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There's nothing this month's cover artist Crystal Fischetti likes better than getting messy in her studio. Before she stretches it on to a frame, Fischetti soaks her roll of canvas in paint on the floor, where she can sit on it and walk on it. It's a process called 'soak staining', first pioneered by one of Fischetti's heroes, the American abstract expressionist Helen Frankenthaler.

"Frankenthaler would sit on her canvases, drink whisky and have a cigarette while painting," says Fischetti. "With the soaking it's as if the piece is living. There's more of a relationship with it, it's very intimate."

Fischetti was born and raised in London but has spent a lot of her career in the USA. Her influences range from abstract expressionists to Navajo sand paintings, colour theory and sacred geometry, all of which she has incorporated into her piece for *First's* cover.

The arcs in the piece show the movement of falling leaves, while the colours capture autumn's warmth. "England is so beautiful



in the autumn, the burnt colours of the leaves and that really cool blue sky," she says. "The blue is also an invitation to winter, the knowledge that the warmth isn't going to be around for much longer so you may as well take it all in now."

Fischetti says her default colours are red, orange and yellow but, since moving back to the UK from Los Angeles, she has been trying to focus on less saturated colours and earth tones such as sienna, burnt umber and cadmium yellow. →

Her painting for First was soak stained in burnt umber and cadmium yellow before being allowed to dry. Then the movement begins. Fischetti picks up the roll of canvas, turns it upside down and sideways as she paints 'wet on wet', with paint dripping as she turns the canvas, a process she describes as "very physical and quite exhausting", depending on the size of the canvas.

Once she has added her main forms, or shapes, Fischetti defines them with pen, ink, white paint or sometimes even a "nice Sharpie", a technique called push and pull, which creates more depth. "The last thing I want when I step back is for it to look flat," she explains.

The end result, she hopes, will look as if there's a conversation inside the painting, with the different elements all speaking to each other. "If you look closely there are brush hairs too, even a staple," she says. "I like to leave those 'ugly' bits because that's life, nothing is perfect." ■

For more of Fischetti's work, crystalfischetti.com

Photography by Lee Kay-Barry (@leekayb;

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Crystal Fischetti
in her central
London studio
working on *Falling
Autumn Leaves* for
the *First* cover

