Bolans Architects and
Sandra Higgins Fine Art
present

A retrospective exhibition of

Agathe Sorel

at The Studio of Contemporary Art

Paintings, sculpture, prints, installation
and livres d'artiste

12 October - 12 November 2014

Private View
Thursday 9 October 6-9pm
Saturday 11 October 4-7pm

Viewing by appointment

RSVP **sandra@sandrahiggins.com**

This exhibition is a unique opportunity to view a retrospective of the artwork produced by Agathe Sorel between 1958 - 2014 and will be shown within the setting of her own working studio.

Agathe Sorel Studio of Contemporary Art

Dorrell Hall, 43 London Road
SE23 3TY

Forest Hill Station

Press Release

AGATHE SOREL

A Retrospective

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Sandra Higgins has curated a retrospective that will encompass the 50-year body of work of Agatha Sorel, focusing on her prints, paintings and sculptures and teasing out the affinities between these media and their stylistic evolution. The exhibition will take place in Sorel's studio in Forest Hill, offering visitors the unique opportunity to enjoy Sorel's works in the space where she created many of them.

AROUND THE GALLERIES

1:54, Moniker and Multiplied are just some of the fairs that have sprung up around Frieze Week. Now is the time to view the best in contemporary art, as the capital's commercial galleries also present their leading artists. **Imelda Barnard**

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1 Agathe Sorel (b. 1935), photographed in her studio in Forest Hill, ahead of her retrospective curated by Sandra Higgins

All eyes are on London this month as **Frieze Week** descends (15–18 October; www.friezelondon.com), heralding the start of the autumn season (see Art Market, pp. 92–96). Alongside satellite events such as the Other Art Fair, Moniker and Multiplied, there's the second edition of **1:54**, the contemporary African art fair at Somerset House (16–19 October; www.1-54.com). Drawing on the increasing popularity of African art, as well as the continent's emerging art market, it presents over 85 artists from 27 galleries. Alongside those based in Nigeria, Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire and South Africa, the fair includes western dealers who specialise in art from the region: London's Jack Bell Gallery and October Gallery, Berlin's Galerie Mikael Andersen and Milan's Primo Marella. The event is accompanied by an educational programme curated by Koyo Kouoh and includes lectures, screenings and panel discussions.

Unsurprisingly, the capital is flooded with stellar shows. Complementing 1:54 is a display of works from the **Danjuma Collection** at 33 Fitzroy Square (6–28 October), which has an emphasis on contemporary African art and includes Julie Mehretu, Ernest Mancoba, Lynette Yiadom Boakye and Marlene Dumas. Making a name for himself as one of London's up-and-coming young collectors, Theo Danjuma's holdings – amounting to some 400 works – also focuses on emerging and established contemporary artists, and this exhibition looks at the use of found and appropriated materials in the collection. Expect to see Klara Lidén, Simon Denny, Matias Faldbakken, Neil Beloufa and Danh Vo.

Elsewhere, titans of the art scene Philippe Parreno and Steve McQueen are exhibiting at **Pilar Corrias** and **Thomas Dane** respectively (both 14 October–15 November). This is Parreno's first show in London since 2010, and it comprises a new film made from hundreds of drawings, each depicting only one insect – a firefly. Widely known for his award-winning feature films, McQueen's exhibition – which also celebrates Thomas Dane Gallery's 10th anniversary – revolves around a new video commission entitled *Ashes* (2014), which continues the artist's ongoing enquiry into image making and his often violent assault on the senses. **White Cube Bermondsey**, meanwhile, hosts Tracey Emin's first London show in five years, bringing together a reflective mix of bronze sculptures, gouaches, paintings, embroideries and neon works (8 October–16 November).

There are a number of additional displays dedicated to female artists. A sculptor, photographer and installation artist, Helen Chadwick became known for her innovative use of materials, including fur, chocolate and flowers. Her work *Cacao* (1994) is installed at **Richard Saltoun** (14 October–14 November), alongside the seminal series of 13 photographs, *Wreaths to Pleasure* (1992–93). For new work by Paula Rego visit **Marlborough Fine Art**, which presents three new series of pastels and watercolours all inspired by Portugal, the place of Rego's birth (1–25 October; Fig. 2). Fleeing Hungary in 1935 following the anti-Soviet revolution, artist **Agathe Sorel** settled in England. Having studied printmaking with S.W. Hayter at the Atelier 17 in Paris, Sorel experimented with transparent objects, tirelessly playing with sculptural form. This retrospective, curated by Sandra Higgins and located at Sorel's studio in Forest Hill, encompasses a 50-year body of work and includes prints, paintings and sculptures (12 October–12 November; Fig. 1).

New works by Howard Hodgkin, one of Britain's most important painters, are on view at **Alan Cristea Gallery** (11 October–15 November).

