

Drawn threads

A decade of creating artworks in denim sees Ian Berry's practice soar to new heights

EVEN UP CLOSE it's no simple matter to perceive the individual pieces of cloth that make up the staggeringly complex photorealist images that Ian Berry creates from pairs of old jeans.

Whether viewed in print, online or even at arm's length, the works are often misidentified as blue-toned photographs rather than handmade works of art. In a painstaking process, Berry collages layers of shapes cut from different shades of faded denim that form mosaics of striking, life-like scenes. Berry, who is originally from Huddersfield, already had a successful career as an art director in advertising when he started making his works. Since then he's had near-sell out shows in Sweden (where he lived at the time), as well as the US and Portugal. The works on these pages were part of two solo exhibits presented by Catto Gallery at Gallery Different last November. Berry produced the works after moving back to London. He felt compelled to create a body of work in response to his thoughts on the meaning of home and the changing nature of cultural diversity in the city.

'Behind Closed Doors' is a series of images of

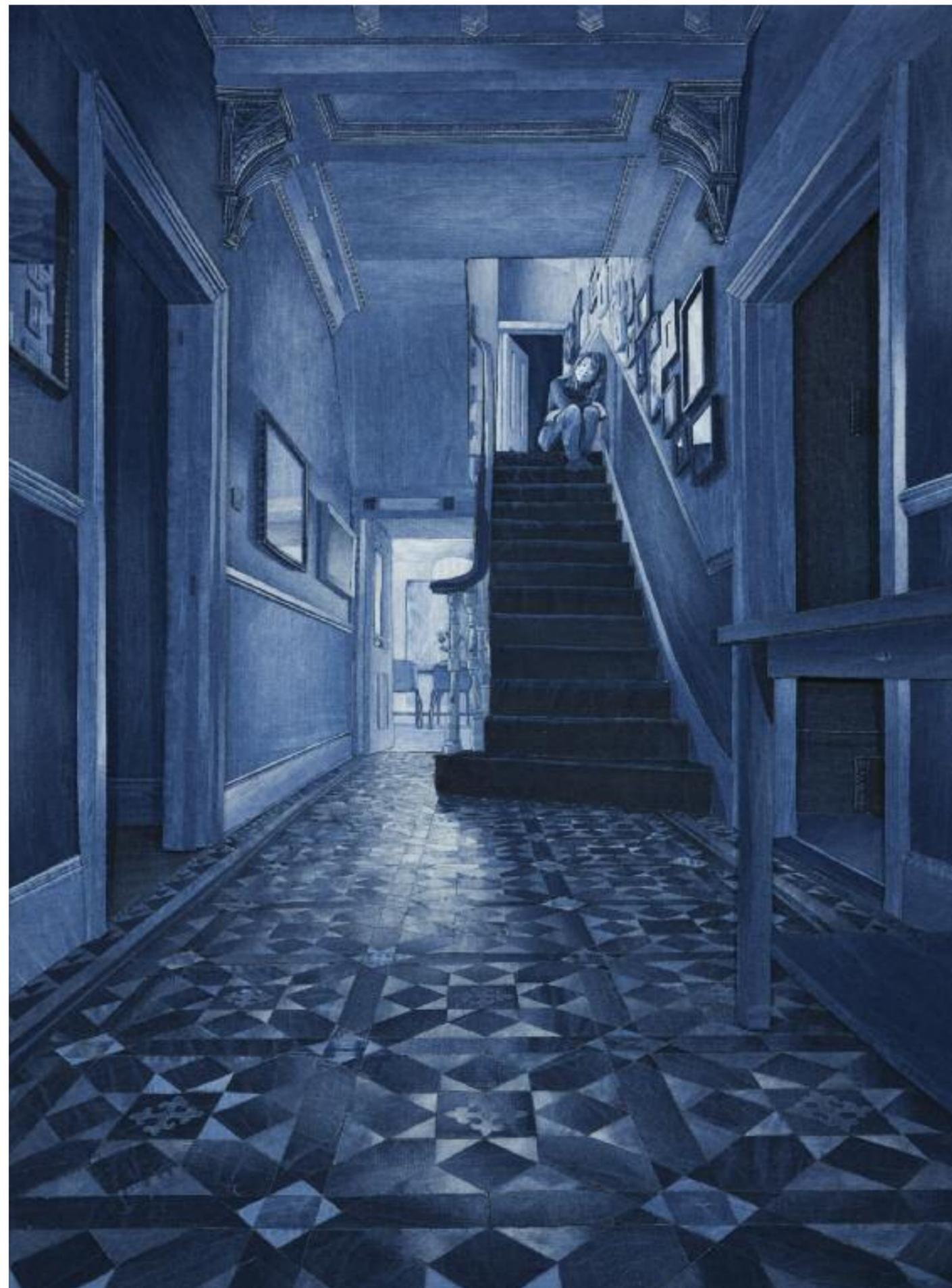
glossy, well-heeled interiors – amongst them a grand Victorian hallway, a Barbican apartment, a luxurious bathroom, and penthouse apartments. A solitary woman features in most of them. Here Berry pokes at the realities that lie beyond our surface perception of other's lives. Unlike a Facebook or Instagram post, where these women would be pictured smiling in their perfect homes or contorted into a pose that says 'look at me', their faces are cast downwards as if lost pensively in their thoughts. The blue of the denim adds a dispassionate coldness to the scenes and, rather than providing comfort, these glossy interiors seem filled with unease. What is the lone woman, who sits atop the staircase, her head leant against the wall, thinking? Berry's other exhibit 'My Beautiful Launderette' addresses another side of London life, the crippling cost of living in the capital. In looking for an emblem to represent the disappearance of artists from the centre of London, he decided upon the launderette. Once an amenity common to most communities, and often a meeting place for



Ian Berry, *Sleeping Alone*. Denim on denim. 184 x 61cm
Opposite: *Behind Closed Doors*. Denim on denim. 180 x 122cm



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Left: *A Delicate Cycle*.
Denim on denim. 122 x 51cm

Above: Ian Berry in front of
Perfect Stranger. Denim on
denim. 180 x 90cm

Below: *In Reflection*.
Denim on denim. 122 x 61cm

locals, they are fast becoming extinct. His portraits of laundrettes in Bow, Poplar, Holloway Road and Ladbrooke Grove are not nostalgia, they represent a disappearing way of life and provide a unique snapshot of urban London at this point in time. Although he has been working in denim for some time, Berry says the laundrette also provided him with his greatest technical challenge – the problem of rendering shiny metallic surfaces in cloth – one that he surpassed with ease, for although Ian Berry's work is often compared to the photographic image, his understanding of tonal values is what renders this work so lifelike. And his adoption of textiles takes the process much further: Denim facilitates other important but little noted aspects of the work – its texture and physical depth. It's only when viewing the work in person that you can appreciate how layer upon layer of

denim adds real depth to the surface, whilst echoing the monotone, tonal decision making that's involved in the process of drawing with cloth in this way. His choice to use denim jeans, with all the associated dualities (workwear / high fashion / symbol of teenage rebellion / ubiquitous western wear) also points to ideas around the life cycle of clothing and fashion. Sustainability versus the constant turnover of fashion also plays out in our communities too, with major cities falling prey to a never ending cycle of re-development and expansion. But mostly Berry wants to move us with his subject matter: His use of denim, which is worn around the globe, is a material to which we can all relate and which provides the perfect invite into his world. 🍷
Jo Hall

www.ianberry.org
cattogallery.co.uk

