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# Ian Cumberland receives an ACNI Major Individual Artist Award

Dec 5, 2024 —

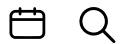
Congratulations to QSS member Ian Cumberland who, together with four other acclaimed artists (pianist, Ruth McGinley, writer, Richard O'Rawe, children's writer, Derek Keilty, and violinist, Darragh Morgan), has been presented with a Major Individual Artist Award (MIA) for Visual Arts. Supported by The National Lottery, these awards, worth up to £15,000 each, are the highest value honour bestowed on artists in Northern Ireland each year by the Arts Council.

The prestigious awards are given in recognition of the contribution each artist has made to creative life in Northern Ireland and makes it possible for them to undertake a substantial, ambitious project that will make a significant impact on the development of their professional, artistic careers.

Ian will use his MIA funding to realise an ambitious new interdisciplinary project that delves into themes of persuasion and perception. The MIA opportunity will enable the artist to push the boundaries of his practice, blending traditional techniques with emerging technologies like AI to craft immersive and thought-provoking works.

**Image details:** '14314 Days', oil on linen, 150 x 110 cm (*currently on show at the Royal Ulster Academy Annual Exhibition in the Ulster Museum, Belfast*)

Ian Cumberland



**ANKE EILERGERHARD**

**ÜBERZUCKERT**  
AUSSTELLUNG MI 23.7. – FR 29.8.25

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BANBRIDGE KUNST

## Interview with Ian Cumberland

Ian Cumberland was born in Banbridge, Northern Ireland in 1983. He graduated from Ulster University in 2006, receiving a BA(Hons) in Fine and Applied Art. He works primarily with paint and installation. Cumberland stages fictional scenes, individual figures contained within generic everyday settings create an environment, which intrudes into moments that appear private.

**INTERVIEW: DANIEL LICHTERWALDT - PHOTOS: RAFAEL BARROS**

published on August 11, 2021



Artist Ian Cumberland

He carefully arranges mise-en-scènes, sets, actors, props and lighting to reconstruct an illusion of normality that is understood through mass media. These are then photographed and painted. The paintings are treated as objects among a multi component tableau staged within the gallery in a wider installation. Elements framed within the paintings extend into the space with fabric, paint, neon, sculpture and video work. By expanding the paintings' mode of presentation, Cumberland is highlighting the process of construction through a method of deconstruction, exploring ideas about the human condition, consumerism, symptoms of mass media, surveillance and control.



**What was a pivotal moment at the beginning of your career?**

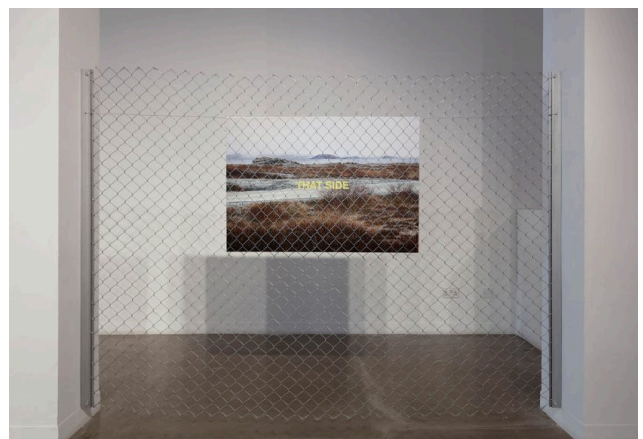
I won a number of portrait awards early on which at the time seemed like a really big deal but looking back I wouldn't really consider them that im-

portant anymore. So probably the most pivotal moment for me to date was five years ago when I made a shift towards working with public art galleries or local regional art centres. I started to introduce installation pieces alongside painting and think about the curation of the exhibition as a whole.