LONDON CITY NIGHTS

'A retrospective exhibition of Agathe Sorel' at the Studio of Contemporary Art, 11th October 2014

Tuesday, October 14, 2014 by londoncitynights

Agathe Sorel's sculptures look like they've been carved out of space itself. Headache inducing geometry meets diagrammatic precision in transparent perspex, a collection of objects that slide into new configurations as you move around them. This is my kind of

queasy psychedelia: organic plasticky bulges, ritualistic artefacts from insane civilisations and gigantic melting primal totems.

The retrospective takes place in her studio, which is nestled down a candlelit driveway in Forest Hill. Filling this space is a literal ton (maybe more) of art in a huge variety of mediums; watercolours, bamboo structures, etchings and (my favourite) mindbending perspex sculptures.

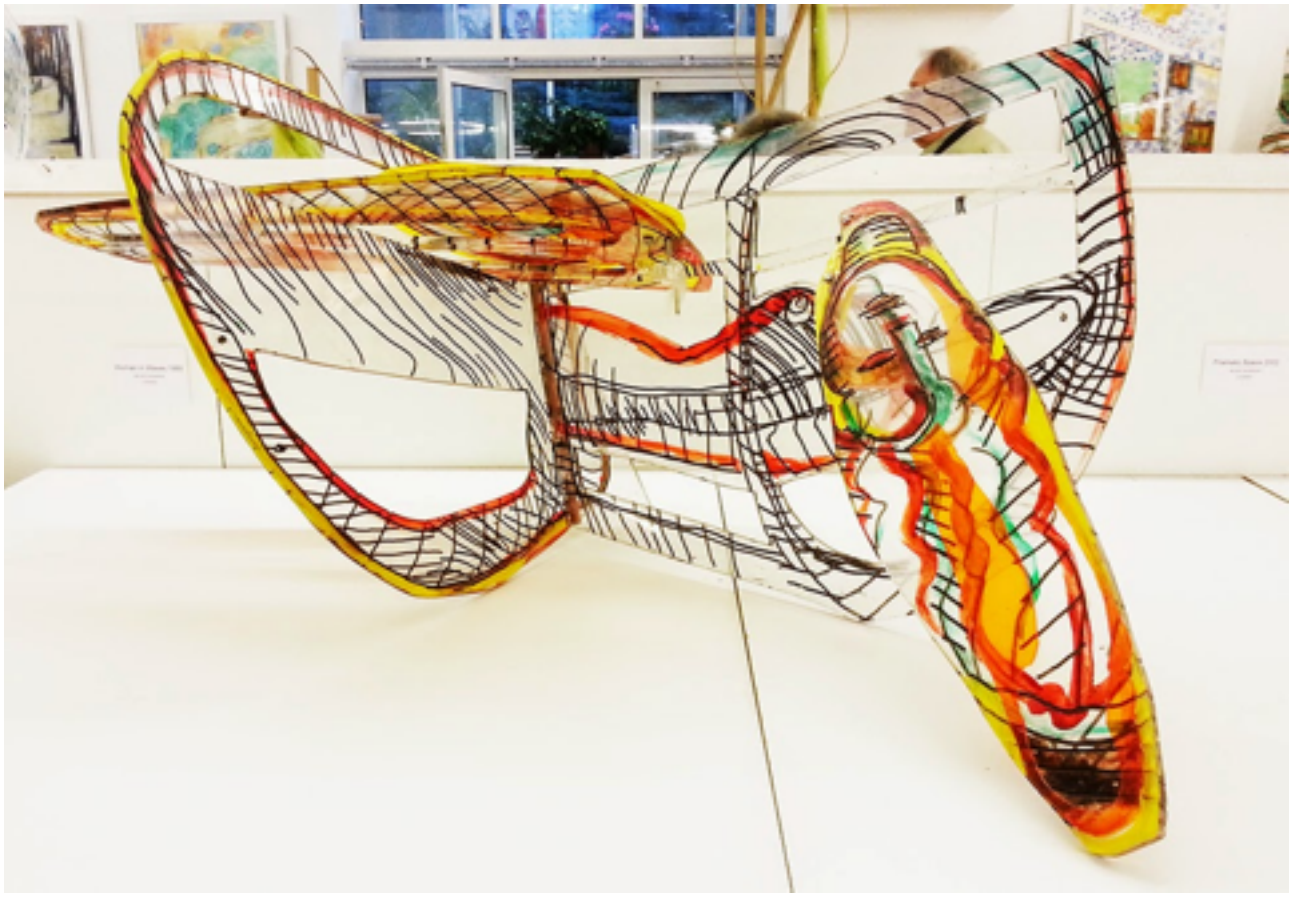
Titania (1990)

So who is Agathe Sorel? Born in Budapest in 1935 she began her art education in the Hungarian Academy of Applied Art, studying stage design, mosaic, frescoes and murals. Following the Revolution of 1956 she fled the country, finding refuge in London where she studied at the Camberwell School of Art. At the tail end of the fifties she moves to Paris, studying at the legendary *Atelier 17* studio under Stanley William Hayter, surrealist,

abstract expressionist and widely considered one of the best printmakers of the 20th Century.

