



Chuck Elliott has been working as an artist since he graduated in 1992, originally working from a series of studios in and around Soho and the East End of London. He now runs a busy studio in Bristol. Over recent years his work has been included in shows at the Royal College, the Royal Academy, London's Southbank Centre and on Cork Street.

Louise Copping works as a curator and critic. Based in Bristol, she has been working closely with Transistor, and has become familiar with the group's working methods. In discussion, she questions where the future may lie for the Transistor project, and Chuck's studio practice in particular. Photography by Julian Welsh and Liz Eve.



Fluid dynamic

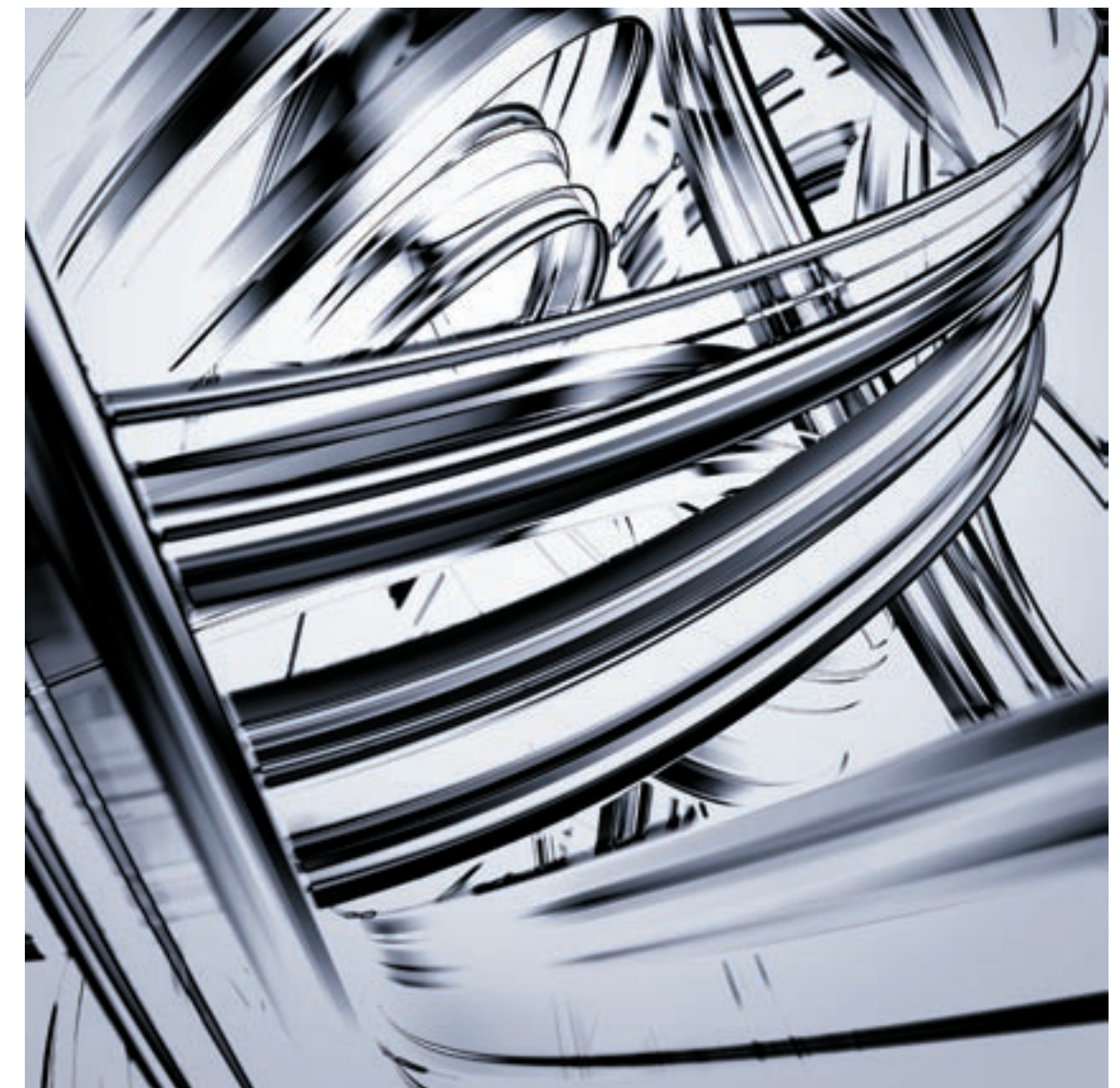
Chuck Elliott's incandescent digital abstractions have become increasingly collectable over the last five years. Louise Copping makes a studio visit to discover how they're made, and what drives the project.

