

# ARTIST PROFILE

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## Lincoln Austin

By Louella Hayes

**Congratulations to Lincoln Austin, the winner of Flying Arts Alliance Inc. Art For Life Award, with their 2023 work 'I saw myself, in you, wondering, how did I get here.' Keep an eye out for more on Lincoln Austin in the next issue of Artist Profile!**

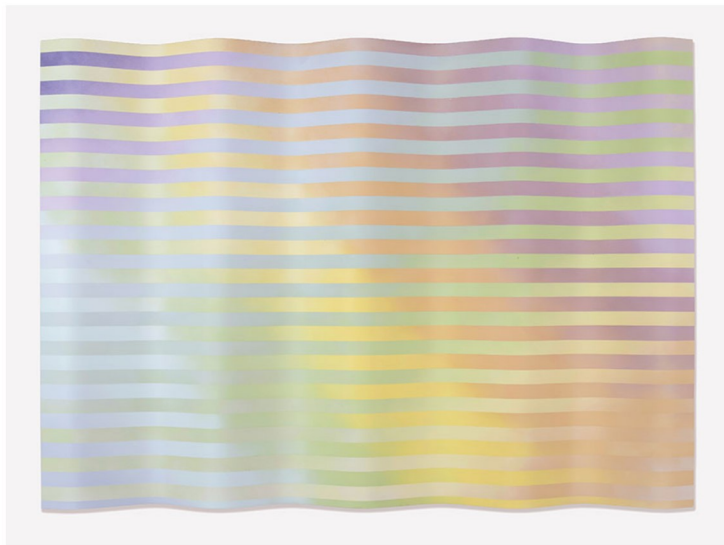
**Fiona Foley, judge of QRAA, said, "One of the marvels of life - is the art of artist Lincoln Austin. Enthralling us with movement in colour and form, this work is no exception - but pure wonder, - how did they do it?"**

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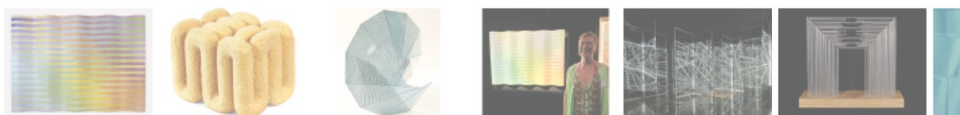
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I saw myself, in you, wondering, how did I get here, 2023, synthetic polymer paint on aluminium composite board, 80 x 9 x 113 cm, photographed by Carl Warner

Louella Hayes interviewed Lincoln Austin for [issue 43](#) of *Artist Profile* in 2018.

Lincoln Austin's artworks invite their audience to experience a vivid world of optical confusion. Their unique sense of colour, pattern and form excite the eye and implicate the viewer through the need for physical navigation. Through their work, Austin seeks to provide an experience of pleasure, love and humour that supersedes written language.

### Your artistic career started in theatre set design. Can you tell me about those beginnings?

I had many interests as a young man. I was making jewellery, art and furniture, and I couldn't decide where my life should go. I started volunteering at an art theatre in Adelaide. I realised that I could do anything in theatre; I got to work on the micro scale in model-making and on the macro scale in construction, so it was perfect for me, I could indulge all of my whims in one place.

A lot of people run to the theatre, but I ran away from it. I fell in love and ran to Brisbane, and went back to the quiet, solitary life of the artist. The beauty of making art is that you're very self-reliant. Theatre requires a massive injection of funds and people in order for it to happen, whereas art, you can just make it.

### It was influential?

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enter into the work. I was trying not to be too didactic in my approach to art-making, trying not to say too much, so that what I said was coming from my unconscious.

#### **Does this background feed into your use of colour?**

The theatre world isn't that colourful. I remember a lot of black. I love colour, I like to shock the eye in any way that's possible. When something happens in your eye you become conscious of the fact that you're looking. So if I can put two colours together that do something to excite the eye, that's exciting for me.

Also, moving to the subtropics. When I first came to Brisbane it was a very positive place. The theatre world is one of inside and darkness, and I guess I came out of that world to the subtropics where it was bright, and I embraced that.

#### **In your artist statement for 'Habena' in 2013, you wrote: 'Each of us is both influenced and influential.' There is a theme of your artworks implicating the viewer.**

I hope so, absolutely. And that's part of the conversation about keeping myself out, it allows someone else to come in. And maybe that's the theatre side of me as well, this idea that there is an audience and that someone is going to look at this work.

