

ANSELL
STUDIO

SANDRA BLOW

Elements of Surprise



SANDRA BLOW WAS ONE OF THE PIONEERS OF THE BRITISH ABSTRACT ART MOVEMENT OF THE 1950S. HER WORK INTRODUCED A FRESH INFORMALITY AS SHE EXPERIMENTED WITH UNORTHODOX, CHEAP MATERIALS SUCH AS CHARCOAL, SAWDUST AND LIQUID CEMENT IN TANDEM WITH PAINT.

Blow enjoyed a prolific career spanning several decades, producing dynamic and unique work, incorporating bold geometries contrasted with soft daubs of paint and discarded materials.

Born in Stoke Newington, London, in 1925 she spent most of her early years recovering from scarlet fever in Kent, at her grandparents' fruit farm. It was here that her passion for drawing and painting was revealed and after leaving school at 14, she enrolled at Saint Martin's School of Art. She was accepted, and at the young age of 16 she started first year, and in her own words discovered 'paradise'. She explains that it was, 'absolute ecstasy to be in St Martin's, and to just draw. [...] I remember the pleasure, the thrill all the time, the extraordinary delight in what happened when you drew, and all the things you discovered.'

Following this inspirational training in London, Blow spent a short but significant spell in Europe. Much of this time was in the company of the Italian 'poly-materialist' artist, Alberto Burri, who would be a significant influence on her work for the rest of her career. Burri became Blow's lover soon after they met; however, their relationship was one that Blow described as 'curious'. She explains, 'the emphasis wasn't on romance; [...] really the fundamental thing was work.' [...] 'I do remember one time he did say that painting was more important to him than I was, and I said, well that's the same with me too, painting is more important,'

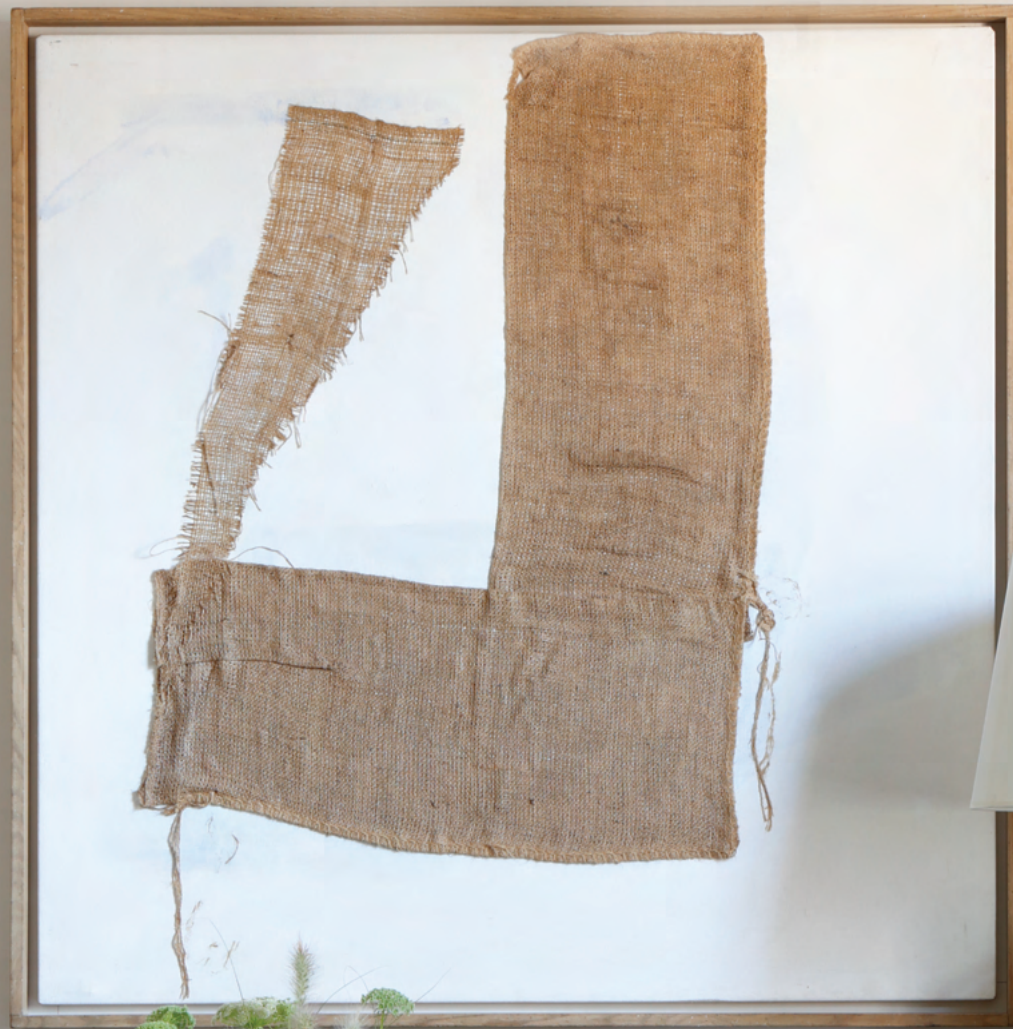
For most of Blow's life she would be completely focused on painting. For her the creation of art was a compulsion, or as she describes, 'a way of life'. It was after meeting Burri that Blow discovered her direction as a painter. Far removed from her own academic training, Blow found Burri's radical approach to art and his use of discarded materials truly inspiring. She explains, 'I think what really helped me with the formation of what I was doing was the use of material, because I found the materials could kind of speak in a way, or have a presence.'

