

KERRY JAMESON

Unbounded

7 November to 21 December 2013

I have known Kerry since 2006 and have watched as her practice has become ever more dynamic, versatile and intriguing. She uses many different scales; little creatures, human and animal, are often juxtaposed with much larger, half animal/half human forms reminiscent of mythology and fairy stories. She is willing to depart from pure ceramics, incorporating other materials into her clay, and a recent radical step has been to break up, redistribute and enclose initial clay forms in other materials like canvas. But her work is always firmly grounded in her feeling for animals. She has an intuitive understanding and affinity with them and in her work they are powerful presences, sometimes engaging, sometimes menacing, sometimes humorous but never sentimental.

In her latest work Kerry has drawn on disparate sources: Pickett's Charge, the ill-conceived infantry assault by Confederate troops at the Battle of Gettysburg in the American Civil War, the Wicker Man legend and other pre-Christian rituals in European cultures where a human parades as larger-than-life, disguised as an animal or covered in vegetation. Such forms act as mediators between human and other worlds. What do these different sources have in common I wonder and why has Kerry turned to them?

Some words come to mind: the word 'sacrifice' for example. The human sacrifices burnt inside the Wicker Man, the rank and file soldiers sacrificed on Pickett's Ridge and the sacrifice of some of Kerry's own work that was involved in the making of 'Unbounded', when she needed sometimes to destroy and sometimes to hide. The process of covering clay works in canvas has transformed them into mediator forms. Why do such mediators, who negotiate on behalf of humankind with other worlds, so often demand sacrifice in mythology and in pre-Christian rites? Is sacrifice an essential component of the creative process?

Another relevant word for me is 'bestiary'. Kerry's creatures form a wonderful individual vocabulary that remind me of the Romanesque carvings on the corbels at Kilpeck church in Herefordshire. Perhaps Kerry's bestiary reflects a bridge between the archetypal and the personal, a link between the mythologies and folk lore of different cultures and the unique bank of images held within an individual's unconscious that has the potential to be realised through art and in dreams.

And what of the two large headless figures in Confederate uniform, the confident Generals, juxtaposed with the little soldiers trapped on their frame cage? Kerry mentioned Guy Fawkes heads to me and I was reminded of TS Eliot's 'The Hollow Men'.

*'We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw'*

The uniforms disguise the emptiness of these human authoritarian figures and contrast with the hidden interiors of the other-world intermediaries.

The result of the covering up processes involved in the realisation of these works - enclosing, masking, trapping, disguising - has been to break down boundaries, both in Kerry's practice and in the worlds she reveals.

Shirley Richmond (October 2013)

After a career in clinical microbiology, SR obtained a Fine Art degree at the John Moores University in Liverpool.

Making Unbounded

I have a small studio in West London which nestles between tenement blocks. The building's original purpose was to serve as the local laundry, and on the concrete floor you can still see the imprint where the industrial machines used to sit. In my space I have shelving fixed against the walls; one side is crammed full with found objects and the many materials I collect, while on the other, looking over me, is my work. It keeps me company so that although I have a solitary existence in the studio, I am never alone. There isn't a window and often I am unaware of the exact time of day and the weather outside. But in that small inner space things happen.

Beginnings

Things will start with an undigested emotion or an idea that has to be worked through, making has become a way of understanding, a place to store things, perhaps a way of joining the inner experiences with outer surroundings. It is the difficult complicated emotions that interest me, the things which we like to keep concealed but which have nevertheless come to light, and that perhaps sit uneasily in our civilised world. I look to find a rhetoric, a means of articulation, for what I am trying to say whether in the everyday occurrences or in museum collections, books and my own photographs. I start searching and collecting, trying to find a face and a body for the invisible and unarticulated, and in doing so I look for different materials to create its texture. Many found objects are included, things that I may have come across whilst walking - that which lies underfoot, a stone between paving slabs, or a seed fallen from a tree. These are then absorbed and find a place in the material world of the sculpture.

When reflecting upon and reworking human experience, boundaries are something we instinctively need, to feel held and to offer security, while we assert personal freedoms. But the unbounded has no borders, and I have never felt constrained when considering what or what not to use in my work. So I don't feel I need to force the work into a particular direction. This unconstrained way of working allows for things to surface naturally and eventually they seem to cohere around a common theme.

Making seems to have a language of its own.

In 2010 I visited 'The Sacred Made Real', a National Gallery exhibition which had a direct influence on how I made my work. These Polychrome sculptures from Spanish churches seemed so shockingly lifelike, familiar in their presence yet foreign at the same time. They produced a feeling of being uncomfortably strange. They were made typically with a core of hollowed wood and built up in sections which were covered with a layer of gesso before they were painted; the sculptors added glass eyes, fabric and ivory teeth to make their pieces seem even more real. I was particularly drawn to a mannequin-like figure of 'Saint Ignatius Loyola' which was covered in a glue soaked cloth. Its true composition didn't appear obvious on first viewing and its fabric perfectly concealed the structural elements almost like a human skin, which covers and defends whilst giving feeling.

I used elements of the technique to suit my own practise; in the studio, sculptures that once came out of the kiln glazed and finished now began a new life. By adding textured skins I could enclose and protect, encasing perfect shiny lead-glazed pieces, almost like hearts of gold. I played with the idea of future generations x-raying the pieces to find the overlooked characters inside. The addition of canvas allowed for many more possibilities, helping me to find a way forward by recapturing the spontaneity that is originally felt when working with wet clay. At that point emotions and ideas are fluid and gestures can find form, the velvety rich matter bends and tilts in harmony with the maker's hands. In the past, when works dried out and were fired for stability they transformed, became lifeless, and it seemed to be the permanence I have been fighting against. I want the pieces to live and I keep them breathing and moving as, breaking all the rules, I incorporate one ceramic piece into another, pasting a head onto another body. By adding the canvas skins I mend and make them stronger.

Kerry Jameson (October 2013)

The Sacred Made Real
Spanish Painting and Sculpture 1600 - 1700
National Gallery (2010)