

Press release

Su Blackwell *Dwelling*

Private view:

Wednesday 16th September
2015

Exhibition:

17th September – 9th October
2015

Gallery opening times:

Tuesday – Friday 10-5:30
Saturday 11-2



Su Blackwell graduated from the Royal College of Art in 2003. She makes intricate art-works from every-day objects, transforming clothes and books into fantastical three-dimensional forms. Using a scalpel she cuts and glues the pages of books to create miniature dioramas glowing with lights in wood and glass boxes, like Victorian relics found in a museum of intrigue, and very much like her hero Joseph Cornell who will be exhibited at the Royal Academy in an exhibition entitled *Wanderlust* July 14th until September 27th 2015.

Blackwell finds her books – or rather lets them find her – by trawling through second-hand book shops. She always reads the book first and this in turn inspires the work. Some that come into the artist's possession sit on her shelf for months and months. The books themselves, their histories and stories, also interest her. They hold in their pages a record of their past events, as physical objects; their damage, such as frays and stains, makes our relationship with the contents immediate and visceral, and in turn tells another story.

As the Royal Academy Introduction to *Wanderlust* says “From a basement in New York Joseph Cornell channeled his limitless imagination into some of the most original art of the 20th century. Step into his beguiling world at this landmark exhibition. Cornell hardly ventured beyond New York State, yet the notion of travel was central to his art. His imaginary voyages began as he searched Manhattan's antique bookshops and dime stores, collecting a vast archive of paper ephemera and small objects to make his signature glass-fronted ‘shadow boxes’.

These miniature masterpieces transform everyday objects into spellbinding treasures”
Joseph Cornell: Wanderlust is organised by the Royal Academy of Arts, London in collaboration with the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

For this series, Blackwell explores the concept of 'dwelling'. 'I have created nine new book-sculptures based on this theme.

All of the works explore 'dwelling' as an imaginative space. They are inspired by the folk stories from the pages they are carved from, but they also operate on a personal level.

The works include dwellings, such as lighthouses, wood

cottages, tree-huts and houses, which appear to be inhabited as often they are lit up, but the scenes I have created are stark and the houses often solitary.

I have been inspired by water, by lakes, and the sea. There is a sense that one needs to take a journey to travel to these dwellings.



To quote Gaston Bachelard, from his book 'Poetics of Space, *'It is about the architecture of the imagination'*.

I have been compelled to create these dwellings now, as I am in the process of selling my house (a house which has many memories, and one which I am reluctant to leave). I am leaving London (a Metropolis), to possibly living in a quiet town by the sea. The process of buying a new house is daunting, an emotional upheaval.

Gaston Bachelard put it so eloquently when he wrote.

"Sometimes the house of the future is better built, lighter and larger than all the houses of the past, so that the image of the dream house is opposed to that of the childhood home.... Maybe it is a good thing for us to keep a few dreams of a house that we shall live in later, always later, so much later, in fact, that we shall not have time to achieve it. For a house that was final, one that stood in symmetrical relation to the house we were born in, would lead to thoughts—serious, sad thoughts—and not to dreams. It is better to live in a state of impermanence than in one of finality".

The material I choose to work with, 'paper' has an impermanence. I employ this fragile accessible medium to reflect on the precariousness of the world we inhabit and the fragility of our dreams and ambitions.'

"There remains a compelling reflection on the enduring human need to find psychological refuge in familiar places and spaces".

"Thus the dream house must possess every virtue. How ever spacious, it must also be a cottage, a dove-cote, a nest, a chrysalis. Intimacy needs the heart of a nest. Erasmus, his biographer tells us, was long "in finding a nook in his fine house in which he could put his little body with safety. He ended by confining himself to one room until he could breathe the parched air that was necessary to him".

Gaston Bachelard, Poetics of Space

These two exhibitions of Blackwell and Cornell run concurrently in London



” I’m struck by the beauty of Su’s work. Her pieces are fragile and ephemeral, and the more you look, the more you see. I can see the influence of her textiles training, too – there are multiple repeats and each letter is like a stitch. It’s as if she’s weaving with words”.

Justin Croft, Antiquarian Bookseller.

Su Blackwell is an artist working predominantly within the realm of paper.