She spends the sixties in London, setting up a print workshop in Fulham with her husband Gabor Sitkey and teaching art at the Camberwell and Maidstone Colleges. Whilst doing this her reputation grows, there solo shows across London and she receives the Churchill Fellowship to work in the US and Mexico. I don't have space to list everything else in her biography, but suffice to say it consists of an impressive list of exhibitions at prominent institutions and participations in high profile collaborations.

In this retrospective 50 years of work is compressed into one space to dizzying effect. Agathe showed me around, starting with her etchings from 1958. The earliest of these have a chemically oozy quality, reminiscent of a river after a toxic leak upstream. These evolve into more ordered compositions, but ones that still bear the fingerprints of disorder; the works punctuated by organic smears and 'trash' materials like coffee grounds.



Woman in Waves (1989)

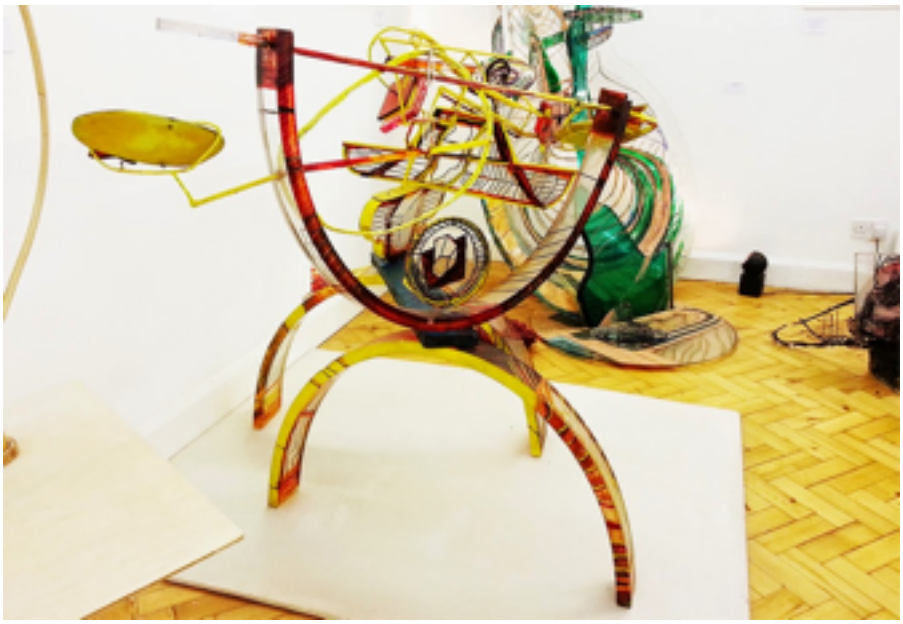
As neat as these are, for me they're a preamble to her sculptural work. The sight of all these pieces in one room makes me feel like I'm in the prop room for an avant-garde science fiction movie. These could be furniture for an advanced alien civilisation, the patterns, shapes and curves suggesting some bizarre logic that our puny human minds cannot possibly comprehend.

One of Agathe's prior exhibitions was titled '*Engravings in Space*' - a perfect description of what she does. One thing I appreciated very quickly is that these pieces morph and transform depending on your position relative to them. I've always held that one mark of a good sculpture is its use of 3D space or more simply, the harder it is to photograph, the better the use of form.

Oyster (1990)

Agathe's sculptures are next to impossible to capture well in a photograph. Lets take *Oyster* as just one example. In the concave curves of the upper piece there's an anatomical roughness, the bulging shape and organic lines reminiscent of an occipital bone. The structure underneath looks altar like; the positioning of the objects upon a curved perspex shelf placed in a way that suggests ritual precision. Here religious adoration collides with skullish skeletal reality, intangible spirituality shackled to blood, bone and tissue. In a photograph this is difficult to communicate, but in 3D space it springs to life, inviting the viewer to explore the shapes.

A similar entanglemet is present in the physics influenced *Grotto for Torus*. Perhaps influenced by M.C. Escher, Agathe has realised Oscar Reutersvärd's Penrose Triangle aka 'the impossible triangle'. Staring at the piece gradually turns your brain to plasticine as you try to fit the impossibly Euclidean pieces into order. The impossible triangle has been created before, but generally relies on an illusion of perspective to work. Agathe uses her own illusion, the thin, curved perspex making the design into a mirage that floast before our eyes. These allusions to physics continue in the other elements of the sculpture; the torus design reflecting theories of the shape of the universe, and the cubes, cylinders and spheres the building blocks of objects.



Macho the Cock (1985)

But it's the insanely complex *Macho the Cock* that's my favourite, despite (or perhaps because) it's the one I understand least. A knot of burnt sunset hues in perspex and metal, jumbled up beyond comprehension - looking at this makes me feel like a dog trying to understand the controls of a jet fighter - I don't even know where to start. This is an invigorating brand of confusion, layers of meaning being stripped away until we're forced to grapple with naked geometry, colour and form.

There's so much to see here - I've not scratched the surface (or the even the surface of the surface) in this article. This isn't a particularly small gallery, but every conceivable space is home to work that positively throbs with intelligence and skill.

