

Interview between Lorrain Mailer and Ali Lees on the 6th July 2020

Lorrain M. 'This is a conversation between Lorrain Mailer and Ali Lees at her Studio on Monday the 6th July 2020. Hello.'

Hello Lorrain.

L. Can I start by asking you a few questions. Perhaps a good place to start would be for you to explain the thinking that took you from your practice before the MA to now?

- A. 'So, my roots are definitely in painting. Painting because that is the practice that I have used for a very long time but not, not just because of that but because of the flow and the layers and the light and the luminosity that I felt and still feel able to work with in painting. When I started the Ma I was still working in that way but I wanted to challenge myself and push, push something, not really knowing that it meant that I wanted to come off the wall from something much more rigid er but I absolutely felt I needed to move something, um, painting itself is, it's not a static process for me. I like to move around the work, it's on the floor, I work around it, I throw things, I layer things and so on. But, when I started the MA I had difficulty bringing together the theory that was tangling my brain. The input from loads of different angles that were so exciting and challenging and I wanted to run with everything, get on board with everything. Its been a really fantastic thing for me so it's really been about embracing the life of art theory and so on. However I try to avoid the intellectual elements as much as possible because if I get stuck there I can't flow with the way I work. So, I wanted to, and I've used this word before, but I wanted to upgrade my practice. I've spent many years as a painter, as an artist, since I did my degree in the 80's and really yearning to find my audience, really yearning to find a way of engaging but knowing that the barriers were my confidence of being able to say who I was an an artist and what I did as an artist and at the same time not wanting to compromise and so... (Daughter Sam comes in) 5.20

..... (continuing) 'There's my little girl...Yes, there's my little girl coming into the whole thing My work very much the nature of my work before was a very intuitive way of working. I never really have any idea what I'm going to, what I want to work with specifically. However, there is very much an allowing that is very present in my work and infact the MA has enabled it even more....So, what was I saying, I really wanted to upgrade my practice and I really wanted to learn very much how to put myself into the world, more than I leaned about back in the 80's when I did my degree. I haven't really found many answers until now infact I haven't really found many more now but I have found some doing the MA and it's been...it's definitely a springboard to where I want to go next.

Lorrain. Have you tried any other Methods or mediums during the last year or so?

A.L – 'Definitely, actually, I say definitely but no. I'm still working with paint. I'm printing a lot more and I'm adapting the way I print to make it much more abstract and more flow to the print. So, I use a Gelli plate which is a gelatin based, mono-printing plate but it's not exactly mono-printing because you are using the negative and the positive and it's something that was very craft based but I've used it and used it over and over and it has very much become a great way to, as I've said before, a great way to abstract the way I create the print and the nature with which I use it... use it on tissue paper. The tissue paper is most definitely a new thing for me but I love its' resilience, its' luminosity and its fragility at the same time. And, of course, how could I forget, I have gone from being on the wall to being on the floor so I am much more tangible and sculptural and still working on playing with that.

Lorrain. Just something that I have observed when talking about the Gelli plates and Sam, coming in and interrupting us so pleasantly. How would you say Family Life has impacted on your work, bearing in mind, like most women and would you say being a woman has also been part of it, has shown the elements of grief and pressures that are put upon one as a female?

A.L I'm very aware of all those things. I'm very aware of the limitations of being a carer to my daughter. I'm very aware of the limitations that that brings to me being able to be who I am, to have the headspace to be able to do that. I'm also aware of the limitations that were around when my Mum was alive. My Mum died in October 2019 and it has impacted hugely and continues to impact my practice.'

L.M What strikes me is it has actually brought something to it rather than it be something negative. It's actually brought an extra dimension to your work. Do you notice that yourself and do you agree?

AL 'Absolutely, it became conscious after something that....it was something that happened by accident and lead me into where I am now, which is about (a) process. This is a Process of bereavement and grieving which I see as a flow and something that will keep going until it changes into something else. So, no most definitely, there is a process. Its not so much that my Mum is in my work but the process of me coming to terms with her not being here anymore and in turn the relationship we had together about creativity and non-creativity and allowing, her allowing, which in turn was about her not allowing herself and in turn, the whole area about women not being allowed .

