to feature in his work. Due to the impossibility to travel and paint outside, Poulain dedicated himself to small-scale paintings and products, such as a red, blue and pink coat made of pompoms titled *There Is No Me*, which took over a year to

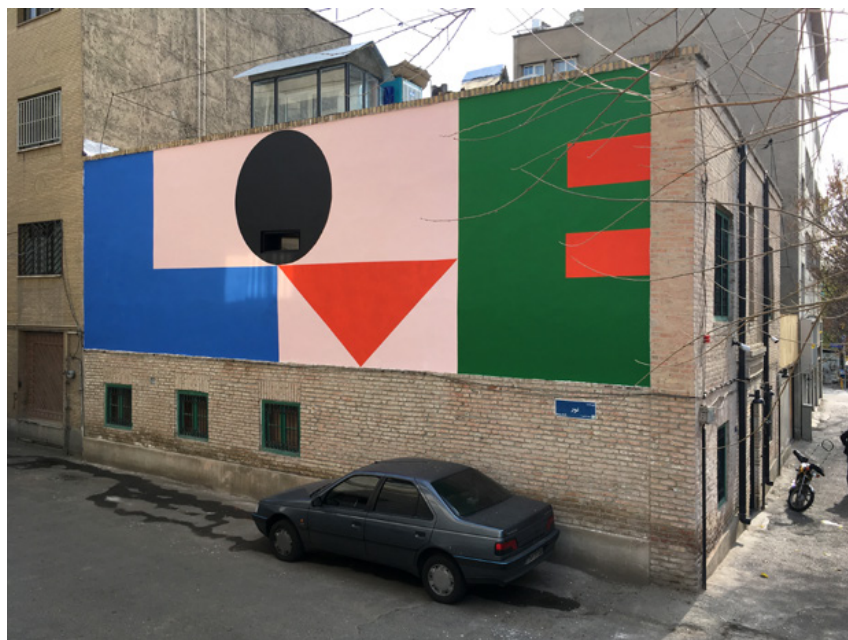
be completed. Poulain's longing to work free of constraints can be found also in his commissioned works and collaborations with fashion and design brands. « I only work with brands which are willing to give me a lot of freedom and be surprised by what I might come up with».

Lampoon talks to Damien Poulain

The role of humans in the world and the way they live and connect to it through their relationship with space, colors and movement is the element that ties together all his works. The topic of movement, understood not only as the physical act of moving of people, but also as the evolution of thought deriving from the cultural exchanges between people, plays a key part in most of his artworks, where his first-hand experience is often the starting point. Hence his fascination with geometry, which he calls a «universal language». Raised in a Catholic environment, his family tried to instill in him a set of values and an ideology to which Poulain never adhered completely: «I felt the need to find my own way through travels and interactions with other cultures. During my trips to Asia and Africa, I learned that there are so many different cults and religions and that the only thing I believe in is nature, where I can find peace and reconnect with my inner self». In Asia he got in touch with one of his major influences: Shintoism, a Japanese polytheistic and animist religion, which puts nature at the center of its belief, as opposed to western religions based on the centrality of the human person.

oodee publishing house

During his stay in London, in 2011, Poulain came to realize the struggle of emerging female photographers to find galleries or magazines willing to represent them and showcase their works. This gender gap pushed him to create a platform with the aim of raising the profile of international contemporary female photographers. He organized five exhibitions in as many cities around the world – London, Tokyo, Johannesburg, Bogota and Beirut – where five female local artists had the opportunity to present their works to an international audience. Due to the positive response of the public, the project started to attract the interest of media and established photographers who soon started to collaborate with Poulain. These collaborations led to the founding of oodee, a publishing house focusing on contemporary photography. Through this publishing house, Poulain has been publishing its POV Female series, photography books where each of them showcases the work of a female photographer, as well as collaborating and publishing the work of photographers such as Pieter Hugo, Charlotte Dumas, Viviane Sassen and Roger Ballen.



Damien Poulain's mural paintings

The core of Poulain's work are however his mural paintings, whose aesthetics is influenced by the heraldic symbols used by kings and noble houses to represent their families and communicate their values, another fascination of Poulain dating back to his childhood. Aware of the power of art, through this artistic practice Poulain manages to convey positive messages and bring people together, leaving a positive mark in the neighborhoods and enhancing the meaning of communities. Also, painting outside provides communities with the opportunity to enjoy and approach art outside of the traditional cultural environments turning the act of painting into a shared and impactful activity. For instance, Poulain's desire to actively involve communities in his work results sometimes in collaborative practices between the artist and the local craftsmen, a practice he would like to implement more often. In 2019 Poulain started his ongoing project Happy Face, which consists in spraying paint on shutters around the world creating a dialogue between art and architecture. With this intervention he aims at adding an element of life – smiling faces composed of bright-colored geometric shapes and patterns – to the atmosphere and dark look cities get when the working day is over, and people return to their homes. Another project involving the use of spray paint in the urban landscape is Love has no size, a series of big-sized mural paintings where the word 'Love' dominates streets and buildings of cities around the world often marked by a difficult past, such as Tehran or Tunis. In 2020 Poulain has developed Hope, a large mural painting in the city of Angers, France, the second step of Love has no size. This urban intervention was inspired by the length of the wall which allowed the artist to create an optical illusion made of colors, shapes and the letters which compose the word 'Hope'. Walking on the sidewalk along the wall, people have time to think and meditate on the meaning of hope, a promise of joy and new beginnings, represented metaphorically by Poulain's artistic intervention which turned an empty wall into a colorful artwork.

Spreading love through art

These projects and the positive messages they carry along are not the fruit of a stretch or a moral duty, on the contrary they stem from Poulain's optimistic way of being. When creating an artwork Poulain focuses on the graphic elements, the first things to arouse the curiosity of the viewer who, only at a later stage, will notice the underlying message. Recently Poulain has been invited to paint on the internal walls of buildings, an occasion to enhance through his work the relationship between painting and architecture, a kind of artistic intervention he executed for Conran Shop in Paris. This ongoing collaboration will result, on occasion of the 2021 London Design Week, in an installation featuring all the elements of Poulain's aesthetics. The goal pursued by Poulain remains to spread his art in as many parts of the world as possible: «Last year I was planning to take Love has no size to Algeria and South Africa, the more I can spread messages of and about love the better. I believe in the power of painting but also in the power of words. I know it might sound naïve, but love is the basic feeling in terms of human connection».

Damien Poulain

Is a French artist working between Paris and London. His art responds to various invitations, from design to architecture, from sculpture to mural painting. Conveying messages about love, joy and hope, his urban interventions bring people together through the power of art and creativity. Throughout his career, Poulain has showcased his works at 21_21 Design Museum in Tokyo, at Museum of Graphic Design in Breda and at Kemistry Gallery in London, among others. He has collaborated with international fashion and design brands. Right now he is working on projects with RSVP and Folk Clothing.

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