SARAH L STEWART - ARTIST STATEMENT FOR FIRST *SIMPLEXITY* EXHIBITION AT NOLAN GALLERY

The relationship between complexity and simplicity has long fascinated me. Juxtaposing these concepts as 'opposites' on a continuum seems to ignore their enmeshment, how they work together. For example, how is it that many apparently simple things have an underlying, often hidden, complexity? Why is it that complex ideas, once deconstructed, may be found to be elegantly simple?

'Simplexity' is a term that has been coined to describe the relationship between simplicity and complexity as complementary[1]. As an emerging theory it has been used in diverse fields[2], including in interdisciplinary work[3]. I have co-opted the concept to try to capture the interplay of simplicity and complexity in my art practice. While my process begins simply, arriving at a satisfying 'endpoint' can be complex.

Starting intuitively with lots of play and exploration, I use various media to make random marks, before starting to apply paint to the canvas or wood panel. I usually start with a colour palette in mind, the colours chosen reflective of my mood and/or the weather (external and internal!). I mix as many variations, tones and tints as I can from a limited palette to achieve depth and richness. I add layer upon layer, often removing as much paint as I apply, so that each 'finished' painting has several underpaintings lurking beneath the surface, creating a history for each work. Eventually, there comes a point in my exploration where something starts to emerge, a line of inquiry that I want to follow further, or a composition suggests itself. At this stage (which for some paintings can seem to take forever to reach), my process has to become more deliberate and intentional. I need to 'switch gears' to engage my mind (not just my feelings) to apply principles of design. Clarifying and refining a piece involves checking the value contrast and colour harmony and ensuring that there is both enough happening in the painting to lead a viewer's eye around, but not so much happening that there is nowhere for the eye to rest.

I consider a painting 'done' (well, you have to stop somewhere, because with abstraction, you could just keep going!), when it is no longer nagging at me to change anything. I need to feel satisfied that my simple shapes (geometric and organic) and lines (straight and squiggly, bold and fine) appear to emerge from and be supported by layers of paint and sometimes other media. Texture (both physical and visual) and colour provide complexity to counterbalance the simplicity of the shapes and lines.

If asked what inspires my art, my (simple) answer is: living. Explaining the 'conundrum of simplexity', Kluger suggests that living in a complex world is best achieved by following simple rules. Similarly, in artmaking, I follow simple principles to create what I hope are complex and nuanced paintings.

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[1] The creation and popularisation of the term has been attributed to Anuraj Gambhir, futurist, speaker, consultant and educator.
[2] Such as design, education, finance, science and social science
[3] Jeffrey Kluger's 2008 book *Simplexity: Why Simple Things Become Complex (and how things can be made simple)* explains how simplexity theory can be usefully applied to multiple disciplines.