The largest work I've made to date, and it's a new direction for me, is a video work I made at the end of last year. Hang on to yourself (2017) was fifty-six large projection screens made out of flyscreens. There was a two-channel video projecting onto this matrix, this maze, of vertical screens. The video bled through the layers of screen. It was the most theatrical work I've made in a long time, and essentially the audience made the work. Once you enter into the work, you become part of the video projection; but at the same time you are camouflaged by the projection, and as you move deeper and deeper into the work, eventually you disappear behind these multiple layers of screen.

The touchstone, for me, of the success of a sculpture is that a person feels obliged to circumnavigate it. There's a physical experience attached to the process of looking; it's not just a passive observation. That's how I know whether the work is successful or not: watching people interact with it. If they're being static I've done something wrong, I haven't engaged them enough.

#### **Can you tell me about your relationship with mathematics?**

Mathematics and pattern are two of those things that no one can claim ownership on, that we all share. There is language that crosses borders and boundaries; one of those is mathematics, and also art and music. That's the reason I do what I do. You can communicate on another level with people and you're not restricted by culture and language.

#### **What about your fascination with optics?**

There's something really beautiful about an optical phenomenon, that it's not really illusory, it's a real thing that happens, a problem with the communication between the eye and the brain. It's a lovely thing that you can confuse them. You can remind yourself that your eye is a living thing, it's not a camera. It interprets. Looking is not absolute.

Turning that minimalist Gestalt idea on its head; instead of saying that as soon as you see an object you know it, it is an object that you have to get to know, and the only way you get to know it is by physically navigating the work. It's an experiential thing. And as much as there's joy and pleasure, I also have this fantasy about one day making a work that makes someone feel a little bit nauseous.

#### **What challenges you as an artist motivated by scale?**

I've tried to make works on the edge of collapse. I enjoy the idea of pushing scale to the point where material is at its end, reaching a point of critical mass, but still able to sustain itself. I really love that challenge, of pushing things as far as you can.

Working on public art is different again, because you're reliant on the expertise of manufacturers and engineers. Sometimes that's frustrating because there are restrictions as far as what can be done. I enjoy learning through that process; there's something to be gained from it, which will then inform the work that follows. Reconciling the two things, the studio work and the public work, has made perfect sense to me. The two have pushed against each other but they also inform each other. A project might throw me off course in the studio, but then you come back to the studio and something new happens that wouldn't have happened unless you'd had this other experience.

#### **You've said: 'I want the work to be enjoyed and for people to take pleasure in what I take pleasure in.'**

There has to be love. If there's no love in the process, then you're wasting your time. I also think there needs to be humour. There are serious moments as well. I'm a liar if I say the process is always pleasurable. I take pleasure sometimes in the process being quite draining. I speak about doing factory work all the time, and it's occasionally incredibly frustrating, but you know that at the end of the process there'll be something that you can enjoy. I try to keep those things in mind when I'm working: ideas of joy and pleasure and love and humour, and let them bubble through.

Images courtesy the artist, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane, Flying Arts Alliance Inc., Queensland, Jan Murphy Gallery, Brisbane, and Nicholas Thompson Gallery, Melbourne.

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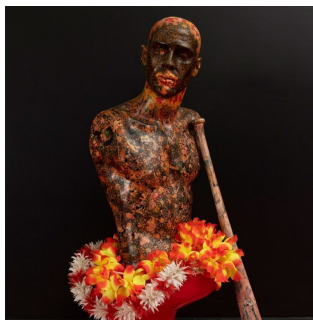
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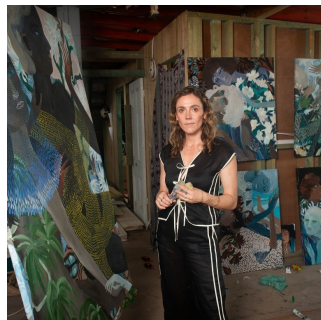
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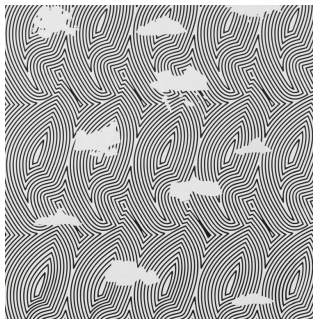
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