



# Rosie Emerson

A multidisciplinary printmaker, working almost exclusively on representing the female form, **ROSIE EMERSON**'s work is unapologetically feminine. She tells *Niki Browes* about how her life has been absorbed by art from the start

**A**S EXQUISITELY DEMONSTRATED in the Tate Modern's current exhibition *Capturing the Moment* (on until 28 January 2024 and as featured in the Summer issue of *Artists & Illustrators*) world-renowned artists including Andy Warhol, David Hockney and Jackson Pollock have, for years, been blurring the lines between painting and photography.

London-based visual artist Rosie Emerson takes a similar approach. She works with photography, which is then edited and, upon completion, she decides what size and shape the canvas will be. Working with three different print mediums – currently screen-print, cyanotype and photopolymer etchings – each

one requires a different approach and, along with photography, includes print and painting.

Rosie's grandmother was an artist who trained at the Slade School of Art, pre and post second world war. Rosie says knowing her grandmother was a successful painter – and from watching her work, stage exhibitions and seeing how her art developed throughout her life – made it feel to Rosie that art as a profession was a real thing you could do, and had a huge impact.

Her father is also a cabinet maker and “a magpie,” and Rosie sees herself in him through her practice. Her sister is an artist, too, whilst mum was a Spanish teacher who also writes poetry. Art and creativity – it's a family affair.

[rosieemerson.co.uk](http://rosieemerson.co.uk) ▶



*Elekra*, hand-painted Cyanotype with 22 carat gold leaf on paper

**I grew up in Dorset in a house that backed onto a field.**

This was my playground, where I would play make-believe and lose myself in storytelling; all essential components of my childhood. I feel fortunate that, through my art, these are all things I still get to indulge in. My father had his workshop in the garden. I would love finding the secret drawers in expensive roll-top desks he was restoring whilst admiring the beautiful mother of pearl and brass inlays he would repair. Creativity was always encouraged at home and I was constantly drawing and making scrapbooks. I loved tidying my mum's sewing box and would play with her box of buttons. I soon began collecting things. Today, for instance, I have an extensive collection of sugar lumps!

**I'm dyslexic which made reading and writing a challenge, but I think of it now as my superpower.**

I'm a visual thinker; it's my first language. I was at my happiest in the art room at school and went on to do an Art Foundation course at Bournemouth Arts Institute. At the time, Wolfgang Tillmans had just won the Turner prize so there was a lot of focus on photography – and I soon fell in love with the magic of the darkroom.

**Thankfully, I am now a professional artist.**

But for the first 15 years or so, to supplement my income, I made sure I worked in a lot of fancy art galleries and auction houses around London, which were my favourite places to visit. The Wallace Collection, the John Soames Museum, the Royal Academy, the National Gallery and Christies were regulars where I would serve canapes and drinks. I always joked I was in all the right places – but in the wrong job! Still, it meant I got to see a lot of art for free, and it was ad hoc, meaning when I wasn't working, I could focus on my practice. Then I had my first big break in my twenties when I got a commission to create 15 works of art for a cruise ship.

**I have been fortunate to have had rather a lot of work featured in a number of press articles.**

For instance, a *Sunday Times Style* supplement collaboration led to a sell-out edition of a Brigitte Bardot print I made fairly early on in my career. I also worked with the jewellery designer Annoushka Ducus and had an exhibition in her flagship store on Sloane Square which led to some lovely features in *Town and Country*, *Vogue*, *Tatler* and *AnOther Magazine*. It featured the models Amber Le Bon, Daisy Lowe and singer Eliza Doolittle



*Mare Tranquillitatis*, hand-painted photopolymer etching with 22 carat gold leaf

**My work is unapologetically beautiful and feminine**

and was one of the glitziest projects I've ever worked on.

**My work can be very varied.**

Last year, I worked on several hotel commissions, including two bespoke pieces for the newly refurbished Vesper Bar at The Dorchester along with a piece for The Waldorf Astoria in New York. I also work with galleries that take me to art fairs, such as The London Original Print Fair whilst I also sell to people directly. During the pandemic, I did a lot of portrait commissions and I really enjoyed being part of lives in such a personal way, making work which will be hopefully passed through the generations. Now I'm working on a new body of work for my solo show next year in Bristol with the Smithsonian Gallery.

**I began working with the female figure,**

**collaging from fashion magazines, creating these elongated figures, as my first ever review said that my figures 'etiolated' as if they had subsumed the pedestals they were placed upon.**

"They are a social comment and an exploration into creating works with both an element of the known and unknown which has been a thread throughout my work. It is definitely more of an idea I am portraying rather than a portrait. It's a subject I feel both most and least qualified to portray. Mostly because I am a woman with strong feminist beliefs and least because there is a responsibility in portraying women. It's a dance working with beauty in art, as this is also the land of advertising and Instagram. I like exploring the surface level, both physically and metaphorically. I'm interested in the sheen, the façade, the presentation, the performance; the stuff of dreams and fantasy. My work is unapologetically beautiful and feminine.

**I have a studio at home within our Victorian terrace.**

What would normally be the master bedroom at the front is now a multifunctional space where I do my photoshoots – the lights come out and the backdrops go up – whilst I also do



*Brigitte Bardot*, charcoal powder and black glitter screen print on paper



*Leap*, hand-painted Cyanotype with 22 carat gold leaf on paper



*Enigma*, hand-painted charcoal and bronze powder screen print on paper

my hand painting there. I have a lightbox on the wall so I can clearly see where the hand painting needs to go. I also make my little theatre sets here so they line the walls on shelves. There are lots of dried flowers in vases, shelves full of brass furniture handles, cotton reels, baubles, bottle tops, beads and buttons, pots full of powders and pigments, folders full of image cuttings, and I have a big plan chest on wheels where I store my prints. A magpie like my dad, see?

**I'd never got on with any social media platforms until I tried Instagram.**

It being mostly visual suits me best and it was a great support during the pandemic with The Artist Support Pledge. I left London eight years ago and became a mother, both of which were potentially isolating, but Instagram has enabled me to stay connected with other artists and reach new audiences. I now reveal far more now about my process than I used to. I think before I was worried it took away some of the magic, knowing how something was made, but I find people are fascinated to see the process. Because my artworks are a mixture of digital and analogue, it helps people see what they are looking at and all the craft that has gone into it.

**Silhouettes are my biggest influence.**

Like many artists and photographers, I have been drawn to silhouettes, from early paper cuts and cameos to Man Ray, Film Noir and fashion photographers including Richard Avedon, Irving Penn and Erwin Blumenfeld. I am not sure what sparked this love. It could have been Japanese prints, in their use of negative space, areas of fine detail and their sharp graphic feel. They maintain a balance of both strong and bold and fine with decorative qualities.

**I'd be wary of telling anyone else to jump into becoming a professional; there are no sure footings in the art world, and it can feel like an intimidating and elitist place.**

Just try to be you, meaning as authentic as possible. I'd say keep going and gradually make your side hustle your main hustle; there's nothing wrong with working to supplement your income alongside your practice. I know plenty of successful artists who do other work alongside their paintings; it can offer you creative liberation in many ways as you're not always worrying about making money through your art. Still, don't wait for things to happen – because they won't. Organise things yourself; remember the world doesn't owe you a job. But if you can carve your dream job out for yourself – which you can – then go for it. ☐