

Rip it up and start again

Writer
Twinkle Troughton

Images
Courtesy of the artists

For a small town, Margate has an impressive number of collage artists. We meet the people working with ready-made images and objects to make work that is vibrant, current and experimental

KAVEL
RAFFERTY

In 2019 Kavel Rafferty won one of five commissions for Dreamland's Mural by the Sea competition, in which she got to fill a billboard with a bold and colourful mural inspired by old postcards of Margate.

Born in Brighton, Rafferty lived in Barcelona, Stockholm, Wales and London before making a home for the past five years in Thanet. She works from Resort Studios in Cliftonville.

The full-time artist describes herself as "sort of self-trained". After studying for an HND in textiles, Rafferty could no longer afford to continue in education, so got a job designing textiles while fitting in her own illustration and art when she could.

There is a raw and instinctive edge to Rafferty's work. Her playful approach to putting found images together is accentuated with rough-cut edges and experimental mark-making. Fascinated by colour combinations and exploring a wide variety of materials, Rafferty attributes an artist residency in Mexico City in 2020 with finding her collage style, spending six weeks focusing purely on the practice.

Rafferty makes work from what she describes as "detritus mostly, the things people throw away. I collect stuff; I'm constantly picking up bits of paper, ephemera from the streets." As well as street finds, she relishes trawling car boot sales or rummaging through old boxes at flea markets for inspiration.

Taking care of her mental health has a large part to play in Rafferty's choice of materials, and using as few new material as possible is paramount:



"At times in my life I've suffered from episodes of depression, and when that happens, I can't make art because it feels like I am just producing more 'unnecessary' things. I've overcome this, partly with medication and therapy, and partly by using materials that already exist. It feels less frivolous to reinvent something, to use something old to make something new." She adds: "When it suddenly all fits together it's like magic."

Rafferty has plans for an exhibition of new work entitled *Queer Flowers* which will include both collage and painting. The exhibition will be at Resort Studios and will hopefully take place in May, although the date is yet to be confirmed due to the pandemic.

Instagram: @kavelrafferty

COLLAGE TIPS

If you would like to try your hand at collage, then check out @margatecollageparty on Instagram who are hoping to hold collage-based events in Margate, lockdown permitting. In the meantime our artists have also given some tips for anyone wanting to give it a go at home.

CECILIA BONILLA

"Define your source material - think about why you are using it. Establish your boundaries and make sure that you use acid-free glue!"

BEN SANDERS

"My tip would be to purchase a cutting mat, some cheap scalpels, a few Pritt Sticks and just source some imagery that catches your eye, and give it a go. Make yourself laugh."

KAVEL RAFFERTY

"Cut up a bunch of old magazines and play! You don't have to stick anything down until you are totally happy. In fact, you don't ever have to stick anything down, if you don't want to."



CECILIA BONILLA

Originally from Uruguay, Cecilia Bonilla spent her childhood as a refugee in Sweden during the Seventies and Eighties. Bonilla moved to Margate four years ago from London, where she had been living on a narrowboat. When she fell pregnant with her second child a family home was needed so, looking to leave London, she wanted to live somewhere with a strong artist community and a good art centre, of which Margate has both.

Bonilla began using collage more than 20 years ago: "I made my first collage when I was a graphic design student in the Nineties. I think I was most attracted to the immediacy of the medium, how by 'simply' putting together existing imagery, something completely different could be formed."

Initially inspired by American post-war painter and graphic artist Robert Rauschenberg, Bonilla now looks more at artists who work in a subtler way, such as German artist Raphael Danke, who is inspired by fashion and surrealism, and British artist John Stezaker, who is known for his hybrid portraits using famous faces.

