

The seven year etch

Printmaker **Gemma Anderson** is currently on a remarkable run of residencies, stretching back to 2003. As she begins a new stint at the Jerwood Foundation, she reveals her unusual inspirations

WORDS: ZENA ALKAYAT

Gemma Anderson's etchings appear to be borne out of a verdant fantasy land, a world where human forms grow among the plants and creatures morph with the foliage. It's strange, then, to find an artist so concerned with observing the natural, living in to an East London studio sandwiched between an A road and an industrial wasteland.

The spot is actually home to ACME Studios Fire Station, a work-live scheme that awards artists subsidised spaces for a

fixed five-year period. Having such a base is unusual for Anderson who has spent the last seven years working as an artist-in-residence for galleries as diverse as Centre Culturel Irlandais in Paris and ICC Saporio in Japan.

"Residencies were a way of working continuously and taking inspiration from different places and subjects," says Anderson. "Everywhere I go, I draw directly from life, from local subjects and natural history. The work is always connected to the place which suits me and seems to suit galleries which offer residencies."

Anderson is still on something of a roll, as she is about to become artist-in-residence at London's Jerwood Foundation. She hopes to shadow the Jerwood Drawing Prize staff, interact with the artists' involved and create a body of work about the experience. Discovering how the artists work could well be an eye-opener for Anderson who has been devoted to the medium of etching since her BA.

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"I was using the finest point pens I could find to get a linear look and I realised etching would be good for that," she says. "I immediately liked it. It's more minimal: all you're thinking about is the line and the form."


Despite being raised in urban Belfast, Anderson has always found inspiration in the natural world. From drawing the flowers in her family garden as child,

Anderson developed an interest in human anatomy and 'geomancy' – the relationship between the body and the landscape.

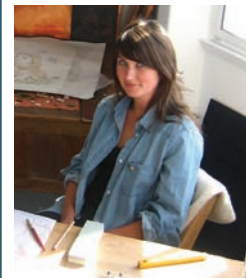
An art degree in Falmouth

cemented her love of the natural and botanical, while moving to London for her MA opened the door to a new source of inspiration. "I was used to collecting things while I was walking outside, so when I moved to London I found it really difficult at first," she explains. "I ended up drawing from museum collections. The Natural History Museum would let me into their stores, choose specimens and then sit in one of their annex

labs and draw. It took a while to build relationships with institutions but I ended up with access to amazing places."

While Anderson continues to "discover and learn" from her surroundings, these resources are more valuable than ever given that, for now at least, the artist is staying put in the city. 

ARTIST'S BIO



Name

Gemma Anderson

Born

Belfast, 1981

Training

Falmouth College of Art;
Royal College of Art

Next residency

Jerwood Space, London
SE1, until December 2010

More info

www.gemma-anderson.co.uk

BELOW Gemma Anderson, *Green Finger*, hand-painted etching