Binding it all together is the art of engraving. I see this repeated technique as Agathe suffering the torture of having an itch she can't scratch. Her itch is in reality and by the act of engraving she scratches away at the world around her through canvas, metal and perspex, stamping her mark onto space itself.

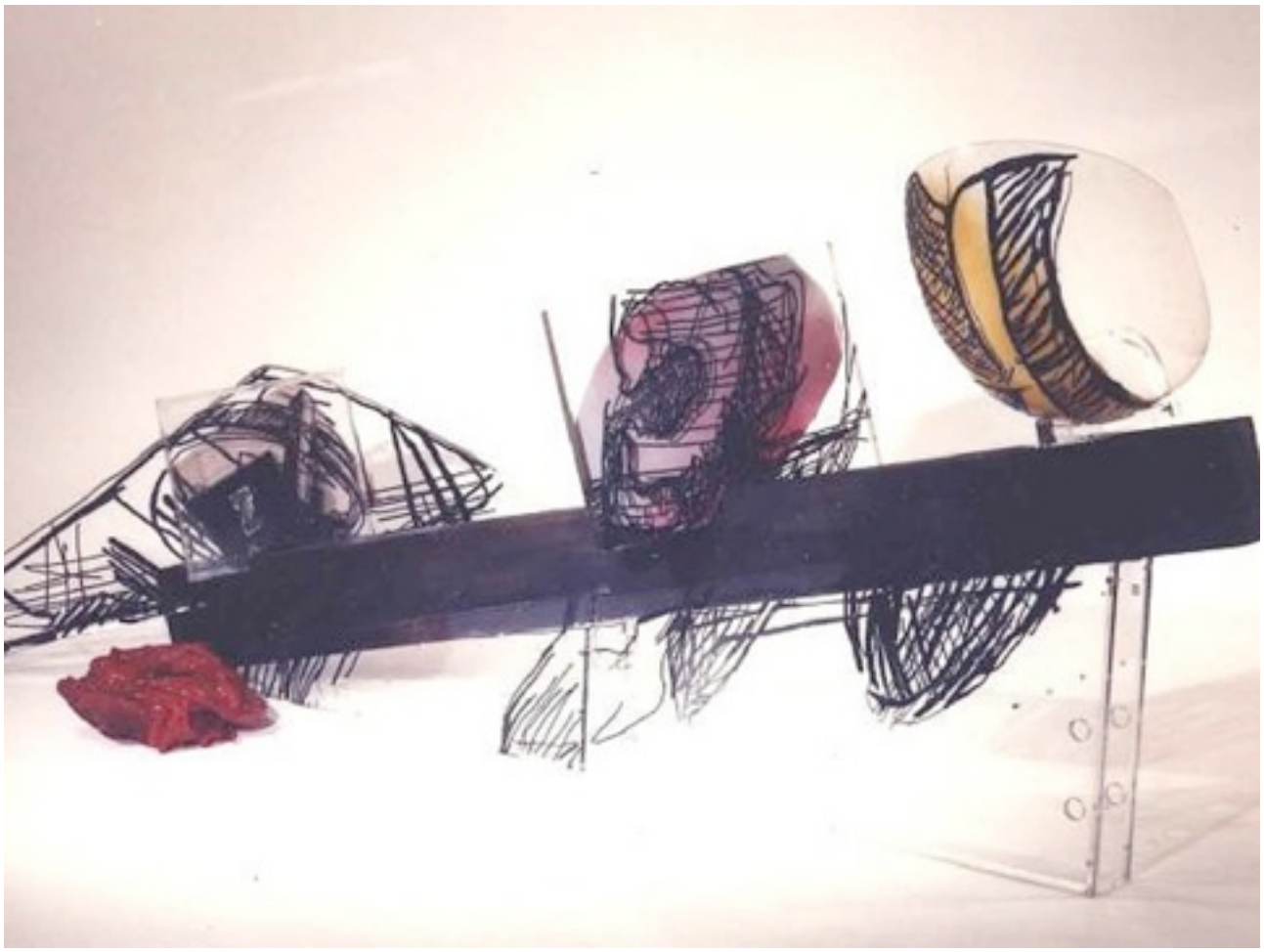
'A retrospective exhibition of Agathe Sorel' is at the Studio of Contemporary Art, Dorrell Hall, 43 London Road, SE23 3TY until 12 November 2014. Viewing by appointment (sandra@sandrahiggins.com).

Tags: Agathe Sorel , art , avant-garde , exhibition , Sandra Higgins , Sculpture
- See more at: http://www.londoncitynights.com/2014/10/a-retrospective-exhibition-of-agathe.html#sthash.T8d56HqM.dpuf

Wall Street International

Agathe Sorel. A Retrospective

12 Oct–12 Nov 2014 at Agathe Sorel Studio of Contemporary Art, London



Agathe Sorel, The Lure of Lost Cultures, 1982, 2200 x 1240 x 700mm

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Ernst, Alberto Giacometti, Juan Miro and Jackson Pollock– and his mentoring and influence was crucial in development of Sorel's artistic career.