I know from our work together that you see your drawing process as experimental rather than goal driven. Can you explain that a bit further? *LC*

To date, none of my pieces have been goal driven, there isn't a predetermined image that I'm trying to capture. In place of the traditional 'goal' is an experimental drawing process in which new forms are drawn, sculpted, manipulated, glazed, lit and rendered. A kind of abstract sculptural environment within which views

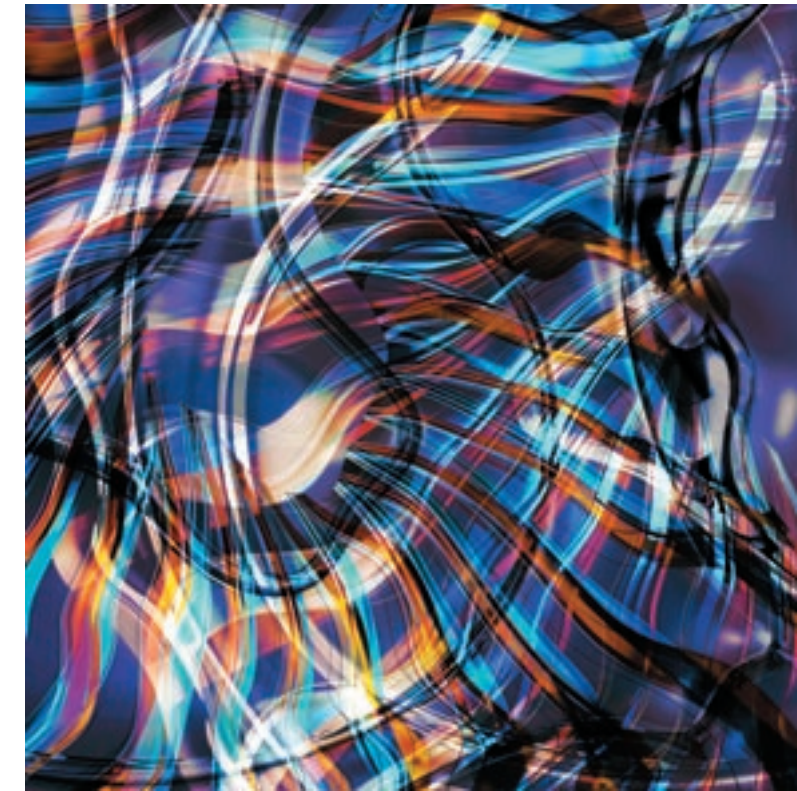
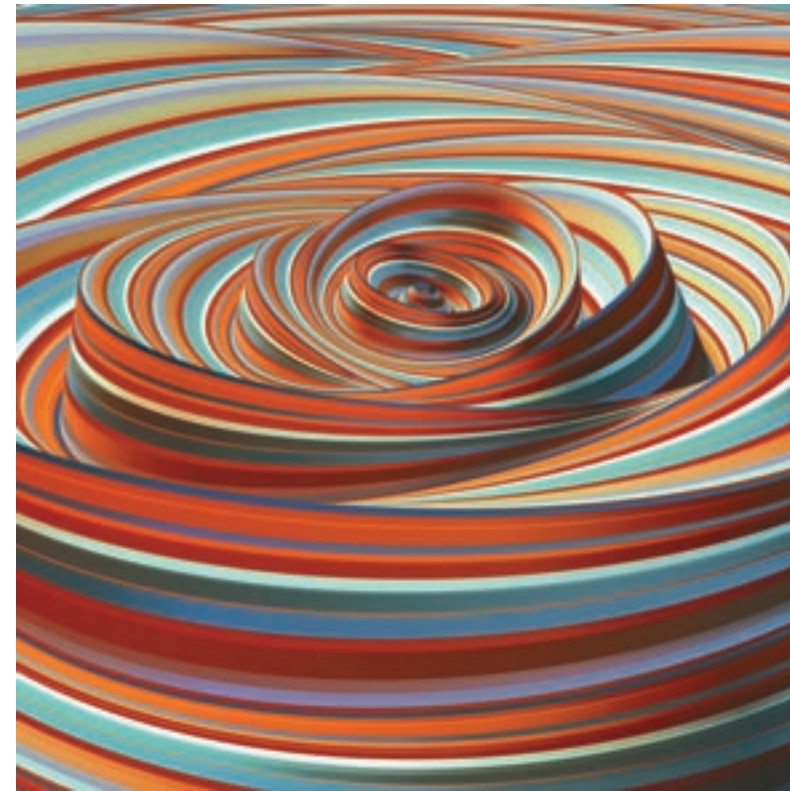
or images become apparent as the process resolves itself.