**“ I was just trying to make pieces that felt more meaningful to me, create the best work I possibly could at that point and at least attempt to say something about society and not really worry about the work commercially.**

### **What inspires your art?**

I take inspiration from anywhere. Sometimes I will be listening to a audiobook or podcast it could be as simple as a phrase that might spark some idea or similarly a lyric to a song. Maybe it's an element of an advert or fashion editorial, a scene in a movie an everyday observation anything really, I don't really try to look for inspiration it just seems to come naturally. When it doesn't, I have a general process that I will work through creating sets, hiring props, models, selecting colour palettes, lighting etc. and along the way, if I don't already know, I'll work out what it is I am trying to say which is usually some unravelling of that process to reveal something about how narratives are constructed and then sold to us.



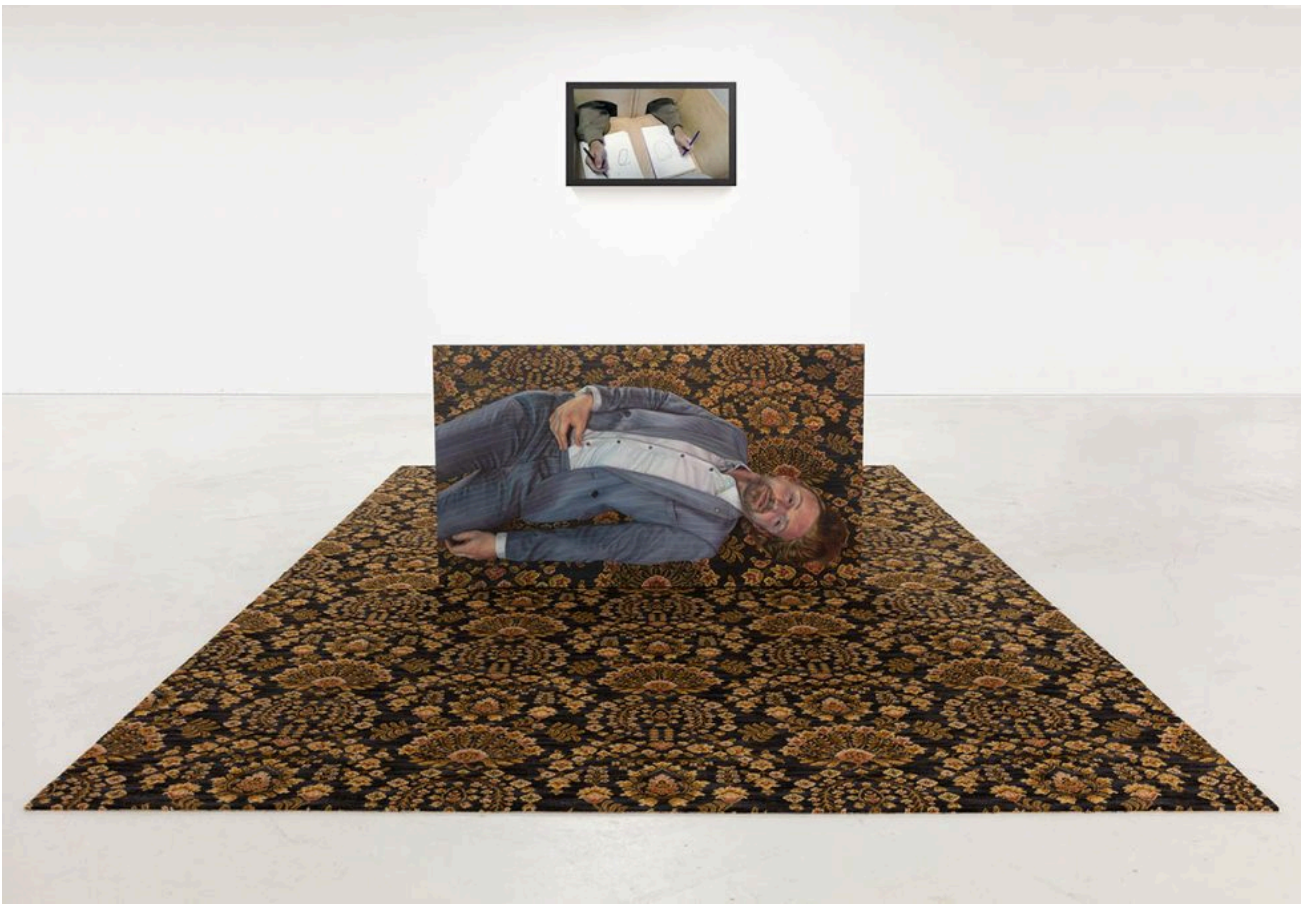


**Who are your biggest influences?**

I don't really have any big influences I like a lot of stuff there is no one particular artist that I continually look at.