The influence of both is evident in

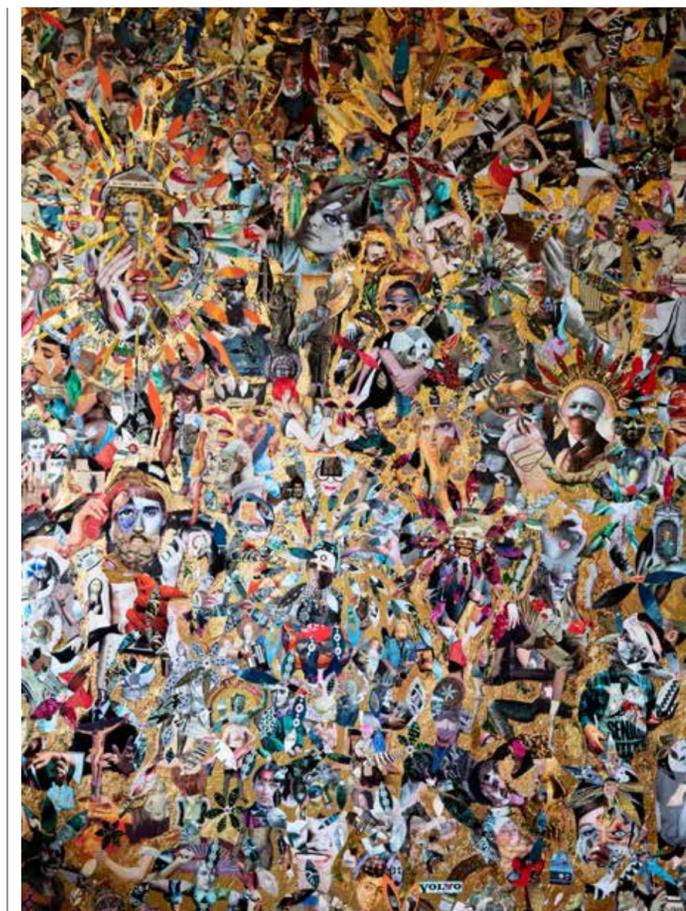
Bonilla's collages, which are skilful in their simplicity.

Predominantly monotone with an occasional delicate use of colour, a lot of the images Bonilla works with originate in old magazines, books and catalogues. "In the making process itself, I often outline a set of rules that aim to achieve the most complex result by minimal intervention. I really enjoy this challenge," says Bonilla, who feels that collage wrongly has a reputation as "easy art".

Often combining just two images, many of her works are comprised of a female figure juxtaposed with images of insects, flora and landscapes. Themes of domesticity, and the ideals of beauty and lifestyle run through her work. Social constructs are questioned, corrupted and undermined through the act of subtle modification.

With most galleries closed for the foreseeable future, plans are a little uncertain, but Bonilla is hoping to exhibit at Gordon House on Hawley Square in Margate with a new group project at some stage in 2021.

Instagram: @ceciliabonilla_studio
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BEN SANDERS

Ben Sanders likes to keep things coastal. Having grown up in Whitstable, Sanders now lives in Ramsgate and works from his space at St Mary's in Cliftonville.

Sanders's interest in collage has been around for as long as he can remember. "I would have made my first one when I was little, not realising it was called a collage," he says. By the time he was 16, collage artists such as Hannah Hoch began to inspire him. "It was both the process and the medium, the bravery and rebelliousness of it all in such a politically charged and vulnerable period in history. It felt punky, authentic, lawless and available for all to have a go, so I did," says Sanders.

His collages can take anywhere between a week and a month to make. In 2019 he completed a large-scale mixed media piece called *Tasty Failures* that took a year to create. He finds great enjoyment in the process of sourcing imagery, describing it as a "materials loot" as he collects a wide range of materials including donations from friends, eBay purchases, trawling through bric-a-brac shops and old book stores.

His works form repetitive patterns, shapes and colours with kaleidoscopic effect. Some of the works are intricate and detailed, and others uncomplicated and minimal. His eye is naturally drawn to imagery which is pre-2000, but he takes great pleasure in combining old with new, often incorporating images from current mainstream media too. In a recent commission, Sanders used imagery sourced from the 1990 football World Cup to create his own version of a Buddhist mandala (circular geometric symbols used to aid meditation), playing with contrasts and connections between football and spirituality. "It's like dismantling one reality and creating another," he says.

Sanders has works that can be seen locally at Kill Me Now Gallery in Margate and McGillan & Woodell in Ramsgate, and he is also currently working in collaboration with studio pal, screenprinter Charlie Cameron, who runs the new Bardo Studio. The pair are hoping to release a limited-edition print which brings together collage and screenprint in Spring 2021.

Instagram:
@lastnightcollagesavedmylife