







# ARTISTS OF VISION

The Hackney Wick and Haringey art scenes together have a higher concentration of artists than anywhere else in the whole of Europe. We meet three visionary artists from each community and unearth the inspiration behind their work.

Words by Jessica Furseth  
Photography by Tara Darby

She's not quite what you'd expect, Lauren Baker. Her art is intense, bright and hard-hitting, so you'd think the person dreaming it up would be loud and brash. Of course, Lauren is plenty intense once you've spent some time with her, but the surface remains deceptively subtle: a small girl with lots of big brown hair, riding a pink mini-bike with a Chihuahua inside her coat. In a sense, Lauren's a bit like her art: the surface is only half the story. Look closer and something happens, it's where light and dark collide; it's sharp and fearless, and ultimately, fascinating.

Lauren's Hackney Downs studio is halfway between Hackney Wick, which has the highest concentration of creative practitioners in Europe, and Haringey, home to a thriving artist community including the Chocolate Factory, London's biggest studio complex.

While conscious of the nurturing effect of the East London arts scene, self-admitted workaholic Baker is really just doing her thing, no biggie. Her studio is inside a railway arch next to Hackney Downs; perfect, she says, so close to her house. Inside her studio we're surrounded everywhere by skulls: gold and metallic ones, jewelled eyes, bright neons, colourful crystals, painted in jagged or sweeping patterns, energetic and bold.

Today she's in a loose, long-sleeved playsuit and tights, with chunky jewellery in silver and bone offsetting the discrete outfit. Lauren serves tea in mismatched crockery before sitting down and launching into the story of how she got to where she is today.





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Now 32, Lauren has only been an artist for three years: "I didn't find my passion until I was 29. It's moving really fast. Now that I'm finally on the right path, it's just flowing."

Lauren credits her former life of working in events and marketing as part of the reason she's managed to become a successful artist in such a short time; she knows how to attract attention to her work, and this is how the Tate Modern picked her up after her very first show.

But it was necessary to make a change: "I quit my old job and went to South America. I was looking for an adventure, a spiritual path." What she found was a mosaics artist in Brazil, who inspired Lauren to go to Venice and learn the craft. Lauren now considers herself a multimedia artist: "I see my art practice as one big fun experiment. I don't want to restrict myself."

It's sunny outside the cool railway arch, and Lauren's Chihuahua, Dude, is keen to go outside. She releases the dog once we round the corner into Hackney Downs, and the tiny dog disappears immediately in the tall grass. "I love it here," she says, as she waves to a woman passing on a bicycle: "That's my neighbour. She's a blacksmith."

Early in her career, she decided she wanted to decorate display windows, picked three places she fancied, and ended up with Harrods. She makes it sound easy, like it was nothing. The Harrods window led to a Selfridges window, and there were shows in New York, California, Ibiza. "I think, in order to succeed, you need the ability to just go for it! Not letting yourself be led astray by what other people want you to do. Stay true to your heart," she says, in an effort to explain how she does it.

And, Lauren is quick to add, you need to be a top-notch networker. "You really need to get yourself out there, go to exhibitions, art fairs, talk to lots of people and tell them what you're doing." Being part of Hackney Downs Studios makes this possible without going far; home to over 100 artists, designers, record labels, bookbinders and other creatives, even a brewery. Regular events and open studio days, plus a café, shop and gallery, ensure a nurturing community.

She seems to be having a lot of fun. Is she? Lauren looks up from Dude in her lap, and for a moment it's like she's surprised. Then she lets out a big, red-lipsticked laugh: "Yes! I'm having a really good time!" And you know it's true.



## ADAM DOUGHTY ILLUSTRATOR: HACKNEY WICK

Adam Doughty draws what he sees: a pint, King's Cross station, some cheese, what the weekend feels like. Of course, it's all re-imagined, bringing a sense of magical, yet simple, realism to his work. "I liked the phrase 'magical realism', I felt it was a fitting term to describe my work," says Adam. "I focus on the everyday, but I like to play with aspects of the illustration, like manipulating scale, adding historical references, and using a varied colour palette."

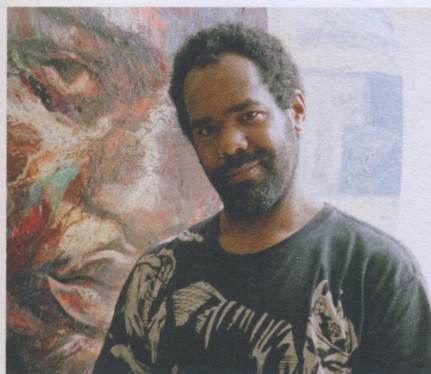
The result is day-to-day elements captured with a whimsical feel. Adam likes to research the history of an area before drawing it: "It's inspiring to discover the old use of a building, the people who worked there and what it stood for." Like his workplace, the Bridget Riley Studios in the part of Hackney Wick known as Fish Island; the building used to be part of a peanut factory. "The Bridget Riley Studios has such an array of talent. At the last Hackney WickED open studios I talked with painters, glass cutters, sculptors, illustrators, web designers, architects, fashion designers - all in the same building."

