

### Painted Lady

Artist Andrea Byrne as she prepares to exhibit her work at *Fresh Art*, Islington Design Centre London.

Pamela Buxton

Not many painters would cite Radiohead, The Smiths or early Roxy Music as key creative influences but as far as artist Andrea Byrne is concerned they are just as valid as inspirations as her other guiding lights - artists Marlene Dumas and Antoni Tapies. In fact, Byrne says there'd be no point in her even so much as picking up a paintbrush to embark on one of her large-scale floral canvases without first putting one of their CDs on at full blast. They've certainly been booming out of her studio lately as Byrne has been preparing for the *Fresh Art* show taking place later this month in London's Islington Design Centre, where she is exhibiting independently for the first time. Originally from London then Blackburn Lancashire she studied fashion at Liverpool John Moore's University and went on to win the prestigious *Guardian Fashion Illustrator Award* in 1988. She then found success working for a variety of magazines, ad agencies and clients including Burberry, Catherine Walker and Dorothy Perkins. At present she still works as a fashion illustrator but her painting has become more and more important and unsurprisingly, it is heavily influenced by her background in fashion. Starting with nudes, she has moved on to representations of flowers, which with flamboyant dressy beauty and slender stems, seem closely related to the models of her fashion illustrations. 'There is a real crossover between them', she admits. She decided to move into painting because of the challenge and spontaneity - of getting it right straight away - that it gave her in comparison with illustration, where she could more easily revise her work. "It wasn't that I was bored with fashion illustration, but I wanted something more challenging," she says explaining that she has to be spot on because she wouldn't be able to re-prime the canvas again to make adjustments. Her works recalls performance - when she's in the right frame of mind, she can just about paint around the clock. It's all she says, about energy. "You have to be hyper confident. If I feel a bit down I wouldn't go in to the studio because it just wouldn't work," she says, but even so she's not always pleased with the results. The two immediately defining characteristics of her painting are size and subject. She paints flowers - lush, gorgeous blooms in an impressionistic rather than realist style, choosing them not so much because of their aesthetic quality but for how they make her work. "I love flowers, but my main love is speed of line and continuity. It's a big challenge as you only have one hit." Her work is large in scale with canvases as big as 1.8m x 2.7m and the smallest being a respectable 90cm x 90cm. "If I go any smaller it can look a bit twee because of the subject matter" she explains. There's nothing twee about the distinctive names she gives to her latest paintings - on the contrary they are distinctly sensual and evocative, but at the same time playful. A richly gold / orange hued bloom is named *Honeyshiva* while her painting of a bunch of pink / purple flowers is named *Purrpoodle*. Other paintings get equally exotic, teasing names such as *Rubygarland* and *Tinglinglolita*. Her painting and fashion illustration work recently came together with several large painting commissions for *Aquascutum's* latest advertising campaign and currently exhibited in their flagship Regent Street London store windows. And while she still has the intention of doing both painting and fashion illustration, her energies lately have certainly been devoted to painting. As well as *Fresh Art* she has a solo show coming up in November at Hicks Gallery London. Byrne shows no sign of running out of energy given, of course, the right musical conditions to do her painting in "I still feel its very very fresh, I still feel new".