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Agathe Sorel Studio of Contemporary Art

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Opening hours

By appointment

Related images

1. Agathe Sorel, Two Cultures, 1963. Photo gravure, dry point, engraving & brass cut out printed in black, green, yellow, brown & red vignette, 780 x 600 mm
2. Agathe Sorel, Fish and Swan, 1989. Two space engravings exhibited together, 1850 x 640 x 550 mm
3. Agathe Sorel, The Wise and Foolish Virgin, 1966. Line engraving, aquatint, hammered brass, photogravure & plastic engraving, printed in black, blue & yellow, 780 x 600 mm
4. Agathe Sorel, Prismatic Space, 2002. Space Engraving, 420 x 230 x 480 mm

5. Agathe Sorel, By the Drunken Photographer, 1967. Line engraving, aquatint & surface rolled brass cut out, printed in black, green & brown, 780 x 600 mm
6. Agathe Sorel, Grotto for Toros, 1989. Space engraving, welded steel and stone, 1930 x 1350 x 1350 mm

September 25, 2014






studio international
Visual Arts, Design and Architecture

Published 17/09/2014

Agathe Sorel interview: ‘I never have an idea in advance, even now. Experimentation spreads through all my work’

Agathe Sorel talks about her battle to get printmaking recognised in art colleges, her unconventional use of the engraved line, the influence of maths and science on her work – and being kicked out of photo shops

Agathe Sorel: Retrospective
Studio of Contemporary Art, Forest Hill, London
12 October – 12 November 2014 (viewing by appointment, contact sandra@sandrahiggins.com)
Private Views: 9 October, 6-9pm and 11 October, 4-7pm

by ANNA McNAY

Agathe Sorel was born in 1935 in Budapest in pre-revolution Hungary. Moving to Paris, via London, to study under Stanley William [Bill] Hayter, she encountered contemporary art and abstraction for the first time. Her work has been principally interested in the line, and its 3D – or even 4D – properties, which she has explored in print works and sculpture. She now has work represented in 43 major museums worldwide. In advance of an open studio and retrospective exhibition, organised to coincide with the putting together of a catalogue raisonné of her work, Studio International spoke to Sorel about her career.

Anna McNay: Did you always want to be an artist?

Agathe Sorel: Yes, as far as I can remember.

AMc: Your mother studied art history. Do you think this influenced you in your future direction?

AS: Maybe, I don’t know. But I always wanted to draw and make things.

AMc: Your early art training in Budapest was fairly traditional. You were already rebelling against the prevailing social realism. Did you know at that stage what you wanted to go on to do instead, or did you simply know it wasn’t that?

AS: I knew what I didn't want to do. I went to art school when I was 13 and they taught me all the traditional techniques; I went to the Academy of Applied Arts and later to the Academy of Fine Art, and I knew I didn't want to do what they taught me there.

AMc: Was your training there influential in any way at all?

AS: Oh, yes. I learned to do a lot of things – for example, perspective and anatomy. That was very influential. And obviously I learned to draw and to paint with watercolors. The perspective classes were especially influential, however, as I later embarked on an ambitious lecture series on the subject, collecting around 1,800 slides.

AMc: In 1956, you left Hungary with your mother because of the revolution. You enrolled at the then Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts to study illustration. How long did you spend there, and, again, how much influence did it have on your development?

AS: I spent about a year and a half at Camberwell. During this time I met some very interesting artists: Michael Rothenstein, Robert Medley, RB Kitaj, Heinz Inlander, Julian Trevelyan at the Royal College and Anthony Gross at the Slade. They became great friends and supporters, advising me to go to work with Hayter in Paris. Later, we founded the Printmakers Council to establish printmaking as a separate department in art colleges, with specially allocated rooms and equipment, not just a little star wheel press in the corner of the illustration department. This has actually happened through perseverance and pressure. I was a founder member on various committees for many years and a chair for two years.

AMc: After Camberwell, you won the Gulbenkian Scholarship to study under Hayter at the Atelier 17 workshop in Paris. Was it at this point that you finally felt you had found your place?

AS: Indeed it was. Hayter was a magnetic personality, developed important experimental techniques and cared for and tutored his students individually. He was a printmaker and a painter, and made artist's books – *livres d'artiste* – in the French tradition. He also wrote books and had many marvellous artists – Picasso, Joan Miró, Alberto Giacometti and Jackson Pollock – with whom he associated, who used his workshop and facilities. When they had private views, everybody was invited to meet them. Miró was very shy and did not talk much, but once he came to the studio and saw an engraved plate with great automatic loops, looking like a football. He drew a foot next to it with dry point as if it was kicking it away. They kept this plate and a print of it for a long time. It was really hard for me to understand abstract or contemporary art because of my upbringing with social realism though. It took me a long time to realise what it was about. It was a struggle because I was fighting all the time with my traditional art training.