Blow and Burri continued to travel Europe together until 1950 when Blow returned to the UK to pursue her own career. This move would be essential to her finding her own creative voice, free of Burri's inspirational but overbearing influence. 'I really wanted my own space, my own country, my own atmosphere to work out something. I didn't know if I could do it or not but I felt I had to try...'

It was no mean task trying to make it as a female artist in the 50's, and Blow was also faced with the challenge of establishing herself as an abstractionist at a time when people were often sceptical of abstract art and what it had to offer. Nevertheless, Blow overcame prejudices and barriers, through maintaining a charm and sensitivity in her work. From her use of subtle earthy pigments like ochre and beige to her more expressive and bold pieces with jostling paint marks flying on the canvas and the tensions and clashes they created in turn.

In 1957, Blow moved to St Ives in Cornwall; this was at a time when the coastal town was regarded as a hub for the development of modern art in the UK. Though she only stayed there for one year, she would return years later to live permanently. Blow would go on to create a series of works entitled 'Wave Sequence' that were exhibited in the Tate St Ives. Throughout her oeuvre a sense of the sea and Cornwall's geological complexities can be identified.





Blow came to be recognised as one of the most important female artists in Britain. She continued to experiment with organic materials such as soil and ash, and would use tea to dye her canvasses, producing natural, rustic colours. Hessian also appeared in much of Blow's work alongside other unusual materials adding a certain tactile quality to her pieces. Later in her career Blow would move away from the more neutral, pastoral colours to works that had an aura of 60's optimism. Her palettes became brighter, bolder, braver, yet managed to remain refined and balanced.

Towards the end of her career Blow emphasised the importance of finding balance when creating a piece of art. She explains that a powerful piece of work has, 'to do with that sense of it being an entity, that it has got the right balance of colour, of the areas, of the shape, everything working together and making a total.' In many ways Blow's aim for balance in one of her paintings is similar to our approach to finding balance when designing interiors.

Like Blow we aim to sensitively make use of a range of different materials and textures when designing a space; a room can come alive with the use of surprising juxtaposition of different colours and patterns, and an eclectic mix of antiques and modern pieces of furniture. When reading a space we strive to pay close attention to each element of the room, and the way in which details clash and harmonise, creating a space that is balanced and therefore liveable.

During the 70's Blow worked with the architect Eric Defty on a collection of paintings. This collaboration would have a great influence on Blow as she would come to see the power of blending architectural elements and simple geometric forms amongst organic shapes and colours on her canvases.

Though painting remained Blow's main discipline throughout her career it is clear that she continued to find great inspiration in architecture and interior design. She explains that art, just like a beautiful room in a house, has the power to do good: 'it really does enhance life, and I think in a way that good architecture, if you live in, amongst good buildings. I've noticed, I once went to a building in Norfolk, I can't think of its name now, but as I walked into the courtyard I absolutely changed my posture and I felt a totally different mood than before I went into it, and I felt I was walking and feeling something that was happening to me by being in that space with those buildings round me. And so, I just feel it is part of what I would call the good in the world.'

Blow's curiosity and dedication to being open to the influences and materials of everyday life remains inspiring to this day. She insists that crucial to a powerful piece of art is that 'there is an unexpected quality about it, an element of surprise.' We try to emulate this assertion at Ansell Studio, applying to interiors the same skilled and mysterious way in which Blow makes art that manages to surprise yet sooth its audience. Blow worked persistently throughout her career, exploring and experimenting with shape, texture, line and colour, developing a body of work that will go on to enthrall generations.



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UNTITLED | SANDRA BLOW, 1975

BRILLIANT CORNER III | SANDRA BLOW, 2003