

Art & Design

As a professional working artist our speaker has exhibited internationally and has pieces in collections all over the world, including Singapore, Dubai, and New York. Her pieces are full of animal motifs, having always loved animals, especially birds.

She studied Design and Craft at Gray's School of Art at Aberdeen, and has a Master of Design in Product and Furniture from Edinburgh Art College.

Background:

I went to Royal High School and I got 3 Highers but I didn't really like school, I was bullied and chronically shy. However I had a fantastic art teacher, and I learned how to express myself through art.

I worked for 3 years on a portfolio and went to Gray's School of Art for a BA Hons in Design and Craft, and later took an MDes in product and furniture.

I am now a working artist at Studio 48, Beaverhall Artist Studios.

Art School:

I really enjoyed my time at Art School. It was a fantastic opportunity to explore ideas and to create what you want to create. It was also lots of fun.

Design and Craft was a very broad discipline. I got to work with diverse materials in the workshop, wood, perspex and metal. There was a CNC machine - very modern at that time, and I managed to focus on developing my work and to find ways to express emotions through my products.

Image - Salt and Pepper shakers, abstract pewter cast shapes which "hug" each other.

In my 3rd year I went to Rovaniemi in Finland, part of the University of Lapland. It was minus 20 in winter. I took these photographs of the reindeer races (image). I learnt how to forge and to sculpt ice. We also learnt jewellery techniques and 3D computer programmes.

Image - Pewter Rat Urns, casts taken from dead rats used for snake food in pet shops.

I took my work to the New Designers show in Islington in 1998, by this time I had become interested in making lights out of resin. (image)

I did a PG dip course at MA - and made these "pilgrim lights" (image)

Art & Design



I followed this with an MDes Product course at Edinburgh College of Art in 2007. This was a fantastic experience. We got a lot of access to the workshops of ceramic and glass as well. I looked at lighting symbolically - "Underdogs" (image)

I was invited to do a PHD. At this point, I was tested for dyslexia and I discovered I was borderline dyslexic. This clarified my experience at school. However the tests also revealed I had a talent for constructing things and for space management.

Present work:

I moved from lighting to more figurative work in 2007 - making the frames myself and using charcoal and Dutch metal on board.

I build the frames by bending ply, using oval jigs. This is "barn owl", 95 cm high, using metal and pastel on board (image). I developed my own technique using gold leaf. I like to control the whole process myself.

My Business:

The next challenge was to become a working artist - to make the transition to selling the work. I had to develop a tough skin. I realised it is impossible to please everyone. However much I want people to like my work, a percentage love it, a percentage hate it, the remainder are indifferent.

I sell my work at affordable art fairs and at galleries in Edinburgh, Oxford, London and Cambridge.

There is an immense satisfaction that comes from creating something from scratch - from the beginning to completion - it is very rewarding. Working freelance suits my personality. 50% of the day is admin as I am self-employed.

My newest work is "The living tree" (image) . The galleries exert some deadlines and pressure. I tend to make about 10 or 12 pieces at a time. I need to photograph and deliver them by a certain date to the galleries.

My income fluctuates - sometimes not all the pictures get sold. I sell work in Singapore and Dubai, I package these pieces and post them to be shipped around the world. It is a great feeling that people all around the world have bought my artworks.

Art Classes:

I also run art classes - and have a social enterprise project starting soon, to provide free art classes for women and children who have suffered from domestic abuse.

It is important to be flexible and to have a few streams of income.

Art & Design



My contemporaries from art school are working in lots of different areas - they don't all make their own art, other careers my peers have followed after art college include working in design, curating exhibitions, community education and product design.

Questions:

Do you get to travel?

I don't really have time - it is a shame I don't get to go where my artworks do!

Was it difficult to start selling your work?

It was terrifying. The first time I took some works into a gallery, they scoffed at it. I found it easier to contact people by email, and I also adapted my work into something that people would want to buy. There was a level of compromise.

Other jobs?

I have worked lots of places: I was a head chef in a Mexican restaurant, so I can make great burritos.

Your typical day?

I put on loud music, tidy the studio, talk to suppliers, buy and research materials, draw birds and make frames.

October 2018