"Our studio is quite spacious and we all get on really well. I love the fact that the space is hidden

away, nestled in the corner of an artistic hub," he says. "I'm proud to show visitors around the area. The graffiti, the quirky sculptures, canal boats, the giant stadium, and the creation of the neighbouring Queen Elizabeth Park. It all makes for an interesting experience."

Doughty lives ten minutes' walk from his Fish Island workspace, in Bow. "I loved the feel of the place straight away, especially the vibrant arts

scene in Hackney Wick. If you need support, it's there for you." Doughty has been experimenting with larger scale illustrations, but he always has a couple of Moleskine notebooks on the go: "I sketch and draw in these when I'm out and about. I draw on the bus, train, the doctor's surgery, the beach, the Sikh Temple in Bow - anywhere that allows it." He laughs. "The only place I've been told off for drawing was in the Tate Modern!"



## MATT SMALL PAINTER: HARINGEY

"North London is one big village," says Matt Small. He's sitting on the fire escape of his flat in Camden right now, but his workspace, at Euroart Studios in Haringey, is just a short journey away on the Overground. There are new studios opening up all the time, Small observes, with lots of open days and initiatives for support: "There's a DIY mentality growing. I think us artists have realised it's important to take control, and not wait on

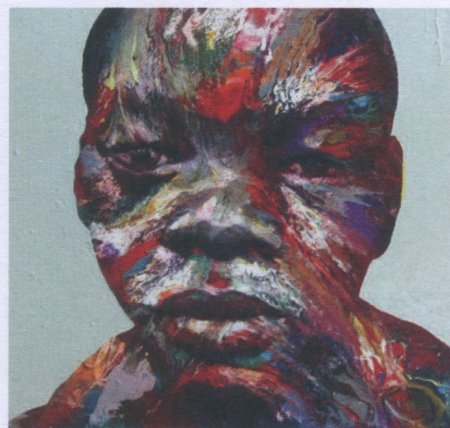
established organisations to provide support."

As a full-time artist, Matt knows that locking yourself away in your studio to focus on your craft probably won't cut it: "You have to be savvy about promoting yourself. That's a part of the job as well, and not something us artists have traditionally been so great at. So it's good to have a network of individuals who are in the same boat as you."

Matt has a strong, compelling style, often choosing discarded objects like car bonnets or old signs instead of canvas for his work. "The theme of my work is young, dispossessed people: individuals who feel undervalued, who don't have a voice, who get looked over." Matt explains how the urban debris he paints on are symbolic of the feeling of being without value: "I thought it'd be interesting to connect the two - that oven door, that shelving unit, that piece of trash to someone - I don't see it like that, I see that it can be something beautiful and worthwhile. That's how I see our young people too. Let's look at their potential, at the hope that's in all of them."

Matt has hosted workshops for socially marginalised people, driven in part by a desire


to give them a voice, but also wanting to make art more approachable in general. "I think the art world is un-inclusive by design, but for me, making it understandable and connected to us mere mortals is what art is about. The most powerful thing you can do as an individual: creatively express yourself, visually or through music or dance." And of course, there's the thrill of the challenge: "I'd feel as if I was cheating myself if I wasn't pushing the boundaries of my own potential. Keep discovering, keep finding, keep playing."











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Matt Small, in  
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Studios, Haringey



**NATALIE RYDE,  
PAINTER/PRINTMAKER:  
HACKNEY WICK**

Delicate nets and intricate webs are in Natalie Ryde's blood, it seems; she had been drawing these patterns for years before discovering her family's 300-year history as framework knitters. "It's so curious to me. I'd been drawing these nets and ferns almost intuitively," says Natalie, who since graduating from Edinburgh College of Arts has had notable commissions at Kensington Palace and Kew Gardens.

The realisation came five years ago, when her family was invited to visit the factory where their ancestors had worked for generations. "My family knew, but they never mentioned it. They just took it for granted. So it's definitely not from nurture!"

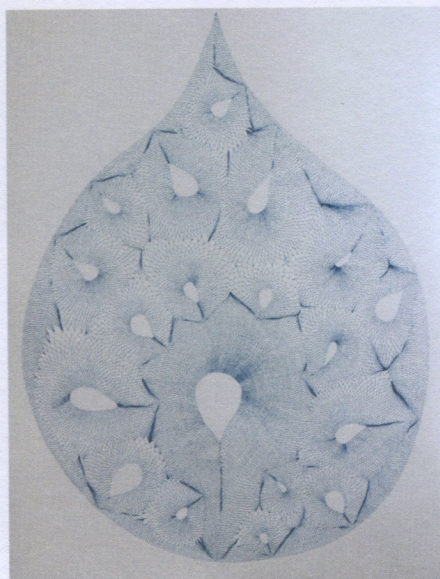
Studying nature, and the close-up details, are key elements in Natalie's work. Her nets create a "sub-lingual pattern" that tries to convey something: "It hints at things that are familiar but not quite discernible, like you can relate to them but you're not quite sure what they are."

