

Fifteen Months On...



'Out of the Ashes' (fibre reactive dye on linen, hand stitch)

Well, here I am after a long silence. For fifteen months I felt like I had nothing to say and I'll be up-front and say this piece has no real focus and is a bit of a mash-up, but I just felt like communicating. You might find some enlivening things in it and some of the images may raise your spirits - let's hope so.

2019 saw me working on the pieces for the 'Inside Atacama' body of work and applying for and getting a residency in Andalucia . In January 2020 I kicked off the latest 'Introduction to Surface Design' series of workshops at the Committed to Cloth studio. Meanwhile, fires raged in Australia. A demonstration piece subsequently brought those fires to mind and I engaged in some hand stitching, hoping that those affected would somehow rebuild their lives.

And then, everything changed for us all...

Along with the rest of the world, James and I watched the news of the virus with concern, wondering when it would reach the U.K. As it raged across Europe it soon became apparent that a residency in Andalucia would be out of the question and on March 23rd the U.K. was put into its first lockdown. What to do? After a period of dithering, procrastinating and mending I decided that Andalucia had come to Surrey in the form of the most fantastic, sunny and warm spring weather. As a result, I decided to pursue my residency plan of working with earth pigments and soya milk, but from my home studio.

Her Quiet Materials

I'm aware that many people struggled with creativity during lockdown and are still struggling. On day one I stood in front of a 'blank canvas' and wondered what the hell I was going to do. I didn't have a creative thought in my head, other than a vague, ongoing preoccupation with the Atacama. But I started anyway, with two colours of earth pigment and just sloshed about. Having at least made some kind of start, I decided to list potential ways forward with soya milk and pigments and treat the whole exercise as a technical or process-led exploration; bugger composition, bugger thinking about outcomes or getting a finished piece, just concentrate on the media and explore with an open mind.



A stack of pieces, hanging to cure.

Eight weeks later, I had 36 pieces, 12 of which were going to be worth pursuing into finished artworks, which were all likely to involve hand stitch.



A detail of the first piece, using left-over pigment with extra added.

Throughout, friends had been exchanging humour on WhatsApp...

**THERE SHOULD BE
A FOOD GROUP
CALLED "FUCK IT."**

Your grandparents were
called to fight in world
wars. You're being called
to wash your hands & sit
on the couch.

Don't fuck this up.



Her Quiet Materials

In truth, those eight weeks were a blast; James and I were still on speaking terms, the veg patch was offering all sorts of bounty, the environment of my home was a blessing and lockdown had offered me the gift of uninterrupted studio time – I'd never been able to get stuck in and focus for so long. At this point the weather changed, the rain returned and I turned to writing up my notes. Seventy pages later, I appeared to have written a book, and maybe one day I'll get it published.



The 'veg barn' sitting in the wildflower meadow

Everything went bonkers as we came out of lockdown; delivering scheduled workshops, squeezing in missed workshops, doing a live demonstration for 'Beyond Festival of Quilts', participating in local actions with my Extinction Rebellion Group and catching up with family and friends.



Her Quiet Materials

I'd jokingly said I wished we were still in lockdown – it had been so peaceful and productive! I guess I needed a lesson in being careful of what you wish for...

First came the 'Tiers' with their confusing array of restrictions and then came Lockdown II., along with a very dreary start to winter. ALL of my creativity went out of the window and I escaped back to mending...



My Mum's mended jeans from Lockdown 1 - very therapeutic!

And reading, with the wood stove lit and the cat on my lap...

Her Quiet Materials



Comforted by the cat...

Even though I knew I had work to finish for a scheduled exhibition, I had no motivation. It all seemed so pointless. My mother died, my best and oldest friend died. The economy was going down the tubes, jobs were being lost, families on the breadline, children going hungry. Lorry drivers suffering in the queues on the M20, Christmas without family, imminent exit from the EU. People dieing. Fuckity, fuckity, fuckity, FUCK!

News of the vaccine and aalking helped - James and I are so lucky to be able to step out of the door and be straight into amazing countryside:



Her Quiet Materials

But there's nothing like a deadline and with the exhibition coming in mid February I went back into the studio, got stuck into hand stitch, framing and generally getting ready. Being able to get the work to Katie for photography was a real boost and soon I'll deliver the work; Ann still hangs her scheduled exhibitions even though no visitors are allowed. 'Her Quiet Materials' will be shown at Gallery 57 (in Arundel) from February 13th to March 13th 2021 and will be viewable online (www.gallery57.co.uk). I'll be sending an email with Ann's newsletter as soon as everything is ready, but I've already added the latest work to my website if you want a sneak-peek.

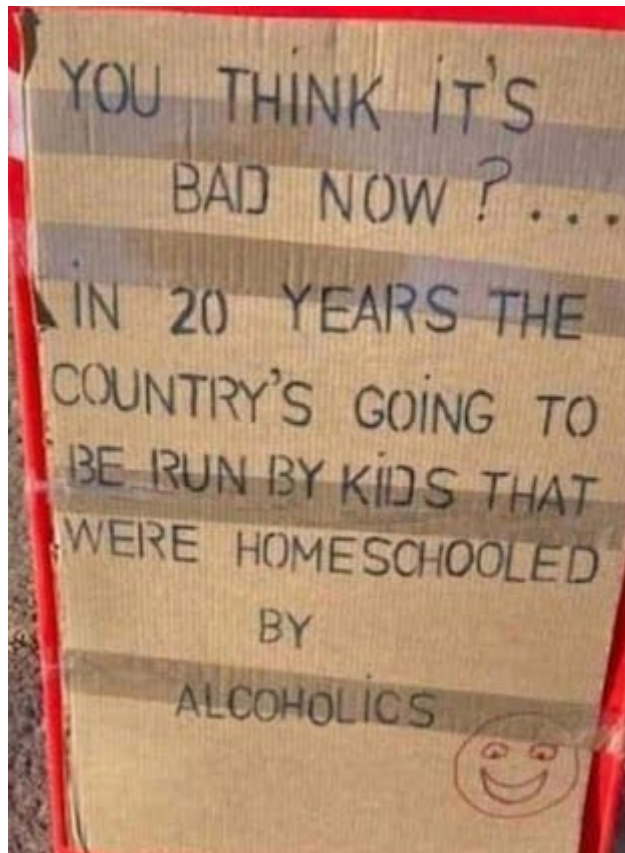
And despite Lockdown III, all of that getting back to work seems to have got me re-engaged., and I'm going to work on making sure that feeling lasts. I'm starting to think about my other soya milk pieces. I want to hang them up, ponder them and think about the best way forward. I want to hand stitch a very boring black dress and spiff it up a bit. I want to keep walking and trying to stay reasonably fit. I want to stay engaged with a local village initiative to make more space for nature in Betchworth. I want to notice beauty when it is offered to me. I want to count my blessings.



Hoarfrost on a cobweb; a very busy spider.

I do not want to diet, despite it being a new year. Dieting in lockdown, in winter? Can't think of anything worse to dampen the spirits!

And speaking of spirits - I enjoyed this one:



Loved this post from a friend!

Stay safe, stay healthy and be kind to yourselves.