

## Review of our Wednesday Morning Talk, 13th June

***From costume jewellery to dust painting, prehistory to particle physics. Four artists, about to exhibit in Harbury, show the range of work to be found in its studios and gardens.***

For several years now, the village of Harbury has made a very lively and varied contribution to Open Studios. Several AMA members and speakers, past and present, live and exhibit there, including Libby January, Katharine Barker, Moira Lamont, Susan O'Grady, Viv Hunt and Sarah Jane Wilson. In 2018, it seemed that numbers might be down as several were taking a year off, but then a series of guest exhibitors saved the day. At our last meeting before the summer break and only a few days before Open Studios, our Wednesday morning talk was focussed on Harbury, with four exhibitors sharing the platform.

First to take the stand was jewellery maker, Jules Whiteside. Jules explained how she had had a varied career including being a knitwear designer, painter of furniture, writer of children's stories and running a business creating exhibition stands. Shortly after she closed this business a friend took her to a bead fair in London and she was hooked.

Jules creates very practical, wearable costume jewellery, using a wide range of beads, mother of pearl, ribbons and fur pompoms in every possible colour and degree of sparkle. There were nods of agreement and appreciation when she showed the large, magnetic fasteners used on many of her necklaces. No more struggling with tiny clasps or having to persuade your significant other to help you disrobe.



She emphasised the need to keep up with trends, fashion colours and changing styles and also to keep prices suitable for gifts and impulse purchases. There is no point in making costume jewellery, if you can't sell it. Presentation is also key. Jules was dressed in a stylish black outfit, with plain bodice and simple neckline, immaculately made up and coifed, allowing her to model and form a backdrop for her own work. Like potter, Penny Varley, who spoke to us earlier in the year she demonstrated a very business like awareness of customers' needs and taste, focussing on a distinct product and, not surprisingly, made the odd sale while she was with us.



Libby January spoke next and began by telling us that we were going to do the talking and, to a great extent we did. John Hunt got us on to the subject of particle physics, inspired initially by one of Libby's "dotty" paintings and, as I understand it, we all agreed that to create the new and the unconventional we must abandon the Renaissance / Newtonian physics ways of thinking and pursue a different kind of reality. Returning to more practical matters, Libby described how all her dots are cut out, individually, by hand. This year's show is likely to have fewer dots, much of her work being collage incorporating tracing paper and pastel. As always, it will be a very worthwhile

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visit.

Wendy CampbellBriggs described how she had been practising as an artist for around ten years and working with ceramics for up to seven. Much of her inspiration comes from archaeology and visits to the British Museum, with items from flea markets and objet trouve being incorporated and adding interest and meaning. For example, some little packets of letters, purchased in France turned out to be letters, in French, to a doctor, written in the 1850's and thanking him for looking after family members. She has attached fragments of these, as labels, to her archaeology inspired tear bottles (which were used to collect tears of mourners and then put in the tomb) to express changed times and loss.



On the practical side, Wendy's ceramics are raku and smoke fired work. A fascinating piece, a bowl with animal head spouts, almost still warm from the fire, exuded a burnt woody smell into the room. Raku and smoke firing of ceramics can give an otherworldliness, the look of having aged and undergone the accidents of millennia. Was it Minoan, or had it, indeed, been made a few days ago in Leamington Spa?

Finally, and providing further evidence of the range and variety to be found in Harbury Open Studios this year, it was Sally Carpenter's turn, speaking on behalf of The Edge. The Edge are a group of women who graduated together, as mature students, in 2002, originally comprising Grace Newman, Angie Stride, Mary Partridge, Dorothy Biddle and Rosemary Keep, plus of course, Sally. Rosemary has since moved on to other things and Dorothy died in 2013, leaving a group of four.



The Edge have exhibited together on many occasions since their graduation, each member developing themes and approaches, but all of it unusual, off the wall, sometimes poignant, sometimes humorous and tending toward installation rather than anything many of the public recognise as "Art". Sally has used the Stealth Bomber as a frequent theme, Mary is known for her "dust paintings", Grace for use of medical equipment and Angie for videos.

They usually work to a theme, this year's being "Invasive", representing the idea that they are invading my (Katharine's) Harbury garden. All I know, at this stage, is that there is a small, heat seeking missile flying, perhaps appropriately, through my smoke bush.

All in all, it sounds as if Harbury 2018 will provide something for everyone. I know we are all rather excited about it!

Katharine Barker.