Su has exhibited her exquisite sculptures around the World. Her illustrated book of fairy tales ‘The Fairytale Princess’, written by Wendy Jones, and published by Thames & Hudson was released in 2012. Su has designed art fabric for Liberty London, and her illustrations are contributed to a regular column in ‘Intelligent Life’ magazine and Harper’s Bazaar UK. Su has also turned her hand to theatre set-design. In 2011, Su was asked to design the set for The Rose Theatre’s production of ‘The Snow Queen’.

Praise for ‘The Snow Queen’:

‘There is a great deal to charm here, especially in Su Blackwell’s cutout paper designs, which conjure fairytale forests and winking houses’.

Lyn Gardner, The Guardian

‘The scantily coloured set by Su Blackwell, with its paper cut-out trees and houses, is lovely’.

Domonic Cavendish, The Telegraph

Su says of her work...

”I often work within the realm of fairy-tales and folk-lore. I began making a series of book-sculpture, cutting-out images from old books to create three-dimensional diorama’s, and displaying them inside wooden boxes”.

”For the cut-out illustrations, I tend to lean towards young-girl characters, placing them in haunting, fragile settings, expressing the vulnerability of childhood, while also conveying a sense of childhood anxiety and wonder. There is a quiet melancholy in the work, depicted in the material used, and choice of subtle colour.”

Paper has been used for communication since its invention; either between humans or in an attempt to communicate with the spirit world. I employ this delicate, accessible medium and use irreversible, destructive processes to reflect on the precariousness of the world we inhabit and the fragility of our life, dreams and ambitions. Su Blackwell, 2007

Published Interview

I was born in Sheffield in 1975. My mother was a nurse, my father a gas technician. As a child, I spent a lot of time playing in the woods near to my home, in my own make-believe World. I gave the tree's names, and believed they would protect me. I made dens, with curtains and carpets that I scavenged from home. I didn't like school much, except for my English lessons, where I liked writing stories, letting my imagination run free. I enjoyed Art at School, but I didn't like the way it was taught. It was too didactic. I floated out of School, not really knowing what to do next. By chance, I happened upon a textiles course run at the local college, and this is something I turned out to really enjoy and begin to feel passionate about. The textile course really suited me, and it fueled my curiosity for texture and materials. I went on to study textiles at Bradford College, and a year later went on to study for an MA in Textiles at the Royal College of Art in London. Since leaving College, I worked as an artist-in-residence in School's in Scotland. I began to get some Shows in London in 2006, and my work began to get more widely seen. I now live and work in West London.

• For how long have you been working with your paper technique? How did it first start?

I started this technique after graduating from RCA in 2003. It started after a trip to Thailand, where I bought a beautiful second-hand book on the Kao San Road. My father had passed away while I was studying at the RCA, and I was thinking about life, death, and the in-between. My first book-sculpture was 'The Quiet American'. I cut moths from the book with a craft-knife. The piece was inspired by a Chinese legend, about two lovers whose souls re-emerge from burnt ashes in the shape of two Moths. I began working with paper, because of its connection to spiritual rituals that I encountered in South East Asia, and this in turn led me to work with books, and fairy tales.

• Although yours is such a personal work, whose has inspired or influenced you?

Artist's who have influenced me are Ann Hamilton, Annette Messenger, Joseph Cornell and Jonathan Callan. Jonathan Callan's Show 'Interference' at The New Art Gallery in Walsall had a profound influence on me.

• Whose work, besides influences, do you fully admire?

Kiki Smith, Christian Boltanski. Mariele Nuedeker, and Paula Rego. I like that these artists work in such a varied way, with a menagerie of materials.

• Your work is quite delicate and full of detail, about how long does it take you to prepare one piece?

I always read the book first, at least once or twice, and then I begin to create the work, cutting out, adding details. The detail is what brings it all together, the magic element. It is a tediously slow process.

• Do you preview the whole scenario you're about to create or somehow go with the material flow?

I have an idea, but I definitely let the materials lead me. The idea is led in part by the materials.

- **What do you do for the material preservation of your work?**

I treat the paper to protect it from UV damage.

- **What are the differences in-between your paper and your fabric work?**

I treat the materials the same. Paper is more malleable to the hand, it has a visible memory. I am not tired of working with paper, in fact the more I work with it, the more fascinating it becomes. Fabric is less forgiving than paper.

For further information please contact Sarah Long or Kinga Grof at Long and Ryle

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