

Questions for ABIGAIL LANE

Which are your special memories of the pivotal exhibition *Freeze*? (would you like to share with us some anecdotes and thoughts regarding this turning point of your career?)

Freeze was a long time ago. It didn't seem so significant at the time and it has become labelled as a starting point in retrospect. History has to be pieced together like this. At the time it was just a natural thing for a group of students to do. My memory was that most student shows at that time seemed to be endless over emulsified scrappy boards, pieced together like a shanty town – an ill defined section set aside for each artist to whack up their works and to compete with one another, without consideration of the whole. Goldsmiths's, our college, really encouraged us to look outside of it's walls; as we were in London we had access to great shows all the time. I think Freeze emulated what we saw and sought to meet the same standards of presentation which made it appear very confident. There were shows and catalogues of so many great installation artists from all over the world, so that the previous way of doing college shows seemed outdated and lacking in the impact that could be achieved by tackling an exhibition in a more rounded way. I think there is a slightly cynical misrepresentation that the freeze group decided to be professional in a careerist way... I don't think any of us thought that far forward – I certainly didn't. It was just a case of get on with it rather than wait to be asked by the gallery regime - Do it well - Work together rather than against each other and make the most of what's available! That's still my motto really.

Could you ever imagine what would happen next?

Well I had another year at college after that – along with Mat Damien, Angus and others in the same year. Then we just carried on with self organized shows such as modern medicine. Everything flowed easily and quickly ... we all got offered shows in various combinations together and individually in galleries and public institutions. I didn't think that was exceptional at the time – just took the balls offered and rolled with them best I could.

Charles Saatchi once said that “Money is the message”. Do you agree?. Is there a link between artistic merit and its market value?. Are collectors rewriting Art History?

I am not quite sure what he meant by that but it is true that money and opportunities make things easier – both inspire confidence to move forward and to take risks. None of us had much money at the time but to sell a work makes it much easier to make another – keeps the momentum going. In this way collectors have always been part of the equation by which art is made and art history has been written. I am grateful to those that supported me by buying or producing those first works.

Artistic merit on the other hand cannot be secured or withdrawn by it's market value ... the merit is only valid to those who feel for the work – it is what it is to those who have a place for it in their mind and life...the cleaner that dusts a sculpture each week may take more from it than it's owner in that sense. I love that... not to poke any eyes but because to look is to have, if it works for you. Of course some people are only confident in their decisions if they are backed up by the credibility of other admirers or the price tag. “Merit”, “Market Value” ... It's all pretty slippery!

How did you discover what you wanted to do?. If you hadn't been an artist what would you have been?. What is your first memorable experience of the arts?.

I am not sure I ever discovered what I wanted to do ... I just do... I have no idea what else I could have been – I have never made a career choice in that way. I try to have a creative response to my circumstances. Making physical things seems like a good way of untangling some of what I think, see, feel and don't understand...

My first memorable experience of the arts was a sculpture by Michael Craig Martin ... a table that was held up by the buckets sitting on it. It turned my perception inside out in just the right way. It was logical yet magical. It was at Arnolfini gallery in Bristol where my mum worked. I was about 10... maybe younger. Michael became my teacher at Goldsmith's many years later and we are still friends. Good things tend to stick.

How did the idea to start *Showroom Dummies* arise?

I felt frustrated that I wasn't making enough money to get by. I was making mostly installations-relatively expensive productions that were difficult to sell. Most artists make editions to back up the larger or more difficult works and I was too but I noticed that although it was, and is, kept relatively quite many artists were also making rugs, crockery and so on – a bit like a fashion designer always seems to make a perfume at some point! I have always loved interiors and domestic objects and so I thought I would produce some things that I liked if I could. I felt there was a bit of snobbery between the art world and the world of design– which is crazy when there have been brilliant and thoughtful designers like Fornasetti and actually artists have always produced commercial things too. Anyhow I decided to be pretty up front about it. The circumstances were made possible by meeting my two partners Brigitte Stepputtis who heads the couture at Westwood and Bob Pain who has a great printing company. We had no money but between us we could pull resources to make a load of prototypes and put some things into production too. I love all the things we made but there were three problems. I am not business minded and couldn't limit myself to making a few profitable things – true to form I wanted to make everything that sprang to mind – it was great – there were no limits. It was fun and somehow we pulled every detail and whim into reality – it made no business sense but that's what I am like. Secondly I had no idea how much time it would take to attend to a company and make every detail perfect – I spent 5 years working flat out and although I was never intending to stop my gallery shows and works, somehow it took over, there weren't enough hours in the day. Finally it meant working with retail outlets – they are a nightmare and the respect I had grown to take for granted within the art world both for ideas and objects was non-existent in the manufacturing and shop world ... it is altogether different ...not a good place for me

do you get the ideas for your work? What topics interest you as an artist? Does the world of subconscious still inspiring your works?

As I mentioned before I try to respond to what comes my way but there are is a tangled web of things that always inspire and interest me. My books span circus, magic, natural history collections, curiosities, disasters, film posters, cards, gambling, freaks ... the list goes on.

How did you get the idea of “art as a crime”?

Artworks are the relics of ideas in many ways. Sometimes I think people try to unpick the ideas from the relics in the same way that truth is sought from evidence after a crime.

Do you make your art deliberately provocative?

I don't set out to make things disturbing if that's what you mean but art should be provocative somehow. It needs to provoke wonder or beauty but also ideas that turn ones perceptions are important - they are not always comfortable.

What is the best advice you've ever received?

I am not sure I received it yet! I think a few people have taught me that sometimes you have to put practical considerations first which isn't always my natural inclination.

Why did you decide to work with wallpaper as a medium?

I like the way it envelopes a room and therefore an experience for a person. In a gallery it works like sound or film, both of which I loop in a repetitive form if I use them, so that an audience is locked into a situation for a moment. Repetition can sometimes mask something uneasy by the decorative nature of patterns. This seems to be true of life also.

Tell me something about your works that will be on display at the Whitworth Art Gallery

I am not entirely sure what they are going to display so best not answer this for now... may be better to check with them.

What are you working on now?

My life changed quite considerably in the past three years, I had a son and moved out of London. I have been working slowly on some small and quite personal sculptures. I have a long running project I would like to complete; is an animated looped projection to work across the 4 walls of a room. It shows a slowly moving blue sky across which the bones of a single body float in zero gravity. It's called "Forever Always Somewhere".