Some of the drawings remain incomplete as a result, in some way failing to deliver a cohesive image or solution to the parameters I've set, and subsequently never see the light of day. But those that do fly are imbued with a density of interest and completeness that I feel validates them in a way that wouldn't happen if I were using more traditional media. *CE*



Left: Lumen / lacquered kandy

Above: Halcyon / silver solar



Left:
Arpeggi / REZ /
cerulean japanned

Above left:
Revolver / oxidised

Above right:
Shellac / indigo base

Below right:
Wave / electrolysed

The surface of your work seems to be of particular interest to you. The pieces have a high gloss sheen that unifies the line work and colour spaces, whilst capturing deep reflections from the spaces they inhabit. Tell me more about that process. LC

Some twenty years ago I used to spray custom motor scooters, so perhaps I've retained a deep seated love for that language of colour and the high gloss finishing that went with the scene. The candy paints would be sprayed on with dozens of coats of clear lacquer, and in fact many of my naming processes stem from those times - candy, metalflake, pearlescent and so forth. There was also a vogue for pin lining in contrasting colours, a practice which I've certainly held on to.

The shimmering metallic quality of the finished work, in which the final image is captured, as if a single moment, from a series of kinetic movements, is in part provided by the Diasac mounting behind Perspex, and in part by the pearlescent photographic paper I'm using for the Lambda printing.

Of course there are layers of preliminary studies and exploratory drawings underlying that surface. But in the end, when the work leaves the studio, it's the final image and it's surface that has to convert some tangible interest, or even an abstract beauty, that will draw people in and create some kind of presence within a space. CE

You use terms such as 'liquid geometry', 'captured light' and 'brilliant incandescence' to describe your practice. Can you expand on these phrases? LC

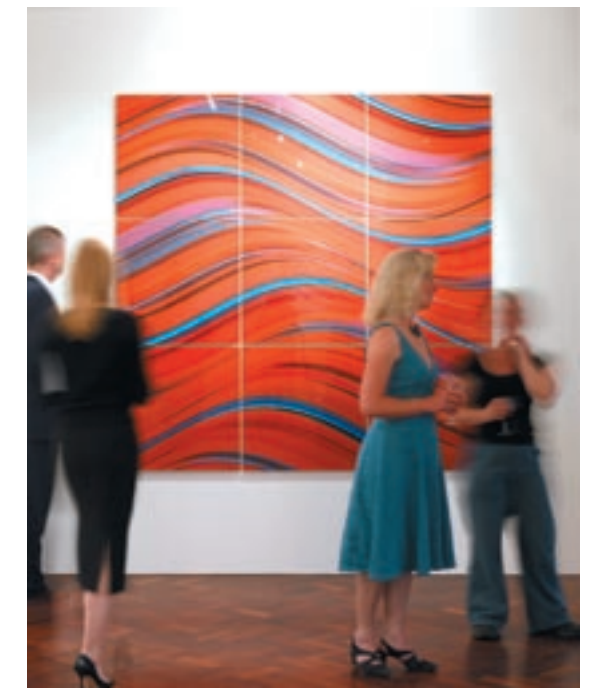
I guess they're a kind of linguistic shorthand to sum up the core of what I'm going for at the moment. Digital drawing systems allow you to create dense sculptural forms that haven't previously been possible. Geometries can be far more complex than they could even ten years ago. Zaha Hadid's practice, for instance,

is a textbook example of how technology is changing the way we can explore form.