**How do you structure your day?**

My days are pretty similar to a normal work week I will be my studio for around 8am I take an hour for lunch and finish around 5 or 6pm, 5 to 6 days a week.





### **How do you spend your free time?**

When I'm not working or doing general domestic things, I try to spend my free time being more active usually with little success or I record some music, I've been into making music from before I started to do art but it's purely a hobby I just enjoy it, nobody ever hears it.





**What things are you looking forward to this year?**

Hopefully me and my wife will take a few trips along the west coast of Ireland and do a little surfing, all be it very poorly and I will begin to start a new body of work for a solo exhibition in Leipzig in September 2022 at Josef Filipp Gallery. I'm looking forward to seeing how the work turns out as I have no real plans.

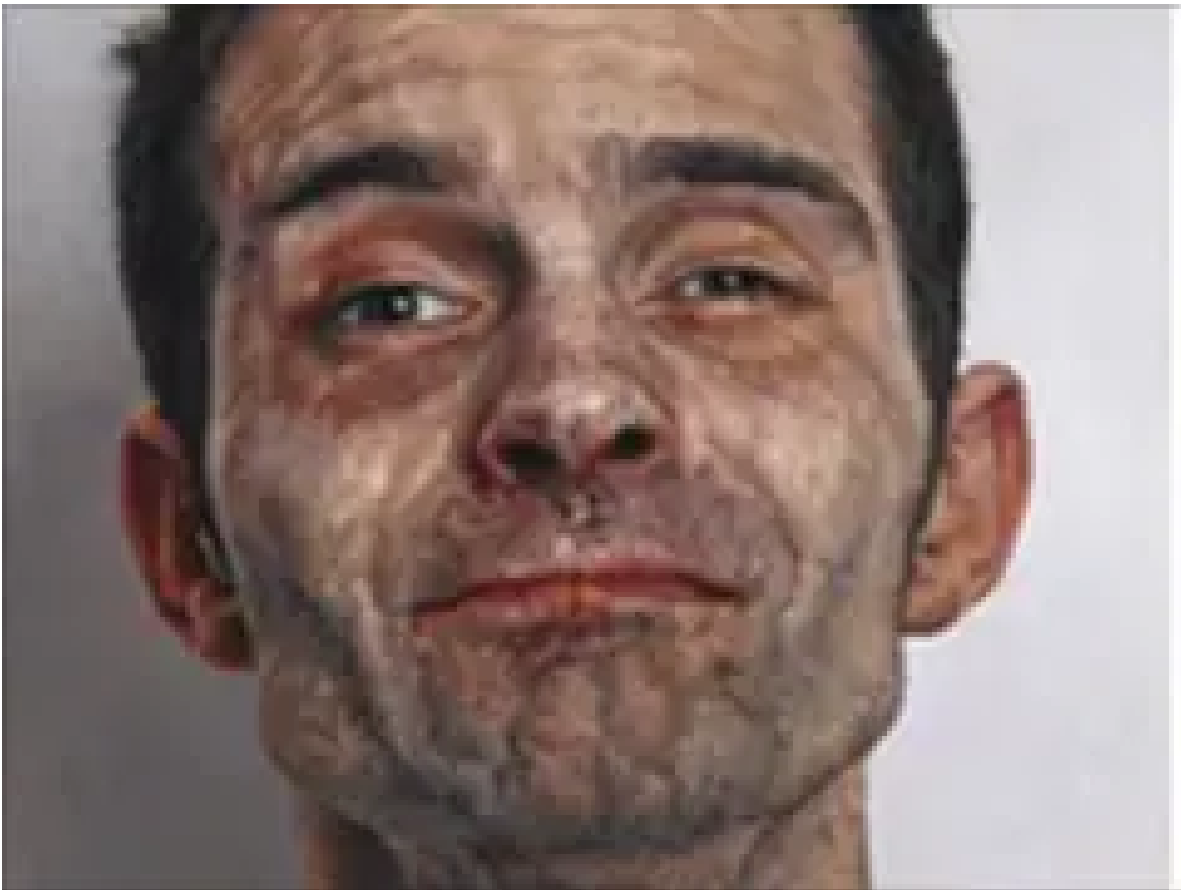
Ian Cumberland – [www.iancumberland.com](http://www.iancumberland.com)

