

Still Waters Run Deep

At the beginning of this exhibition journey, I felt most clearly that what we need right now is a Lake Faulkner. It is a shady place, soothing to the soul, envisioned as an equivalent to a lake discovered by chance in a forest clearing. Lake Faulkner is imaginary, a landscape for a virtual imagination, but it is also a line drawing, and then a silhouette, cut with a curved knife into soft black linoleum and set flush into the floor.

Still waters run deep, as the saying goes. William Faulkner was an American novelist for whom individual voices and nature play significant roles. Faulkner used a stream of consciousness technique to capture the chaotic, continuous flow of inner thoughts, often ignoring traditional punctuation and grammar rules to create a more organic, immediate experience. He used non-linear narratives and time shifts to disrupt chronological order, using flashbacks and shifting timelines to show that the past is never truly dead, but rather constantly influencing the present. He used multiple perspectives, often telling a story through the, at times, contradictory viewpoints of several characters, including children, the outcast, or the illiterate. His novel, *As I Lay Dying*, progresses through chapters which are each narrated from the perspective of the different characters in the story. Here is young Darl reflecting on drinking water at night:

DARL : When I was a boy I first learned how much better water tastes when it has set a while in a cedar bucket. Warmish-cool with a faint taste like the hot July wind in cedar trees smells...At night it is better still. I used

to lie on the pallet in the hall, waiting until I could hear them all asleep, so I could get up and go back to the bucket. It would be black, the shelf black, the still surface of the water a round orifice in nothingness, where before I stirred it awake, I could see maybe a star or two in the bucket, and maybe in the dipper a star or two before I drank."

This image of blackness and night, of liquid in a vessel- a cup, a bowl, a lake, a pool- has been central to my internal imagination for as long as I can remember myself. I recall the first time I read this paragraph in *As I Lay Dying* and feeling like I was home, and that I was no longer alone. My early wood and black glass sculptures reflect this. Those works were also the moment when my practice began to emerge and my career began. I understand this being to do with the balance of open and closed in these works. The works are closed, but the reflective black glass inserted panel, also created an opening for others to themselves enter the hermetic space of the work. This relation of open and closed has been very important to me and I learnt a lot over a long time from those early woodworks inspired by *As I Lay Dying*. *As I Lay Dying* led me down a path which I remain on today, and which I have always been on. Den building was an important part of my childhood and remains a vital methodology today. Dens can be solitary or social, a sanctuary or a retreat, provisional or elaborated. It is out of these first spaces and then, the small object sculptures and related photographs, that the pastoral landscape spaces I have been dreaming and making over the last 15 years have emerged.

My long, perilous, stigmatized, 45-year journey to a late, female-profiling autism diagnosis, led me to here. Since then, I have connected

with others as myself and no longer feel alone. Deep loneliness was my primary experience from puberty until diagnosis. Since then, I have not felt lonely for a moment, even at the times when I was most alone due to bullying. I understood that I get to spend each day in my own company, with myself. Knowing this has been life changing. I am no longer excluded by myself due to experiences of being excluded by others. Being at the centre of one's own small world is a marvellous thing to discover and then to get to live each day, and to tend and nurture that world. It sounds simple, but this radical difference cannot really be put into words. If you have ever experienced depression, for example, and felt the sunlight of healing, you will know something of all of this.

The exhibition is for me about individual experience over several decades as an interior landscape of various shades and hues. It is also about ambiguity and the experience of slowly coming to understand oneself and also understanding more about how easy it is to misunderstand, or be misunderstood by, others and about how hard it can be to do the work to understand each other with compassion for our differences. It is about my own slow journey through decades of anxiety and fear, into a newer place, a clearing in which I understand the rights I have to be illegible, and to hold and make a space for human illegibility and opacity to rest, to open up, to commune.

In this penal society of casual exclusion and cancellation for making social errors, or the miscommunications that so easily occur via language, I have made what is for me a deeply opaque and, I hope, deeply hospitable space to encounter each other via the opportunities that art offers us.

It is dangerous to speak directly to the injustices that occur within society and frightening to watch the democratic freedoms the West has taken for granted in our lifetimes being broken down. The difference between remaining silent and being silenced is radical. I am afraid to speak directly to the dangers present in the current arts leadership; whether those who's love of art turned into a love of power, or those around them who can see what is being done, but do not speak out of fear. We need virtuous leadership and altruistic, trustworthy governance. This exhibition is a place for renewal and reset, somewhere to sit and slow down and think, plan, map out new routes and pathways for oneself. That's what I am going to do too.

My advice to others is to always back yourself, most especially when it feels like everything and everyone is against you, find others you can be yourself with safely, and, most of all, never give up.

BB

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