

Laura Ford on Laura Ford

While I was growing up my family worked as show people on a fair, and the aesthetics of the fairground obviously influences my work today. I have vivid memories: such as the woman painted gold who would sit all day in a glass box full of rats, and then come, in her hair rollers and overcoat, to buy chips from my Grandfather. I love the element of fantasy sitting so close to the completely mundane.

Equally my education at a convent school was influential. I come from a family that was not interested in religion and I was able to witness and appreciate from the outside what seemed to me fantastic and weird rituals. I loved all the praying to statues, investing in them all your hopes, dreams and fantasies. As schoolgirls we used to imagine the statues coming alive once the school had closed, and wandering around the grounds. Later, when I travelled in India, I was particularly struck by the way devotees of the Hindu religion bring sculptures of their gods alive with clothes, pigment, butter, oils etc - much more interesting than how they might be seen in a museum. I love the way a bit of carved stone in a dress covered in pigment can come alive and mean so much to people.

My choice of materials is very intuitive and a fantastic excuse for large amounts of shopping. It's important to me to have a large stock of materials as they can often act as a catalyst for new work.

Often the choice of materials is nostalgic and influenced by the kind of clothes that were being worn while I was growing up. I suppose they were clothes that had more evidence of being made, often by hand; clothes that my kids would have a fit over if I tried to make them wear them.

I started to work like this at a time when it seemed important to everyone else that all trace of the artist's hand was erased, and if you could, you got someone else to fabricate work for you. It felt quite perverse to be making these things that were so obviously hand made all over, lovingly so, by me. This is a position I find myself in quite often- the position of being at a tangent to the accepted norm - so I must quite enjoy it!

In developing *The Great Indoors* I was enjoying the idea of camouflage not working in the context of the gallery. I had the opportunity to make the show for a large white space with beech flooring and skylights at the Centre of Art in Salamanca, Spain. For a long time I had wanted to create a forest of stags with oversized antlers suggesting trees, their bodies hedges, their legs trunks and undergrowth. I felt that the glare of this immaculate space could make the postures of these animals feel like they had been caught in the headlights of an oncoming car. Through this exposed context I imagined the struggling figures of the *Glove Boys*, a cross between Scott trudging through a snow scape and the many homeless people I pass every day in London.

The Great Outdoors has developed since the Salamanca show. Some *Mother's Sons 1* and *2* have been included and one of the *Glove Boys* *Glove Boy* has been lost. With the inclusion of these two outdoor pursuit figures the work has become less Antarctic and more of the forest. The *Mother's Sons* are a bit like Roy Mears meets Joseph Beuys or boy scout meets terrorist but whoever they are they are

fond of their gear.

In addition to my larger sculptures, I have always made work in ceramics. My interest in ceramics goes back to the fair ground again. My grandmother –and, it seemed, most other show people at the time- collected lots of very elaborate and expensive ornaments. This was my introduction to sculpture, and was not far off all I knew about it when I went to Art School. They were my equivalent of Ganesh or the blessed virgin.

I still enjoy making ceramics now, and use the pieces much as I used to use drawings, to develop ideas. I like the idea of these little gestures on people's shelves or mantelpieces.

My new work, `Headthinkers`, incorporates my sculptures with my work in ceramics. These are a series of soft bodies with ceramic donkey heads, resting heavily on plinths or shelves; looking as though the problem of dealing with the plinth has finally got the better of them.

After nearly 20 years of teaching, my tastes in art are very catholic- I am prepared to look at anything and try to find something interesting in it. I suppose I get really engaged when an artist has obviously got imaginatively involved with the stuff, be it video, paint, light or old bits of bread. I'm moved when you can see someone has got excited about something.

Some filmmakers have in the past had a particular influence on me- like David Lynch, Jean Cocteau and Frederico Fellini for instance, and certain films including Night of the Hunter (Charles Laughton 1955), Don't look now(Nicholas Roeg 1973) , Fanny and Alexander (Ingmar Bergman 1983) and The Ice Storm (Ang Lee 1997).

There is, I think, in this country a suspicion of anything that appears to be accessible, as if being immediately engaged by a work somehow makes it an uncomplicated piece. There is a mistrust of visual art being visual. Maybe this is why this is why some galleries are so intent on placing information boards everywhere you look, sometimes dominating spaces and telling you how you should be looking at or reading the art works. To me, this stops people really engaging in the artwork in an imaginative way. I don't really mind if the viewer misses certain references, doesn't quite get all the complexities; I think people need space to experience the work and then perhaps if it interests them, do some research. As far as my own work is concerned, I hope the viewer can take the experience of seeing the show home with them and unravel or elaborate as much as they want to in their own time.

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