

Evening visit to Libby January's Studio, 30th June

By the time you read this, the week of the 23rd to 30th of June may seem a distant memory. It was the week in which the Prime Minister resigned, the leader of the opposition failed to resign, despite an overwhelming vote of no confidence, and the “winner” of the Brexit referendum turned down the chance of standing for high office. If there was one thing we were all agreed on, it was that “an hour is a long time in politics”, to misquote Harold Wilson.

There is possibly only one artist in AMA whose work and creativity could hold its own against this background, **Libby January**, so it is fortunate that our first summer evening visit was to her studio. I had advertised it as a chance to explore Libby's wonderful garden, with its climbing roses, yellow irises, pond, hens, fish and garden sculpture. In the event, it was pure luck that rain just managed to hold off on this dark, dank late June evening. But inside the studio, all was warmth, light and colour, wine and canapes.



Libby began her talk by telling us a little about her studio. Visitors from a few years back will remember a generously proportioned garden shed. This has now been replaced by possibly the most desirable studio in Warwickshire. Libby's brief to her architect was simply that she wanted three spaces, a dirty room for pastel work, a gallery and a utility area comprising store room and loo. One, two, three, all in a row. The two main rooms have fully glazed, folding doors all down one side, opening out onto a small veranda creating the illusion of being an extension of the delightful garden beyond. Lighting, hanging systems, choice of wall colours and some very contemporary furnishings all add to the effect. I asked if the construction of the building was modular, flatpack type and learnt that it was a floating structure, without foundations, easing its route around planning regulations.

We then moved on to memories of Libby's college years at the Warwickshire School of Art. Anne Cole, who was present, had been one of Libby's contemporaries and Moira Lamont's late husband, Brian, had been Director of Art and Design, so there was a group trip down Memory Lane, recalling tutors past and present.

Libby soon found that she enjoyed working with pastels, not least because you don't have to wait for them to dry and you can get physically involved with them, smudging on a large scale, if you wish. Over the last year or two she has made much use of tracing paper, colouring large expanses and overlaying sheets. Jane Williams raised the traditional teaching that pastels should only be used on paper with a “tooth”, but we were assured that this is not necessary and that she likes building up colours, with dark, rich tones first.

One of Libby's ambitions was to become a member of the Pastel Society. This involved several years of submitting work and finally presenting sketch books. Despite not being a sketch book user (“everything is now”), she was admitted to the Society, only to find that this would involve an annual membership fee of some £200, which slightly took the edge off the celebrations. However, this, and getting work into the RA, began to open doors and galleries got in touch.

Evening visit to Libby January's Studio Cont....

Like many artists, Libby has a natural reticence about talking about her work, so it was a sign that we had all relaxed and that we were proving to be a generous and supportive audience, when, from the back store cupboard, some precollege works were produced: conventional oil (or where they acrylic?) paintings of the family home and children. These truly illustrated what a long road she has travelled, as we sat there surrounded by subjects she has referred to as her "inklings", based on physics, music and searches for the intangible, trying to understand what it means to be abstract, to express "self". Perhaps Libby's phrase, "working with my eyes wide shut" expresses it best?

A truly inspiring evening.

Katharine Barker

An evening with Leyla Folwell



Set in the heart of rural south Warwickshire, in an old converted mill you will discover 'The Ceramics Studio and Gallery'; a unique retreat. A hideaway offering workshop space and a gallery, a place to find yourself, developing your artistic talents and learn with others. All this has been brought to life by the ubiquitous and equally engaging Leyla Folwell.

AMA members were treated to an evening talk by Leyla and an opportunity, over a glass of wine, to visit the studio, chat to the artist about her work and hear about her ambitions for the future.

In 2000, Leyla, graduated in Ceramics from Loughborough University having explored sculpture, use of the wheel, slab and mould making. She then embarked on a decade of moving around England, working in different settings, including a number of artist residencies, to adult education and community arts projects.

