

Banksy loves Laura Lancaster's work which has gone on display at a Gateshead gallery

The Hartlepool-born artist exhibited in New York earlier this year after a special residency with twin sister Rachel

[David Whetstone](#)



Artist Laura Lancaster with her exhibition **ELLIPSIS** at the Workplace Gallery, Gateshead

Among the artists recruited by Banksy for Dismaland, his dystopian 'bemusement park' in Weston-super-Mare, was Laura Lancaster

who has been quietly building up an international reputation from her base on Tyneside.

She shares a studio with twin sister Rachel at the 36 Lime Street complex, in Newcastle's Ouseburn Valley. Both are among the artists represented by Workplace Gallery which is in The Old Post Office at 19/21 West Street, [Gateshead](#).

It's pretty low key for a gallery – no big signs or banners; just a tiny bit of paper beside the bell, saying 'Workplace'.

This is where you'll find Ellipsis, the new exhibition by Laura Lancaster, whose busy schedule means she just about has time for an interview and a photo before catching a train for the West Midlands (The New Gallery Walsall, run by former Baltic boss Stephen Snoddy, is planning an exhibition of her work next year). We arrive on the Workplace doorstep at the same time.

Once inside, Laura starts telling me about her first American exhibition at the end of March. She and Rachel spent time at the studio in East Hampton, near New York, which belonged to Elaine de Kooning, wife of Willem de Kooning.

De Kooning was born in Holland but travelled to America in 1926 and found a job as a house painter. He died in 1997, aged 92, having become revered as a pioneer of abstract expressionism.

Elaine de Kooning bought the house in 1975 because East Hampton had been a haven for artists. When she died in 1989, it was owned by a sculptor and then a painter and then, in 2010, it was bought – rescued really – by Chris Byrne who also runs Dallas Art Fair. He now invites selected artists to take up residency for short periods when they can work or recharge their batteries.

"We were there for six weeks and it was really good," says Laura. "Half the work I made there went to the solo show in New York and the other half went to the Dallas Art Fair in April, so I've had a lot of American exposure."

Some people who would have loved to own her work, she says, simply didn't have a wall big enough.

Well, you might retort, make smaller paintings. But it doesn't work like that. *"I think you've got to make the work that you need to make. Small scale canvases might sell but museums and galleries are more interested in filling big spaces with more ambitious work."*

While Laura is talking I am staring at a seriously ambitious painting on the wall behind her. Actually, I can't take my eyes off it. I'm trying to work out what it's all about... although I can deduce that it is painting mimicking the moving image.

The big painting is called Threshold and it consists of 24 separate paintings set together in a rectangle. They are a sequence and only the first image in the top left-hand corner, showing two girls or young women, is different. The remaining 23 show just the dark-haired girl... laughing? Singing? It's a prolonged and intriguing blur.

For some reason I'm thinking of an X Factor contestant, hyped up in front of the camera and clutching a microphone. Or maybe that's a mirror and she's putting on make-up.

The X Factor answer can't be right, it turns out. Wrong era.

Laura explains that she specialises in 'found film' and her source for this painting came in a batch of cine-film she bought via an on-line auction. The painting, completed in January, is 24 frames which represents a second's worth of Super 8 film footage.

What Threshold invites us to pore over is a moment in a life, a moment so fleeting that even the girl in the picture/s is unlikely to remember it. Being a journalist who trades in particulars, rather than an artist who is happy with impressions and generalisations, I'm keen to know who she is and when this was.

Laura doesn't know. She thinks the footage may be from the 1970s – *"the early 70s, I'd guess"* – and the girls are probably teenagers.

“The girl in the blue swimsuit looks into the camera and then turns away, which sort of abstracts the movement.”



Artwork by Laura Lancaster

The fact that Laura bid for the footage raises other questions that she can't answer. How does such home movie-style footage come to be so devoid of sentimental value that it is made available to the highest bidder? It lends to the work, depicting a moment's *joie de vivre*, a veneer of sadness.

For Laura, the painting is “a departure”. She has made paintings inspired by individual photos before but never ones which freeze fleeting frames of film in such a way, putting first herself and then the viewer in the shoes of the unseen cameraman.

The painting, almost filling a wall, is called *Threshold* because it catches the girl, having spotted the camera, on the threshold of evasive action. The work also exists at a point between film and

painting, Laura deploying runny oil and acrylics to animate the work with some quite large brushes.

In some of the panels, she observes, the girl looks quite ugly, even grotesque. But the overall impression is of someone young and vivacious. Threshold gives the viewer the opportunity to study something you'd hardly notice in minute detail.

There are six paintings in the exhibition, three in this room and three others upstairs – all of them drawn from the mystery film. These are paintings that both pack a punch and invite you to linger.

Upstairs is another multi-panel work, Re-run, this time with eight sequential frames representing one third of a second. The face in the paintings is that of a curly-haired blonde woman.

Laura says: *“I made this with the idea of making a slightly more intimate picture with the woman coming towards the camera and putting you, as the viewer, in the position of the cameraman.”*

“I was also interested in the effect of the light which gives the footage a glowing, luminous quality. This one has become almost like a loop that you can replay over and over again.”

“Sometimes the faces in these films stick with me and then I have to go back and rummage through the box, looking for it. That’s part of the enjoyment of it.”

Also upstairs, in a little room all of its own, is a smaller, single work which is called Semblance. It shows a back view of a woman caught in bluey shadows. Faintly sinister, it sends the mind racing into dark corners of cinematography.

Other paintings are diptychs, each of the two linked panels depicting the first and last frames of a particular piece of film. These are paintings less about the subject matter than about the film itself. While the final frame might show a woman reclining on a sun lounger, its twin might be a colourful abstract taken from the

'leader tape' which runs through a projector before a film kicks into life.

In a digital age, this ancient art (painting) paying homage to an almost defunct successor (cine-film) is fascinating and moving. Ellipsis, a title referring to a continuity editing device used in film-making, is on at Workplace Gallery until October 31.

It is Laura's fourth solo exhibition here since Workplace was founded in 2005 by Paul Moss and Miles Thurlow. Born in Hartlepool in 1979, she graduated from Northumbria University, along with sister Rachel, in 2001.

Since then she has exhibited widely and impressed a lot of people – including, it seems, Banksy. In 2009 and again in 2011 Laura won The Journal Culture Award in the visual art category. But now she must dash and catch a train.

After she's gone, Paul Moss smiles as he recalls the call from Banksy, all cloak-and-dagger, asking to speak only to Laura. The paintings loaned to Dismaland, which closed at the weekend after attracting 150,000 visitors, were all from private collections.

Paul makes no apology for Workplace Gallery's low-key presence, explaining its principle aim is helping good North East artists to exhibit out of the region and overseas, particularly in the hotspots where gallery owners and collectors gather.

He is proud that a gallery which opened initially in a unit beneath Gateshead's brutalist 'Get Carter carpark' (since demolished) now has a London outlet with a Mayfair address. "*We are trying to build careers for artists and an international client base so that's very important,*" he says.

Workplace Gallery, [Gateshead](#), is open Tuesday to Saturday, 11am to 5pm. Find details on www.workplacegallery.co.uk