

It's Nice That

Artist Amandine Urruty creates huge, highly detailed charcoal drawings from her bed

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Amandine Urruty never intended to forge a career as an artist. “My parents were not interested in visual arts at all, we only had a Salvador Dali poster in our toilet,” she laughs. “I always thought it would be too risky to become an artist, too difficult, and I had no idea of what I needed to do to make a living out of it. As we lived in a very rural place [in south west France], no museums, no galleries, only ducks, cows, and sunflowers, the art world remained a mystery for years. I wanted to become an art teacher, and began to study art at the University in Toulouse. I stayed for eight long years there, and finally abandoned my doctorate as soon as I had my first illustration and gallery show proposals.”

Now based in Paris and living as an artist full-time, Amandine works for between ten and twelve hours a day, often until 3 or 4am, on astoundingly detailed drawings in charcoal which span more over 1.5 metres in height and width. A 130cm x 160cm drawing takes Amandine around a month to complete, “or 350 hours”, she explains. Rather than working from a studio, Amandine makes her drawings from an unusual, informal workstation. “Working on my bed is a very old and bad habit I’ve always had,” she says. “I can’t work on a table, or on an easel. Impossible! I feel bad, uncomfortable, and my productivity dramatically drops. I use pillows and blankets as a way to raise a wooden plaque, and that is my support. I work sitting cross-legged, in pyjamas. It can be sometimes a bit ridiculous, as I also work on very big drawings on my bed, but as every challenge has a solution, I cut these big drawings into several parts, and reassemble them in the frames. For example I’m working on a three-metre triptych right now, but I divided it into four parts so it can fit my workspace.”

Amandine’s macabre, surreal, hyper-realistic illustrative style was honed through many hours of doodling after she took some lessons in academical drawing at university. “It was the beginning of a revelation,” she says. “After that, I doodled more and more... I progressively began to realise what could be the internal logic of my work — it was an additive logic. So I decided to mix up all my influences and secret passions to produce a kind of ragout: Flemish paintings, ugly tattoos, Surrealism, post-mortem photography, antique toys and horror movies.” Amandine’s world is one where references skip across time and space, a place where death seems to lurk around the corner.

One of the defining aspects of Amandine’s work is that it is largely executed in monochrome, using charcoal to give shape to her Victoriana-inspired land populated by anthropomorphic creatures. “I always hated to work with paint, as I’m a very clumsy person,” Amandine says. “I used to swear I would never, never use direct colour. Well, I changed my mind only one year later and began producing gaudy pictures, with colour pencils. These brights colours and rainbows were part of a ‘magical thinking’ plan, a childish way to cope with a sad period I had to face for four years. I released a big neon book and then I had enough. Five years ago I needed to change and return to my first love, to the memories of my academical lessons, to black and white drawing, graphite and charcoal. At that time I had the impression to have a personal language, but not my own tool, my favourite and definitive one. Black pencils are my definitive tools now. I don’t know why but I love the idea of a definitive way of working. Maybe that’s because of my conception of drawing as an obsessional activity.”