Studying glass making, I became aware that Dale Chihuly, for example, creates a colour and kinetic interaction with light in his work, that I'm definitely keen to evoke. So trying to capture some of that effervescence and brilliance, by exploring light and colour densities, and embedding that drama in the work, is a key part of the process. CE

Your work seems to look forward, but without being completely cut off from the long tradition of British colour abstraction, and the modernist movement that suffuses the art world. Do you see yourself as a modernist, or more firmly rooted in the contemporary scene? LC

I think the work absolutely picks up on that long tradition of constructivist, vorticist and modernist work from Britain, Europe and America, but moves it





Above:
Flow / indigo black

Below right:
Transistor at the
Southbank

on into a contemporary space. Partially because of the industrial / digital production techniques I employ, such as the laser light exposure, and the laser cut Perspex. I think a move toward the contemporary and away from the geometric purity of modernism will become more clearly defined in my work over the next few years. *CE*

We've often discussed inspirational groups like Tomato, painters such as Albert Oehlen, and of course the ubiquity of the Apple Mac. Can you discuss how digital tools have become embedded in the fine art process for you and other contemporary artists? *LC*
I first discovered the Mac in 1984, by sneaking into a pioneering software consultancy called Praxis one

evening after work. They had imported what was reputed to be the first Apple computer in the UK. I was completely sold on the idea that you could draw, edit and erase, fine tuning your work until all the relationships made sense, or in some way coalesced.

I think most people have embraced digital techniques in music and film, photography and architecture, and whilst there are some corners of the art world that have yet to condone it, digital work has been brought into the mainstream by artists such as Julian Opie, Tony Cragg, Takashi Murakami and Andreas Gursky, to great effect, and has enriched our visual culture in a myriad of unexpected ways.

Your reference to Tomato is apt, a hybrid studio fusing the music of Underworld with digital art projects such



Above:
Group of works from the
Kinetic series

Below right:
Aquiline / cerulean angel

as 'mmm... skyscraper I love you'. I think they, and other studios like Stylorouge and Why Not Associates have trailblazed a fusion of digital art, design and music which has already had a far reaching legacy, and of course the Apple Mac is a ubiquitous part of that process. Indeed Julian Opie's current web site makes specific reference to the Mac's desktop environment in which he creates his graphic works.

Albert Oehlen, for me, represents a great example of a hybrid artist who works across the digital / traditional divide. I'm increasingly intrigued by the idea of working back into the digital with paint, varnish and lacquers, as well as re-sculpting the works, perhaps with cuts, folds and seams. The 36 panel piece with nails I showed at the Bristol Contemporary Open was a primary example of this idea of objectifying the printed material within the gallery, and is an idea I will be pursuing further.

Clearly it is during the transition from the drawing board to the gallery that the work becomes imbued with its own life, and the collision between the analogue and the digital is a recurring theme that I'm keen to study further. My recent Arpeggi drawing is in part an exploration of a series of transitions from the seamless analogue curve to the clipped, cut and shut stepping of the digital forms, alongside a random fluidity that permeates the interstitial spaces.

It's this sense of what is ordered, what is generated, what is contrived and what is happenstance that really lies at the root of these most recent works. *CE*

You founded the Transistor project as a means of showing your own and other artists work, and to gain momentum within the art world. How does Transistor fit in with your studio practice, and what are you hoping to gain from the collaboration? *LC*

Transistor stems from a belief that artists prosper best when loosely affiliated in groups. So whilst I'm keen to continue showing work with established galleries, Transistor provides a great vehicle for creating experimental shows, without an overbearing concern for base line profitability. It's all part of my long term DIY ethos I guess. *CE*

So what's next? *LC*

I'm really excited to be able to get back to the studio full time this autumn, and I have a myriad of projects that I'm going to be working on.

The multi panel installations continue to be directional for me, and I may try out some non rectilinear forms with these. I'll also be working up some smaller studies of highly focused single forms, and there'll be a move towards more freeform abstractions, which will allow for a more lyrical and fluid exploration of the volume and line relationships I've been pursuing in studies such as Lumen and Shellac.

I'm also keen to reconvene my collaboration with Dunstan Baker at the Fine Art Print Company, and G. Ryder and Co, to create another boxed folio of works on paper as a follow up to the Arpeggi folio, which has been a new and intriguing departure for me this year.

In purely linguistic terms, I'll be moving away from 'Flow' and 'Lumen' and towards 'Torsion' and 'Shatter'. I think there'll be a natural progression with these new forms and I hope creating drawings around these more splintered ideas may be more in tune with the times in some way. *CE*

To view more of Chuck Elliott's work online, visit www.transistor.uk.com where there is also a listing of upcoming shows and events.

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