I also had connections through my father, who introduced me to Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, Árpád Szenes, Manet Katz, Victor Vasarely and Joseph Csaky, and it was a great experience to visit them in their studios and exhibit with them at the various salons. We were asked to submit work to

biennials and other art shows, such as the two exhibitions organised by André Breton; at one of which he selected my work, together with Simon Hantaï's Hayter's students were treated like mature artists, which was marvellous. I was there for two years, and Hayter was very strict. To some extent, I use his methods in my own teaching because they are very good.

AMc: Hayter was a prolific printmaker, and his book New Ways of Gravure explored the spatial properties of the engraved line. At which point did the line become significant for you in your own work? For you, is a line 2D or 3D?

AS: I always thought that the engraved line had sculptural qualities. The line has always been very significant and I wanted to see it in space. My use of the engraved line was very unconventional as, in traditional etchings and engravings, you were not supposed to dig very deep into the plate and you were not supposed to use multiple lines, but, in my work, I literally dug up the plate with multiple lines as thick as ropes. This was negative sculpture already. When I started to work on Le Balconfor Jean Genet around 1963-4, that is when things really came alive and I started combining these techniques with photogravure, etching, pressed metal, drilling, hammering, soft-ground etching, brushed aquatint and gold leaf. It was all completely new.

There is a lovely story in Edwin Abbott Abbott's Flatlandabout a worm crawling on a flat surface, not being aware of its spatial position, and, when the surface is bent over into 3D, it is not conscious of it. If you imagine this situation on a transparent acrylic surface, as in the space engravings, and add the time factor, you get a different philosophical position, in line with modern scientific thinking – it becomes 4D.

AMc: You also worked with photographic processes, in particular when you returned to London in 1960 and set up your own studio in Fulham. Can you tell me something about the running of this studio and the work produced there? How did you use photographic processes? And how and when did you begin working with a photocopier?

AS: In the early 60s, there was a Robert Rauschenberg exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery. I was intrigued to see that he rubbed white spirit on newspaper pages and, when the paint loosened, he rubbed them off on to paper or his canvases, thereby getting photographic images as well as type transferred. Also, at college, they had some photogravure plates, which they used for newspaper printing, mounting them type high to be printed with the text. Just imagine – in those days, photogravure was copyrighted and nobody could use it except the newspapers with Kodak's permission. I devised methods of using these in my prints and also of transferring photographic images in Le Balcon by squeezing lift ground through silkscreen. Later on, I managed to get photosensitive litho or etching plates exposed using a photographic image with various screens. At the beginning, I just used a sun lamp to do this, but later I used proper professional equipment.

When I returned to London, I sold three editions of prints to Robert Erskine at the St George's Gallery and also had a small amount of money from my father. I decided to put down a deposit for a small terraced house in Fulham to start a studio. I was promised two part-time jobs at Camberwell and at Goldsmiths College. I managed to get a mortgage, which was exceptional, as

women still needed the guarantee of either a father or a husband to own property. The little house was derelict, but it had three floors, which I had converted so that I could occupy the ground floor myself and let the upper floors to pay for the mortgage. The through-lounge was also a studio with a conservatory attached for colour work, workbenches and an acid area. I ordered a large geared etching press with the help of another Gulbenkian grant. The gears were specially commissioned to be cast in Manchester. This press was later motorised to save my back and it could also be used for surface printing of woodcuts and lithography.

In our house in Lanzarote, we had some giant cacti, which died owing to an infection. The veins of the huge petals formed a delicate latticework, which I tried to reproduce, and photography proved inadequate. I wrapped up some of these in my grandmother's damask towel and my son's vest. I took this to the photocopier and turned it around to get a picture from all sides. I was not popular in these immaculate photo shops and got unceremoniously kicked out of many places.

When I took these large A3 prints home, I was surprised to see some amazing figures appearing – more archetypes, some wearing drapery, some in the nude. I started collaging these prints and struggled with the stylistic problems for a few months, until I was satisfied. I decided on a book and called it Catalana Blanca, from the type of cactus fruit it produces, and combined the pages with woodcuts. I asked the well-known physician, photographer and poet Lorand Gaspar if I could use his poems on the desert areas of Morocco. The book was very successful: individual prints, as well as books, were bought by the Tate Gallery, the British Library and the British Museum.

I also got interested in the large figures drawn in the sand by children, which incorporated 3D elements, like sandcastles. I bought myself a child's rake and engraved large figures and abstract shapes in the sand, including real figures, aeroplanes and footprints of animals. I photographed them from various angles. These are, of course, prints in themselves. I collaged these prints and decided to make a book, a *livre d'artiste*. The pages were interleaved with raked sand in various colours glued to sheets of acetate. David Gascoyne, a friend of Hayter, agreed to collaborate with me on this book, which was shown in London and at the Galerie La Hune in Paris.

AMc: You have already mentioned your work producing a series of images to accompany Jean Genet's play Le Balcon. Your work here was very experimental. Did you know what you wanted to produce – and how you were going to produce it – in advance, or was it really a case of trying things out and seeing where they led you?