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# NI artist takes third place in BP portrait contest

🕒 16 June 2011



| Ian Cumberland's portrait of a friend (Cropped for web due to technical constraints)

## **A young artist from Northern Ireland has taken third place in a prestigious portrait competition.**

Ian Cumberland, 28, who is originally from Banbridge but lives in Comber, was selected out of 2,400 entries in the BP Portrait competition.

His winning entry, "Just to feel normal" will be on display at the National Portrait Gallery in London.

"It's a real compliment to be even asked to exhibit in the BP Portrait Award," he said.

"So to be in the top three is a genuine honour and I'm delighted'.

The painting is an enigmatic, half-smiling, head-and-shoulders study of a friend.

"This is a painting of a friend whose story is like many others from my generation, who have fallen victim to themselves and the grinding pressures of life," he said.

"The title, Just to feel Normal, refers to his answer when I asked why he continues along his chosen path.

Since graduating in Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Ulster in 2006, he has had a solo exhibition at the Albermarle Gallery in London and won several awards.

His work is represented in many public and private collections.

## **Related internet links**

### **National Portrait Gallery - The Exhibition**

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## An impending sense of doom with artist Ian Cumberland



*Viewer II*, 2020, oil on linen, 120 x 110cm (image taken via @iancumberlandart)

With a solo exhibition now showing at JD Malat Gallery, Cumberland's work is at times an uneasy glimpse in the fucked up world we live in – Trump and all.

CULTURE  
Words: TJ Sidhu  
16th September 2020

In Cumberland's work is spooky stuff. The 37-year-old from Banbridge, Northern Ireland creates hyper-real and staged portraits, often focussing on the themes of consumerism and mass media. More specifically, he highlights the population's unconscious acceptance of manipulation and control through outlets like the news and the Internet.

Each work is a piece of social commentary. In his painting titled *Black Hole II* (2020), a middle-aged man shoves his arm through a black hole as a TV sits behind him, static. In *Viewer II* (2020), a woman wearing a glamorous evening dress sits by four TV sets – one showing Donald Trump shaking hands with

Chinese politician Xi Jinping, another showing a polar bear trapped on melting ice.

In its simplest form, the work explores constructs, how things are staged to create certain narratives and how those narratives or ideas are then sold to us," Cumberland says. "In a sense, I'm staging the 'spectacle' to explore the relationship between perception and illusion."

Cumberland graduated from Ulster University in 2006, where he studied for a BA in Fine and Applied Art. Ever since, his work has bounced between paint, installation, photography, video and sound. But whatever the medium, voyeurism is a running theme.

"I like the idea that you're looking at a scene which feels like something is happening, but at the same time nothing is happening at all," the artist explains. "It's about perception. When creating images I always start more intuitively."

Cumberland is capturing a moment in time. Subjects are caught mid-gaze, often staring blankly in the distance. Limbs are thrown around limply, as they're caught in an uncomfortable moment.

He likens it to being caught up in some kind of drama, mentioning that his work has been described as an "unintended moment of voyeurism" – and what's more invasive than glaring at some poor sod draped across their living room floor?

As an artist, Cumberland feeds off his surroundings, whether listening to a podcast or reading the news in the morning. Through his work, he wants to project "reality bubbles". In other words... perceptions about the world around us, who we are, and how it influences our behaviour.

"We are constantly being bombarded with images selling us ideas on how we should look, feel and act, so the very idea of free will is probably debatable," says Cumberland. "We have choices but they are very limited."

In Cumberland's solo exhibition, *Presence in Absence*, is showing now at JD Malat Gallery