

# Exploring New Ideas

ELEANOR MCCOLL is a Discovery Bay-based artist and art educator. Originally from the UK, she moved to Hong Kong straight after university, setting up art school **Chameleon Workshop**.

We chatted to Eleanor about her evolution as an artist living and working here.

BY KATE FARR



## What's your background?

I first came to Hong Kong for work experience. I spent a fabulous two months working for former Youth Arts Festival costume designer Roberto Conti, loving every minute! When I completed my degree, I was offered a job to help set up an art school. Then, two years later, I went on to set up my own: Chameleon Workshop.

## Tell us about your career to date.

I've been producing art since I left university, but it's only in the last three years that I've begun calling myself an artist – in fact, it still feels strange to say it! Setting up Chameleon Workshop brought me the best of both worlds, as I could both teach and create art; however, after 11 years running the school, something had to give.

Becoming a mum pushed me to home in on what was really important to me. That was, firstly, being around for my children more, but it also helped my career focus. I chose to close the school and stop teaching for

a while in order to focus on my art. These days, I still run Chameleon Workshop but in a smaller way. Last year I launched a range of children's fine art kits together with toy company Nobel Creative, which is very exciting!

## Describe your creative process when embarking on a new series.

For my new Zodiac Collection, I could visualise exactly what I wanted to create, so it was a straightforward process of taking, choosing and tearing photos to fit within the animal silhouettes I'd designed. They were fun to do, and I worked on nothing else until I'd completed them.

Painting is a very different and often frustrating experience. I work on a few different pieces at once because of the drying time of oils. It can often feel like I'm getting nowhere as each one takes months to complete, but when I'm on a roll it's wonderful

and I don't want to stop! I have made peace with the fact that having three small kids means my painting will always progress at a slower pace than my other artwork.

For my photomontage work, I'll usually spend a few weeks photographing for a collection and, while I sometimes get great shots in one day, most of the time I return to the same area two or three times, just standing and waiting for the right tram to come by!

## How easy is it to work as an artist in HK?

I think that artists face the same challenges everywhere. The unromantic reality is that there are very few people making their full-time living from art. Most supplement their income through teaching, lecturing or other jobs. It's the perpetual juggling act: you need to be creating to sell, but if you're creating you're not earning – at least in the beginning. Hong Kong has the great advantage of being somewhere that encourages creative people and values hard work.

I have been very fortunate to work with two great galleries in Hong Kong: Picture This Gallery and Van Rensburg Galleries. They both respect my multidisciplinary work, and have enabled me to explore and produce separate collections for each of them. On the whole I love the Hong Kong gallery scene, and there are many I would love to exhibit in.

## Where are your favourite spots in Hong Kong to experience original art?

Events like Art Walk, Art Week and Chai Wan Mei get me inspired – they're a wonderful way to see a lot in one go. I love wandering around from space to space being in turn wowed, awed, horrified, amused and inspired by what is on show! *ei*

Find out more about Eleanor's work at [eleanormccoll.com](http://eleanormccoll.com).