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Art

MEET THE ARTIST Aleksandra Mir



With the help of ten assistants, the London-based artist has transformed our city into a 24 metre-long drawing that delves into the collective dynamism of the metropolis. She tells **Freire Barnes** about brutalism, working with Sharpie pens and mocking art history.

The city's so colourful but you work in monochrome. Why?

'The work is black and white but it has a vibrancy and there are different tonalities in the black. I've pushed the pen to its extreme, creating a whole repertoire of strokes, lines and patterns.'

Why do you work with a team of assistants?

'If I did this alone it would look really boring. You can see how much more vibrant it is because there are different hands doing it. I'm using people as a way of diversifying my own palette.'

What was it about London that inspired you to make this work?

'I'm mostly interested in the energy. The drawing is an image of London landmarks that harnesses the energy of the ten people who are helping me make this work. They're demographically very different and they contribute their personality and diversity to this drawing.'

What aspects of the city did you want to capture?

'I'm intrigued by London's incredible layering of history, styles and the congestion of it all. The city is so rich, so dense. Many cities have just one style but here you have a brutalist building next to the Shard, for example. It's an archaeology of the city, in a way, and excavating those layers has been fascinating.'

You've drawn the Gherkin upside down!

'Yes, that's just taking artistic liberties; I don't want to render the city architecturally. I've squashed one building from Westminster next to an Elephant & Castle high-rise to make the disparity appear even more overt. My job as an artist is to subvert and mock the age-old traditions of Western art.'

If I did this alone it would look really boring

Does your way of working reflect your subject?

'My subject is always society. This is the first project where I've focused on architecture as a subject but it's always about communal experience.'

What is it about Sharpie pens that you love?

'It's a random preference - like the way you like a flavour of ice cream, I suppose. I used to use Sharpies for taking notes and doodling. I was then asked to do a drawing for a fanzine and I used a Sharpie and it felt free and unburdened. With a Sharpie there isn't that tremendous weight of history on your shoulder. It's just a contemporary gadget and if I can elevate it into something masterful then hopefully I'm in sync with my time.'

Aleksandra Mir is at The Drawing Room, 12 Rich Estate, Crimscott St, SE1 5TE. ► Jul 19.