

Marcus at work in his studio



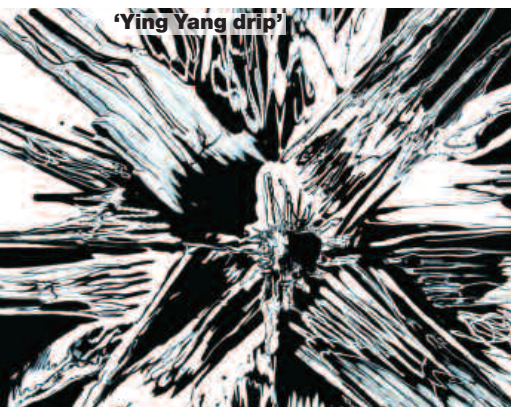
'Nude distortion in blue'



'Nude distortion in red'



'Ying Yang drip'



FEAR FACTOR

After overcoming his initial apprehensions, Marcus Levine has found a new lease of life as an artist. Susan Preston talks to him before his first public exhibition.

Creativity and passion have a way of fighting their way to the fore and this is certainly true in the case of artist Marcus Levine.

After struggling for years trying to conform to society and family pressures, Marcus has finally broken the mould and is now hammering home his message of artistic arrival through his unique and stunning nail art, a series of one-off life size and larger pieces depicting nudes using thousands of nails. He is currently immersing himself with more abstract works and has created a mesmerising yin and yang series and is also in the midst of a set of morphing nudes in metallic leaf and acrylic. He is brimming with ideas for future works.

At 42, Marcus, who has worked in his family's printing business based in Bramhope for 18 years, feels he has finally broken free of the shackles of feeling pressurised to please others and is loving creating freely. The man who filled drawing books from the age of four and for years played to an audience of family and friends with traditional artworks and fought with his father over his desire to be an artist, is now finally comfortable in his own skin.

So far has he come on his journey that he now feels able to, and confident enough, to share his work with the wider world and is staging his very first public exhibition at the Radisson SAS Hotel Leeds on 12-14 October. This exhibition will document his artistic journey from his early 'pleasing' years to his new-

found freedom and happy arrival at self-acceptance.

"I suppose you could say that a fear of people close to me not liking or misunderstanding my work meant that I pampered to a conservative audience, which repressed my creative thinking," said Marcus.

"It was only when I myself came to terms with the idea it no longer mattered and that I should paint for myself that things got interesting."

Meeting Marcus, who looks more like a brawny rugby player than artist who would be intimidated by others thoughts on what he does, it is clear to see the absolute love and devotion he has for creating works of art.

"I just love what I do," he enthuses, and many would envy him this joy in his work.

"My break with the past came when I bought an apartment in Budapest. I wanted it to be ultra modern and filled with modern art. After fully restoring the apartment I set about deciding what to create and to give my work a unique feel. I had been creating things in my mind for a long time, shelving things away. The idea of using nails to create my image came about 16 years ago and so I set about experimenting with nails and it was a true creative break for me."

Each nail painting takes Marcus around three weeks to create and features around 6,500 nails. Many of his early paintings feature his Hungarian wife Krisztina, who Marcus credits with giving him the

confidence to finally be himself and do as he wishes.

"Krisztina is very bohemian and my relationship with her has allowed me to develop, have self-belief and has been very liberating for me."

The nail art, which has to be seen first-hand to be fully appreciated, is, Marcus says, extremely difficult to create as getting the detail right using just nails is painstaking work. You need to stand in front of one of them to see how light plays a major part in these works; as the light shifts so do the shadows of the nails. This changes the contrast of each image: making them darker, lighter and even sharper or softer.

Marcus admits to often working until the early hours as he becomes immersed in his work and thankfully he, Krisztina and their two daughters, live in a large, rambling, Edwardian house in Bingley so his hammering in his home-based studio does not keep the neighbours up.

Leeds-born Marcus has come a long way from the days when he had a blazing row with his father after announcing he wanted to do an art foundation course and his father insisted he do a computer science course. Some of his determination and passion was clear then though as he went against his father's wishes and attended Jacob Kramer Art College, but later compromised and did a degree in Scientific and Technical Graphics in Falmouth: "It was more academic than artistic."

After a spell working as a graphic designer for HTV television, the

opportunity to join his father's flourishing printing business along with his brother lured him away from television. For a while he admits to getting caught up in the all too familiar modern-day cycle of making money and spending it without paying too much attention to his artistic voice.

Marcus is thankful for the time they have spent working together. The two are very close and he says his father is now fully accepting of his art and actively encourages and supports him.

Now though Marcus is intent on pursuing a full-time career as an artist and is quietly delighted that people have such a strong, positive reaction when they see his work.

"It is great for me that people go 'Wow' when they see my more recent work and it gives me an enormous thrill and encouragement to continue to explore my own creative boundaries and to have people compare me with the likes of David Hockney and Jackson Pollock is fantastic."

"I have matured now and art is what I love doing. When people ask my daughters what their dad does they answer: 'He's an artist'."

Marcus does not want to be pigeon holed and says: "I will continue to expand my work into sculpture, photography, installations, and other mixed media such as audio visual."

He is really enjoying himself and is adamant that his work is never repeated: "I never repeat an image unless it is a

Marcus with wife Krisztina



series of the same image like my morphing nudes where I intentionally use the same image but change the colour. Each is still unique and can be bought individually or as a series."

Marcus also does portraits using mixed media and is embarking on a few commissions.

"This is a very exciting time for me and I am thrilled to have reached this stage in my life and being able to absorb myself in what I love doing most – creating."

There will be over 20 years worth of Marcus' work on show at the exhibition at the Radisson SAS Hotel Leeds in October and it will be well worth a visit. Each piece on show will be unique and trace his artistic development from child to adult.

If you would like to attend the exhibition just visit Marcus' website at www.levine-art.co.uk and register your interest in attending. Whilst on the site you will be able to see some examples of his work.

The exhibition will be a great opportunity to see his unique works and also, perhaps, to meet the artist himself.

With limited edition prints starting from £150, and life size nail art, ready to adorn even the most impressive penthouse apartments walls in Leeds, from £5,000, there's something for everyone. Anyone attending the exhibition that mentions this Northside feature will be entered into a competition to win a limited edition, signed print of one of Marcus' favourite yin yang pieces.