AS: I first saw Le Balcon at the Arts Theatre Club in London in 1957. One had to be a member to attend because the censors deemed it immoral and it was not to be shown to the public as it took place in a brothel. The membership cost £1. I was blown away by the play and decided to use all the main characters as archetypes but I only had the means to begin this work in my studio in 1963-4. By this time, some of the ridiculous censorship restrictions had been lifted following the DH Lawrence trial and there was a second performance of the play by the National Theatre in the East End, directed by Terry Hands, who, after the success of What a Lovely War, did this in just the same manner, pure vaudeville. There was a great rumpus and Genet walked out and wanted to have nothing to do with it. At this stage, he was shown proofs of my interpretation by Martin

Esslin, head of BBC drama, who interviewed him on his book, The Theatre of the Absurd. He liked it very much and I gave proofs of the series to both. Unfortunately I never met Genet in person.

I experimented with all kinds of new techniques to get the right atmosphere. Every page was new, techniques I had not seen or tried out before. I used photography, engraving, hammering, viscosity printing and more. I started using pressed metal, for example, which I rolled up and printed from. Sometimes I would use a drill, and I'd drill right through the plate – absolute sacrilege, as you might imagine – or drilling it part-way through, and then filling it up with coloured ink or gold leaf with a matchstick. It was not illustration. The series was meant to be shown as a storyboard sequence in a single line. Genet, who was rarely satisfied with the productions of his plays in the theatre, was pleased.

I would sometimes work with a compositional diagram, but I never had an exact idea of what technique I would use. I would try various things and see if they worked. I never have an idea in advance, even now. It's just wherever it takes me. This experimentation spreads through all my work. In the case of my sculptural work, it might take months or even a year. It is very difficult because it has to work from different angles and different perspectives as you walk around these transparent objects. I don't mind the time because I have to be 100% certain that it works. I'm just like a dog with a bone. I won't leave it alone until I'm absolutely satisfied it has satisfied its purpose. This is why I ask a lot of money for them and I hope that after 30 or 40 years these works are still relevant.

AMc: In 1966, you travelled to America on a Churchill Fellowship. Here, you encountered plastic. How did this change your work?

AS: I had used pieces of plastic, like the setsquare in *The Wise and Foolish Virgins* (1966), before and I was interested in continuing to explore its possibilities. In Philadelphia, I was introduced to a plastics manufacturer, who showed me around his factory, showed me how to work on acrylics, with routers, pantographs and the lathe. He also gave me some tubular material to take home with me and a little router on which the depth of line could be controlled. I took these back to London and a whole new phase of line in space started to unfold.

AMc: Indeed. Your 3D work with Perspex takes the engraved line into a third dimension. Your work began to take on a scientific and mathematical bent. Did you study these subjects? How did you acquire the requisite knowledge?

AS: No, I did not study these subjects formally but, when I was preparing my lectures on perspective, I read a lot of books, collected innumerable slides and had knowledgable friends – both artists and scientists – to advise me; they left articles, books and publications in my pigeonhole. I also had a distant relative who was one of the instigators of String Theory and another who drew up experiments at Cern [the Geneva-based European laboratory for particle physics] and at the Argonne National Laboratory in Chicago. They were patiently trying to explain very complicated things to me, of which I understood only a fraction. The meeting with [geometer] Tom Banchoff at Rhode Island College, with whom I struck up a friendship, was also significant. We were working, strangely enough, on the same ideas. I am not scientifically minded at all, but we

were starting off from the same point – the work of the Hungarian geometer and engineer Imre Pál. He went on, obviously, on a scientific basis, and I went on by simply putting the light on some of these geometric objects, taking projections from them and drawing around these projections. So he did it scientifically and I did it purely visually. When we actually met up – the great meeting of minds – he gave me his book and I started eventually borrowing images from his book and incorporating them in my work.

AMc: You also began to include found objects in your work. Would you consider yourself a surrealist?

AS: Surrealists have liberated art and Hayter was a prominent member of this group. Under the guidance of Breton, lots of interesting experiments were made, using found objects, automatic or accidental marks, and so on. This period is well documented, but one of the most interesting essays was by the then 19-year-old Gascoyne, with whom I later collaborated on theBook of Sand. (He was then in his mid 80s). Surrealism, however, is a historic movement and a lot has happened since this period.

AMc: Your work certainly sits on the boundary between a lot of oppositions: not least the figurative and the abstract. Have you always been aware of these dichotomies? Are you deliberately sampling some of each and attempting to avoid categorisation?

AS: I never thought that abstraction and figuration were incompatible. Indeed, lots of artists start out with figurative work in the early part of their career and later become abstract, but there were also some who progressed the other way round, such as Philip Guston, Willem de Kooning or Roy Lichtenstein.

AMc: Henry Moore once said: "Order and surprise, intellect and imagination, conscious and unconscious. Both sides of the artist's personality must play their part." To what extent, and in what ways, does this apply to you?

AS: This is absolutely true, but I must add the introduction of one's critical faculties, the ability to assess the work as an outsider after the creative bit is done.

AMc: Your 3D plastic works have been labelled as "space engravings". Who came up with this term? Was it a deliberate avoidance of the term "sculpture"? Do you consider those works to be sculptural?