Leyla honed her people and artistic skills working with children, adult and groups, helping communities develop group and individual aspirations. Leyla's passion for ceramics and sculpture has enthused those whom she taught and helped to give extra meaning to their lives

An evening with Leyla Folwell Cont...

and the workshops and arts projects became an outlet for hidden and untapped creative energy.

This passion led her to vision the setting up of a studio and gallery space in 2014 from which to run workshops and inspire a whole new generation of budding potters. Creating a bespoke gallery to show work and space to develop her own practice.

Initially, a joint venture of (former owner of the in Shipston) they also of hand crafted terracotta colours with vivid and also available to for Leyla was on the

Leyla a has always you want to work with talking with Brian From small beginning the something more solid, Warwickshire Open



Leyla talks with Brian O'Grady

Leyla and Bruno Dauvin's 'Where I Fell in Love' gallery launched Wigwam, a range kitchen ware, in strong splashes of line and colour purchase. But the main focus studio and workshops

cherished the notion that 'if ceramics we will find a Leyla O'gradyway to help you'. studio has grown into gaining a reputation though Studios and with a steady

flow of regular customers accessing the workshops and studio facilities. Recently she had the opportunity to extend the working space but, I think wisely, decide to concentrate in consolidating what she has successfully established now, with a greater focus on the studio work..

Leyla's keenness to support others sometimes distracts her from developing her own practice and as she moves forward it is her ambition to create more time and opportunities to work on her own ceramics and sculptures.

From large beautiful glazed plates in subtle blues and greens, to small sculptural figures of crowds of people. She likes to investigate the deconstruction of materials by unfolding or cutting in half the hardened clay to see what's inside, to intrigue with both the inner and outer workings of the clay. Her work is quirky and fun. She enjoys pushing the boundaries and challenging herself.

Do visit 'The Ceramics Studio and Gallery', maybe even sign up for a pottery course, enjoy the experience! You won't be disappointed. For more information go to www.theceramicsstudio.co.uk

Fiona Metcalfe

AMA member

Morning talks, 22nd June: Moira Osborne and Jane Williams.

Moira Osborne

began by saying that she was going to talk about “bowls” and, indeed, she did. Her early life as a chef and later as an upholsterer Moira Osborne was quickly dealt with, there was a passing reference to her training as a potter (with Emma Falcke at the Warwickshire School of Art) and we were into the techniques of throwing, slab building and coiling.

Moira is influenced by the sea and by the natural environment of her large garden, which provides leaves, seeds, fruits and flowers, which reappear in her work. She showed us a bowl constructed as a giant flower, each petal being constructed from its own slab of clay and formed over a hump mold. Also slab built, but of much more fragile appearance, she showed us one of her “wave” bowls. While every one is different, this example had an impressed swirling wallpaper design on the base and a deep blue interior, with turquoise surround. To some extent, this was a lucky accident (a common occurrence in ceramics) caused by the barium glaze puddling.



We discussed, briefly, how many variables there are in ceramics, including position in the kiln, which affects temperature and how the very idea of firing clay must have been a chance discovery. For all those of us who have ever produced a flawed pot, Moira reminded us that “flaws” are highly valued in Chinese ceramics, each one being unique.

Glass fragments are often used in the glazing process, melting and running to produce clear, glossy interiors to vessels. Moira has tried putting “sea glass”, those well worn pieces you find on the beach, into the base of one of her bowls. Strangely, despite being taken to an appropriately high temperature, these fragments remained pebble like, possibly due to a high sodium chloride content?

Moira concluded by explaining how much of her pleasure in pots comes from the sense of contact between the maker and the holder, how the size and proportions of the potter’s hands control and form the shaping of the clay, which is then passed on, hopefully giving pleasure to the recipient.

Jane Williams

Jane’s talk was about a problem she has been wrestling with for over a quarter of a century, how to reconcile the fact that music moves through time, but painting is static. She expressed the pleasure this little difficulty has brought her by quoting Henry Moore.

“The secret of life is to have a task, something you devote your entire life to, something you bring everything to, every minute of the day for the rest of your life.