She laughs a bit, nervously; it's hard to explain what she means. "I'm compelled to drawing things and making things in response to the world around me. I can remember being little and wanting to be really good at drawing. It's so much a part of my life now, I can't imagine it not being the thing I do every day."

Originally from Scotland, Natalie works at Wallis Studios in Hackney Wick. "Why did I come here? Because this is where everyone is!" Previously living in London Fields, Ryde has since moved to Haringey. "I was thinking of getting a studio closer to home, but I quite like the commute. I cycle down, along the canal."

Not to mention the community in the Wick: "It's exciting, there's always lots of exhibitions and galleries. People work hard here, it's nice." Natalie is part of a mentoring programme for artists in the area and also works in arts education, for local children in nearby Queen Elizabeth Park.

And of course, there's the net drawings. "I have worked in lots of different mediums but I'm focusing on the nets, as I feel that's my visual language now," says Natalie. "I get my ideas from being outside, but I'm not necessarily interested in the view. I'm more interested in the ground, or in things that are washed up on the beach. That's how you'll find those strange things, detached from their context." Natalie recently exhibited at The Other Art Fair at Brick Lane's iconic Old Truman Brewery.







## RICHARD PEACOCK, PRINTMAKER: HARINGEY

"The Chocolate Factory is really not bad," says Richard Peacock, who's been in his Haringey studio for 14 years now. "When I first qualified I had a studio in Dalston, where you had to scrape the ice off the windows. But here, we have heating!" He laughs. Richard lives close to his studios too, although this is a happy accident; he originally

came to Haringey because his sister lived there. "I didn't do my art degree until my 30s. As a teenager in Essex I wanted to be an artist, but I didn't get back into it until I started going to evening classes. Then slowly and surely it became the most important thing in my life."

Richard talks about the "rhythmic abstract" process of screen printing, the "changes in the weight of the inks" and the "variation in the edges of the shapes."

This is a physical experience, requiring 24 different processes for each print. It can be planned or intuitive, but regardless: "You have to respond to what's happening. That should let you make something that's better than what you can plan."

The result is part abstract, part pop art, playfully exploring shapes and colours. "Every time a cardboard box comes into the house I take it apart and look at it," says Peacock. "I like things with holes and gaps in it, so you can see through it as you print layers. Someone once sent me this lovely waxed paper with lots of tiny holes, it had been used in a circuit factory." Richard used the paper to print strips, which began to resemble a forest. The resulting piece, "Step from the path", is his favourite. Sometimes he'll include words too, usually simple phrases, or maybe texts from spam emails or horoscopes; it's cliché language that ultimately says something about how we live.

Haringey has seen a lot of new artist spaces pop up in the past few years, Richard explains. While still a very diverse borough, things are becoming buzzier, especially around Tottenham with its open studios, and around Alexandra Park with its art trails. "Then there's the Chocolate Factory, which has its own community associated with it. There are lots of people here who are making things happen."



## ESTHER AINSWORTH MIXED-MEDIA ARTIST: HACKNEY WICK

It starts out subtle, Esther Ainsworth's work, always with a place or sound that's caught her attention. Like today, when she's in Balfron Tower, East London's Brutalist masterpiece: "It's an incredible building. I'm using it as a kind of residency, trying to conjure up ideas based on the environment."

Esther's main medium is sound, but through this comes an exploration of space. "I like looking at what makes an interesting place, and then finding the sonic information that gives it a sense of identity." The result is an experience that teases you in and opens you up, be it a recorded soundscape or a site-specific installation.

Esther has been at Mother Studios in Hackney Wick since 2006, which has provided its own experience as the area has changed. "Hackney Wick is such an interesting place to be. It was completely different when I got there," says Ainsworth; especially the previously "stark and industrial" Olympic area has undergone a complete transformation.

One of Esther's current collaborations is with a light artist also working at Mother Studios. "The activity on each floor at the studio is very sociable, very vibrant. People often work with

their doors open, and you can get feedback on your practice. We share a mailing list where everybody can promote their work," says Esther. "All the studio blocks and the galleries tend to know about each other. The Wick is essentially an artists' village, because there's not really anything else happening there!"

Having said that, Esther often works outside of East London. Her favourite project is called Drive-In Sound, a series of mobile projects exploring interactive technology, social networking and location through the medium of sound. Esther has done the project three times so far, travelling by car, plotting sonic routes nationally and internationally and inviting people to contribute via mobile phone or skype.

This also goes to the core of why Esther does her work: "It comes from trying to understand the world a little bit better. By finding interesting places, by hopefully connecting people between those places." She thinks about it. "The idea of uniting and building bridges between communities and cultures is very exciting for me. I don't think there's an arrival point, but there's a sense of journey. It drips through everything."