

# Bold art is a mixture of India, Mexico ...and punk!

Amanda Taylor is the artist whose work is featured in this month's *Chase* magazine. **AMY FORDE**, marketing and communications assistant at Rotherham Open Arts Renaissance (ROAR), met Amanda to find out more about her distinctive work.

**M**ANY of you may have heard of Amanda 'Minx' Taylor, a prominent figure in the arts in Rotherham.

She founded Minx Designs, was a local DJ and is a prominent supporter of the local music scene. She was part of College Town Collective, featuring as one of the Mayor's Artists, and is also the owner of local business Amanda's Blinds.

Amanda's art appears to me an accumulation of three prominent influences: punk, Mexico and India. At first they could seem juxtaposing, but they are all brought together in bold and layered pieces of work which reflect the artist most astutely.

We spent some time unpicking her work in her studio.

I had first seen Amanda's art The Three Fridas in ROAR's recent Textile Fiesta, a set depicting artist Frida Kahlo, a personal favourite of mine and seemingly popular figure in contemporary culture.

Amanda explained her love of Kahlo: "She was a feminist, into all her politics and she didn't care what people thought."

Punk before punk – it is a statement I think resonates strongly with Amanda who also explained how she takes inspiration from Mexican culture, in particular the colours and skulls representative of the Day of the Dead celebrations.

Threading similar colours and textures into her practice is a love of India, something she puts down to working there in her last 12 years as a manager with BT. Amanda said: "When I have been travelling in India and when I was working out there, I used to use my free time at the weekends and go to fabric markets in Mumbai."

She described being brought a selection of fabrics to look through. Like many textile fiends she has kept a lot of these materials which we rifled through admiringly.

Indeed textiles has been the original basis of much of her artistic practice, from making clothes for her dolls when she was younger to designing her own outfit for a friend's upcoming wedding.

She established Minx Designs, selling her own punk-inspired pieces on craft and market stalls. Always captivated by fabric, wherever she finds it, she laughingly told me she once used a pair of her own silk underwear to create items: "It made me laugh because I would see people out with these necklaces on and I would think you're wearing a pair of my old knickers around your neck!"

The third huge influence in her life and one which is striking in her artwork is punk. This is most obvious in two of her pieces which she showed me — Thatcher the Dignity Snatcher, a piece largely inspired by her grandad's experiences as a miner at Orgreave, and her most recent piece on Donald Trump which centres around a reworked mask of the American president's face. Politically bold, these mixed media collages are rich in texture and sentiment, reflecting the strong beliefs of the artist who created them.





Her favourite piece and one which caught my eye as we scanned the filled walls is called Cancer. Amanda was diagnosed with breast cancer a few years ago, something they caught unexpectedly in a trial.

Amanda said: "When the Macmillan nurses came to tell me what was going to happen they said 'you have to put this radioactive dye on the day they operate on you and you'll turn blue'. I got through this by calling it my Smurf day."

She pointed to the bottom of this piece which shows a small blue Smurf on a wire. Amanda said: "I did the piece after I did radiotherapy and I guess I just needed to get it out."

In the centre of Cancer is a gas mask, a visual metaphor for her feeling of isolation while she was ill. She explained how it felt like it was not happening to her but to someone else. In the eye of the gas mask is a photograph created by fellow artist and ROAR member Jennifer Booth.

Amanda did a topless photoshoot with Jennifer after treatment. She said: "It really helped me actually because it made me look at what had happened to my body."

Although always creative, Amanda told me she wasn't encouraged in art at school: "I actually remember doing some really good paintings that kept getting ignored by the teacher."

Instead she followed a different path, studying for a Business Studies diploma, going on to become a senior manager at BT.

**“It made me laugh because I would see people out with these necklaces on and I would think you're wearing a pair of my old knickers around your neck!”**

Although operating outside of the art world, she told me how she was always creative in her work, making posters and creating fun incentives.

Amanda currently runs Amanda's Blinds with her partner through which she supports a range of local charities and music events.

Amanda said: "We always say we are a successful business but we have got a social conscience as well."

As a part of the Rotherham Pioneers group and Rotherham Chamber of Commerce, the business has provided valuable work experience to a number of young people in the area.

At the moment, Amanda told me, she has really got back into her artistic practice, attending a recent print workshop at ROAR which she thoroughly enjoyed, and is now experimenting with more traditional mediums including oil pastels.

She has a greater drive to show her work. She said: "Next year one of my ambitions is to exhibit at Rebellion Festival. They have a proper punk art show."

The Rebellion Festival in Blackpool may be a marker of the start of an exciting new period in her creative journey.

## 'The sexy statue stayed on my mind for years'



**ONCE upon a time a very distinctive statue used to leave the more senior visitors to Doncaster's old Arndale Centre in a bit of a tizz.**

Puritanical eyes were firmly turned away from two figures who dominated the main walkway of the former shopping centre.

The cause of such annoyance was a piece of art called The Lovers which stood next to the indoor fountain for years but which in the Eighties mysteriously disappeared.

For some back in the day the vanishing did not come soon enough.

The statue in question was of two figures in a state of love-inspired elation — and joined rather suggestively at the hip.

It was too 'modern' for many Donny folk back in the 1970s, as well as being thought 'rather rude'.

Youngsters, like me back then, would snigger at the two figures and it was something of a talking point among hormone-riddled teens.

Over the years I often wondered where the two lovers had got to. Now the statue is back and hopefully appreciated a little more in these artistically enlightened times. I hope so.

The two figures can be found in the Watterdale shopping area near Doncaster Library.

The statue was created by architect Eckhart Selke for the Arndale Centre when it opened in 1967.

His boss thought it was somewhat inappropriate but, as these things do, it was built anyway.

When revealed there were self-righteous inhalations of breath and hotness under plenty of collars in the town. Questions were asked. People wanted it gone.

But, and this is the reason I always liked it, the statue didn't budge an inch for a long time and just stood there indignantly waving two fingers (metaphorically speaking) at the fuddy-duddies.

But where did The Lovers go in their wilderness years? My fear was that the artwork had been melted down and become part of a bridge or piece of tatty jewellery.

But no! The Lovers had been biding its time in a garden in Bessacarr.

It made a return to the town centre — well, slightly away from the town centre — in around 2015 after a search for its whereabouts.

Now the statue stands proudly on a busy shopping street close to the town's library and Cast Theatre, hips joined as passionately as ever.

For me, I'm glad it's back in the town. It was as much a part of my childhood memories of Doncaster as the old Gaumont cinema and the SIX places where you could buy records in the one shopping centre.

But unlike the record shops and the Gaumont, The Lovers has survived.

It may not be a Henry Moore or Barbara Hepworth, but I like the fact that it's there and remains a bit of public culture.



## PRESTIGIOUS ARTIST'S WORK GOES ON SHOW

**A MAJOR artist's new exhibition has taken up temporary residence at a South Yorkshire arts venue.**

Internationally-renowned American installation and video artist Bill Viola has a new show courtesy of the darts (Doncaster Community Arts) group at the town's The Point venue on South Parade.

The exhibition was officially opened by Doncaster North MP Ed Miliband and will run until December 15.

The launch attracted business and arts professionals from across the country.

Speaking at the opening alongside Mr Miliband were two of darts' Young Curators, Amy Metcalfe and Isobel Robson.

The Young Curators are a group of 13 to 25 year olds with an interest in art.

Entry to The Point's gallery is free and more information is available at [www.thepoint.org.uk](http://www.thepoint.org.uk).

Bill Viola's work will be displayed at the Royal Academy of Art in London from January but this selection of his work has come north in advance of this.