AS: In one of Michael Rothenstein's catalogue essays or articles, he mentioned engravings in space and I rather liked this. Also, there have been vicious attacks on me by the conservative establishment at the art colleges and by traditional sculptors working in metal or stone carving. When Tessa Sidey from the Birmingham Museum wrote my catalogue essay and articles, she came to the studio 13 times. It was she who advised me finally to call a spade a spade and my work sculpture.

AMc: You are much better known for your 2D print works. Is this what you would prefer to be known for?

AS: I would like to be known as an artist – period. Most artists I respect work in a variety of media.

AMc: When you produce 2D sketches for 3D works, do you consider these to be works in their own right, or are they part and parcel of a larger piece?

AS: I never make 2D sketches for 3D work, I just use the materials at hand to create the work – although I often use the theme of a finished piece for making prints, but with an entirely different process. Working from 3D as a model simply doesn't work.

AMc: What significance does the female form play in your work? How significant do you think it has been – or not – that you are a woman artist?

AS: The female form is very important, as most of my work is autobiographical.

AMc: Would you say that you have developed your own vocabulary now, which you use for representing archetypes in your work?

AS: This has been going on for a long time, ever since Le Balcon.

AMc: Where do your colours come from? Is colour as important to you as line and shape?

AS: The use of colour and scale is becoming more important, especially in my paintings. The colours are very specific; they often come from landscape but could have other origins. Strangely, the digital media also has a role. For the last year or so, I've been working on this series that actually started with really strong colours. Instead of violence or politics, I'm focusing on colour.

AMc: There has been some controversy over whether or not your works were original, given the use of appropriated source material. What would you say in answer to such comments?

AS: The use of collage is well established. If you look at Picasso's use of farm implements, newspapers, his absorption of the style of Velázquez or primitive art, or Matisse's use of textiles, the list is endless, not to mention the cheekier adoptions by Damien Hirst of other people's work. The context is, of course, decisive. Also, we are all influenced and inspired by the past.

AMc: Where does your inspiration for a new work come from?

AS: The inspiration could come from any aspect of life; often from the landscape, but it could equally be from the theatre, music, a fairground or a performance by the Cirque du Soleil.

AMc: How did your trip to India, organised by the Royal Watercolour Society, for 10 British artists to work alongside 10 Indian artists, affect your work?

AS: The Indian trip was very influential. The two groups worked very differently. The artists from the RWS worked out of doors in the true impressionist fashion; the Indians worked from their imagination on a very large scale, using the watercolour media appropriate to international standards. They are lucky in the sense that watercolour is taught in colleges for many years, while in England it is considered cute but irrelevant, amateurish. In India, and in Indian communities throughout the world, they receive a lot of support and achieve high prices for their works. I think we could learn from them about ambition and fearlessness.

The purpose of this trip was to put together some group exhibitions in London and on the Isle of Wight, and then we showed at the Nehru Centre in central London. Then the centre asked me if I would like to mount a one-man show. It was curated by Mel Gooding in a very imaginative way. He did it on an experimental basis and he taught me not to use everything – just to use large paintings and sculpture. We covered the whole hall – at the time it was some garish Indian colours – in calico and it looked absolutely fantastic.

I had a recent retrospective at the Bradford Museum, Cartwright Hall, and it was very significant because I made a bamboo construction to go with the Indian paintings, to emulate the bamboo constructions that they use as scaffolding on buildings. They are just tied together with ropes, even on skyscrapers, and the women, who climb up carrying materials, often fall. This construction was in their honour, actually, because they are simply replaced afterwards. I used the sari material that these women wear and I bought it in the East End of London, in Brick Lane. I had a very warm response from the Indian and Pakistani communities in Bradford.

AMc: You are currently in the midst of producing your catalogue raisonné. When will this be complete? And why choose to do this now?

AS: I am producing an inventory of all the work that is in my studio at the moment, which includes experimental work, sketches and paintings. Sandra Higgins asked me to do this and she is curating a retrospective exhibition of this material. It is also timely to do this while I can still give relevant information on my work, as this is something that no one else could do.

Sandra Higgins presents Agathe Sorel's retrospective (12 Oct – 12 Nov)

Sandra Higgins, in collaboration with Bolans Architecture, is delighted to present the first London retrospective exhibition of of the avant-garde artist Agathe Sorel which opens this month at The Studio of Contemporary Art in Forest Hill. Running from October 12th to November 12th the exhibition is a unique opportunity for visitors to view the artwork produced by Sorel between 1958 – 2014 in the setting of her own studio. Exploring the the use of Perspex has allowed Sorel to combine the properties of line engraving with three dimensional form,

enabling her to create a large body of sculptures of various sizes that replace sculptural mass with transparent open volumes and whose translucency absorbs and reflects natural light. The focus of this exhibition is not only on these sculptures that Sorel refers to as “space engravings”, but on her prints and paintings too which tease out the affinities between these media and their stylistic evolution. For more information and to visit, contact Sandra Higgins.

Posted 7th Oct 2014 by admin