L.M 'Is that what you mean by 'creative uncreativity'

AL – Uh huh.

LM and that is how you have used those adjectives to summarise that issue.

AL It's a really big area but there's no doubt about it there's a river that flows, that I have my feet in, that is completely connected to the feminine, the deep feminine and the halting of the feminine.

LM So, how do you make this work? You said you paint. Do you make film? Do you just paint on paper or tissue?

AL I use paint on tissue. An unresolved area or an area that I am beginning to work with...or I'm just beginning to put my toe in...There are lots of 'feet' in my analogies!

LM – 'We move, we travel with our feet'

AL – Yeah! What's unresolved isI think I will be working with film more in the future. That's how its feeling, and with sound as well. Something that's very sensual and the atmosphere is something that is actually very important.

LM Would you say that there is a certain similarity to the way Karla Black works with Sugar paper, with organic, natural substances? although she does use other things like eyeshadow etc.

AL – I am really drawn to her work but there's something, I feel, is very 'surface' and I can't get any deeper but that doesn't mean that I don't. I really like looking at it and I love to hear her talking about her work. What she says about the difference between painting and sculpture is something that has really inspired me over the last few weeks while I have been writing the Critical Evaluation paper. I'm having to explain why and how I am making these changes.

LM – How important do you think your interaction is with your work with the things around you and the manner of your process? How does that contribute to the meaning of your work?

AL I'm very aware of my surroundings.

LM .

How important do you think the way you interact with your environment, your materials , the manner of your process? How does that all impact on the ultimate meaning of what you want to say or explore?

AL. Well, I'm definitely exploring it but its inherent in me that I am affected and I run with the flow of the season just not in any cosmic way but I'm on this planet and I'm going to be influenced by the season, by whether the moon is full or not. I'm going to be influenced by whether its cold or whether its warm and so my materials, like the willow I have recently been working with. It was cut a few months ago and its still very bendy, .If we cut it in September then its going to be a completely different beast so the fact that the willow is in my studio now I know full well that the 'bend' comes from the springtime. So it is important but its not what my work is completely about. Its almost as if that part of my work is an ally and I'm held by that until I move to the next place.

LM. So, what do you consider the core of your practice?

AL. Its an ongoing, flowing, moving process. It's like journeying or moving the work into being so I don't know how intellectually I can put that into a pot. Its also about layers, layering materials and layering of experience that is continually flowing.

LM Would you consider yourself to be part of the very international movement from the arts generally to address a lot of these questions and how do you think the rest of the world, the non art world, if you like, are receiving it? There seems to be an alienation...and these are my words by the way...between what art generally is concerned about and some of the deeper rooted, indigenous and organic matter to the commercial, corporate art world. The multi nationalism that is occurring where values are different? Are you part of this art movement that's being generated?

AL. I'm aware of the corporate and commercial world. It's a world I don't want to pay homage to. But what I think is very exciting about now with XR and what's happening with all the green movements, what has happened in lockdown means we are questioning how we do things. There is a mirror in the way I work the way it echoes a lot of what is going on internally as well as externally.

LM. Is there anything that you would like me to ask that I haven't or that you would like to add?

Where would you like to go from here?

AL I think that there is a great area of positivity. I don't know where it is yet but I think there is going to be more of a collaboration with artists, thinkers, philosophers and scientists will make these things much more concrete and bring them out. We have something to say and I really believe this passionately, but artists have something to say so people can look at things differently.

LM Where do you see it being? in museums, in the institutions we have at the moment? Do you see yourself doing Pop Ups in a cow field perhaps?

AL I do see a place in museums but only in the 'new' museums as these places are going to have to change. BLM has brought huge positive feeling I feel because were going to have to de-colonise our history and arts. There's so much potential and art will go hand in hand with that change.

LM. I want to say thank you very much. It has been a priviledge and an honour.

End of Conversation between Lorrain Mailer and Ali Lees . July 2020. Adisham