

# The INTERVIEW: Sarah Morris

*The London-born, New York-based abstract artist tells EVE CLAXTON about her unusual route into the art world and a life filled with color*

*Photographs by PETER ASH LEE  
Styling by TRACY TAYLOR*

Sarah Morris is sitting in her all-white, Paul Rudolph-designed apartment on New York's Upper East Side. Dressed simply in a black tank and lounging pants, her dark brown hair is pulled back, a swipe of bright scarlet lipstick creating a dramatic flash of color. Beyond us, there is a view of the gritty East River waters, decorated by the swirling reflection of the giant Pepsi Cola sign on the opposite bank in Queens.

Being faced with so many bold contrasts, hard edges and graphic flourishes is akin to stepping into one of Morris' paintings – brilliant, flawless



Jumpsuit by Bottega  
Veneta; shoes by  
Charlotte Olympia

geometric abstracts, inspired by the structures and tensions of cities and their architecture. “I was beckoned to live here,” the 46-year-old says of her apartment. “I could not believe my luck.”

In person, Morris is far less intimidating than expected. Yes, she’s fiercely intelligent – within five minutes she has referenced novelist Vladimir Nabokov, designers Charles and Ray Eames and architect Oscar Niemeyer – but she also laughs easily and is appealingly self-deprecating (“Do I look like a model from a Robert Palmer video?” she jokes of her hairdo).

Her dry wit perhaps stems from her roots in England, where she was born in 1967, to an English father and an American mother. “We moved to the US when I was a child,” she says. “My father came for his work.”

With both her parents scientists, Morris “learned to question everything, to be very skeptical”. She carries two passports and always felt a little displaced as a

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**PROFESSION:** Artist  
**MY STYLE:** Feminine but structured, with a relationship to sport. Sometimes I go for bold color, other times just white  
**MY GO-TO LABELS:** Givenchy, Saint Laurent, Isabel Marant  
**MY FAIL-SAFE PIECES:** Silk blouses by Isabel Marant, jodphurs by Hermès, tees by Proenza Schouler  
**MY FAVORITE ACCESSORIES:** I seem to have a thing for white accessories

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result. “I wasn’t fully American, nor was I British,” she says. “Even though I grew up in America, I felt this distance from the culture.”

After studying semiotics at Brown University, she went to England’s Cambridge University for a year, where she read social and political theory. It was a turning point. “I met a lot of people who were interested in art,” Morris explains, “and I saw a number of exhibitions that were important to me. I got bitten by

Dress by Narciso Rodriguez



*“I don’t LOOK back and wonder if I could have done things differently. The PATH I took was the path I HAD to take”*



SARAH'S WORLD  
November 2013  
[Rio], 2013 (above);  
Electrobras [Rio],  
2013 (right)

art.” When she returned to New York, she won a coveted place on the Whitney Museum of American Art independent study program and began painting, while working as an assistant to Jeff Koons.

In 1996 she held her first show, for the influential White Cube gallery in London. “I packed a very big suitcase and ended up living [in London] for the next six years,” she remembers. “It was the perfect city to be in: the fashion world, the art world and the music world were all in one place.”

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*“I do **THINK** that you can have it all. Even those things that you don’t **NECESSARILY WANT** to have”*

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Morris says she is one of the few contemporary art stars who never went to art school. Does she regret it? “I’m not someone who looks back and wonders if I could have done things differently,” she says.

“The path I took was the path that I had to take.”

For the past 12 years, Morris has been based back in New York. She and her husband, artist Liam Gillick, with whom she has an 11-year-old son, Orson, divorced two years ago, at which point she moved into the Rudolph apartment. A blank slate, I suggest. “Blindly white,” she replies.

But it is not only her home that reflects Morris’ stark aesthetic. In fashion, she prefers simplicity above all. “I wear mainly black, or midnight navy,” she says. “If I do wear color, it’s a very specific orange-red, yellow or cyan blue.”

Is she drawn to the digital prints that have populated runways in recent seasons, which echo the geometry of her art? “There are designers who do amazing things with print, but it’s not for me,” Morris confesses. “They are too distracting for my character. I like a very plain, color-coded closet.”

Her studio is in Long Island City, an area that has become a locus for artists who want more space

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### SARAH’s go-to pieces

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“JUMPSUITS have attitude. I have many...”



Jil Sander



Moschino



Maison Martin Margiela



Cutler & Gross



Gianvito Rossi

“I LOVE BLACK skirts, straight or flared, as long as they are waisted.”



“STILETTOS IN unusual colors are my staple.”

and light than Manhattan can offer. In the evenings, she loves to cook for friends – her circle is an eclectic group of artists, architects and film-world types, including the actress Uma Thurman, whom she met “when our sons became friends”.

Tomorrow, she will be back in her studio, pushing forward

with two films currently in production, as well as developing artwork for several shows in 2015. How does she juggle film, painting and family? “I have a team at the studio, and my galleries help enormously with my projects,” she explains. “I do think you can have it all. Even the things you don’t necessarily want to have!”