

IN THE FIRST OF A RUNNING SERIES IN CHASE, WE MEET THE ARTISTS BEHIND THE ARTWORK AND MEMBERS OF ROTHERHAM OPEN ARTS RENAISSANCE (ROAR). FIRST UP, AMY FORDE MEETS ILIVEINASQUARE

On approach to the benches of Rotherham Minster on a Monday afternoon, ILIVEINASQUARE tells me how much his confidence has grown. He has spent the morning filling in for another artist at ROAR, drawing portraits of local residents, something he said he would never have done a year ago.

As we find a bench to sit and discuss his work, him clasp his camera lens style flask filled with coffee- and what I know will be copious amounts of sugar, I decide to go back to the start and try and find out where his creative flair began.

"When I was at school and young, I didn't like art. It wasn't my thing." It was only when he got into his mid-20s that he started to develop his creative side, performing in numerous bands as a guitarist and drummer, he also had a role in producing music. Born and bred in Rotherham, he tells me that he felt that art was not for him: "I thought art was for the elite really. I think in my head you know, I thought I wasn't born into the right family or good enough to do it. It didn't seem right to do it anyway."

After participating in, as he put it "failed bands", he turned to photography and graphic design, much of which he has taught himself. Having always been into computers, he explained: "I couldn't draw and to me, that was art. I didn't see art as being graphic de-

sign, I didn't see it as being any other medium, just drawing. But as I got into my mid-20s I thought there is more to art than this, and photography became a big thing for me."

His background is underwritten in a lot of his work, in particular his photography which explores the Rotherham landscape around him or "my home" as he defiantly puts it.

"There are some beautiful places but there are also some run-down, derelict places which I think are beautiful in their own way."

I quizzed him a bit more about this, to which he replied: "Maybe it's the industrial link to Rotherham I like, it's home and it's what I am attracted to without even realising it."

He goes on to explain how the differing textures found in the urban landscape are also appealing to him and his work.

With an idea for a photography book whizzing around his head for a while, he decided to take the leap; buying a good quality camera he took to the streets to explore. It was while he was out taking pictures around the back of Westgate Chambers that another member of the ROAR approached him and told him about the organisation.

"I didn't know anything about it, but I was invited in and I joined. From then on I met some really great people. It's where I go everyday now," he remembers.

That was nearly two and a half years ago. He explains how ROAR has given him the opportunity to experiment and also collaborate with other people, something really important to his practice.

"I would rather work in a shared environment than on my own, and the people at ROAR are really supportive in trying new things. If it goes wrong it doesn't matter."

His photography book, called Sight Unseen: A Photojournal Of The Streets came to fruition in 2016. He has also created two other books, Glass Wires Moving Very Slowly and Boring Pictures.



THE MAN BEHIND

THE LENS



Interactive light sculpture made with 900 pieces of perspex and mechanical bugs with LED's.

Much of ILIVEINASQUARE'S work is digital and experimental. We discuss a lot about his artistic process. "I recently did a piece where I created some music on a program called Python and I took the outcome of that, i.e the wave file, and made it into a sculpture on the laser cutter. I like to experiment with different forms that don't go together, but in the end they do. I like the flexibility of art, you don't have to stick to drawing, you don't have to stick to graphic design."

As with a lot of contemporary artists, much of his work says a lot while at the same time remaining quite ambiguous. This is even more relevant as he likes to remain anonymous, working under ILIVEINASQUARE, a name stemming from his photography phase. I wonder why he decides to remain anonymous.

He explains some of this is to do with his own insecurity in the fact that he doesn't do traditional art, his more contemporary approach is something he feels might put

people off his work. Ultimately he admits: "I am trying to find a balance between doing something that I like and that people like, but maybe pushing the boundary as well."

There is also a deeper level to this anonymity. Similar to famed artist Banksy, who has tried to remain anonymous throughout his career but has persistently tried to be found out by the media, ILIVEINASQUARE tells me: "I like to let the work do the talking. If the public don't like it they can't associate it with anybody, maybe its just the art speaking for itself."

He is currently working on a new project producing some light art. By creating some perspex, electronic bugs which light up as well as scurry around the space, he also plans to film the bugs. Using video editing software and circuit bending, he wants to develop a piece of film which the audience can interact with, recording the sound of the electronic bugs to further enhance the experience.

In the longer term he would like to do more exhibitions, focusing on expanding his work with sculptures, or at least using more mixed media. Ultimately though he says: "I still want to create and that's all I want to do, create something new."

You can find out more about ILIVEINASQUARE on his website: www.iliveinasquare.com



MAYBE IT'S THE INDUSTRIAL LINK TO ROTHERHAM I LIKE, IT'S HOME AND IT'S WHAT I AM ATTRACTED TO WITHOUT EVEN REALISING IT.



Image taken on Moorgate Road, Rotherham. Slow-shutter speed shot. Above: Scribble- Digitally manipulated from music score in Adobe Illustrator.