

Sunday 7th June, 2020

*Time ticks by it always does,
It never wants to wait for us,
It always wants to race us there,
And then it's gone, but why, and where?*

(The Sloth's Shoes, Jeanne Willis)

Even before we locked down, it was clear we were about to experience something life-altering. As I headed home on the 17th of March I already had a vague notion that I would make a diary, a cup every day to document my own experience and some of the wider social, political and cultural happenings of the pandemic.

As I write we're on day 81. I've just opened my last bag of clay -

I allocated 50 kilos of a creamy coloured, slightly speckled stoneware – and I plan to stop on the 15th June (day 90) when some children will be invited back to school and non-essential shops can start to reopen.

I have made dozens of vessels; some resemble cups, others are unrecognisable, like the one I ran over with my bike because the way we exercise has changed. Many are thrown on the potters' wheel, others built from slabs with embossed detail. On day 48

I made the 'ode to denim' when I realised that I'd worn the same two pairs of shorts for two months straight. I rolled an old pair of jeans over the clay to leave a relief pattern complete with pocket detail and belt loops and then used the slab to construct a rudimentary vessel shape. The piece was finished with a wash of manganese to bring out the details. Others in the collection are part-glazed from a limited palette, and a rare few have some gold lustre detail or fired-on decals.

There is narrative, abstraction, metaphor and some subtle (and more blatant) art history references.

Since March 17th, time has been difficult to understand. Looking back, lockdown seems like somewhere between a heartbeat and an eternity. In one way we've lost a whole season. The summer is here, the baby birds have fledged and the blossom has gone, replaced by tiny fruits ready to swell. What happened to spring and those rituals we associate with it? Easter holidays, degree shows and the end of the university year. Viewed differently we've been at home forever. Our old routines have morphed into new rituals which have become so ingrained we are almost institutionalised by them. My time has narrowed. A 24 hour cycle is pretty much on repeat. I see the same people, work in the same place and eat the same regular three meals (plus snacks). Looking back before lockdown is disconcerting. I struggle to feel nostalgia for hugging friends and traveling to work on the sweaty packed train, because we currently have no way to know when the old normal might return. But if looking back is awkward, projecting forward is virtually impossible. We don't yet know if every child can go to school in September or when our next holiday might be. Will we be able to have Christmas dinner with our loved ones or will that be a facsimile this year mediated by a screen and an increasingly popular meetings app?

As the diary grows I start to reflect and the early entries seem like another world. Day two was called the 'Pandictionary' and considered the new language we were being introduced to; social distancing, panic buying and stimulus packages. Today it seems ludicrous that people were stockpiling toilet roll and pasta - it seemed bonkers at the time to me anyway.

Some of the pieces have new significance as time trundles along its narrow track. On the 18th of April, day 32, I made a gravy jug with its own tiny facemask. There simply wasn't enough protective equipment for our caring staff in the hospitals and the care homes. Everyone blamed everyone else and the issue dominated the daily news conference for several days. Nearly 50 days later and I have made a couple of dozen masks from reclaimed fabric (my Mother's old pastel coloured cotton capri pants mostly) and it has just been announced that masks will be compulsory on public transport. Artists have adopted the mask to make political or satirical comments and wearing in public is commonplace.

It seems even the concept of time through my diary is fluid. What should be a robust daily measure, like a clock or a calendar, is a flexible and ever moving beast within which meanings are not yet settled.

This will finish; humanity is resilient and some patches of the old normal will resume. For now the timing is uncertain and so I plod, one foot in front of the other through the days, mostly smiling, but on the inside trying to process the nonsense in a wibbly wobbly world where everything we know is like a ball of slime dripping through a sieve.