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Can Beauty Come from Pain?

Frankie Locke travels on a cathartic journey through her ceramics.

It began in the blackness and redness, night and blood entwined in terrified existence that rested in my mind like a living nightmare.

The work relates to my cathartic journey of recovery and acceptance of the destructive forces of cancer as my partner journeyed through illness to death.

The series of porcelain dishes containing traces of fired drugs trapped in glaze materials are transformed into something positive. Can beauty come from pain? The arrangement and presentation describes the journey of impending death, destruction, and self-destruction: the creative activities being a source of healing.

Making the porcelain dishes from measured amounts of clay pinched and turned in my palm to form a receptacle was a mesmerising, addictive experience, and took me from the pain of my reality. It was a ritualised making, sending me into memory traces of the illness, the blood, and the drug abuse. The dishes reveal the truth of the hand in their imperfections.

Upon diagnosis of a spread of cancer that was advanced and terminal we both embarked on our journeys, separate with our own agonies, pain, and coping strategies, and yet it was a journey together – to the loss of each other. We reacted in the ways our characters dictated. I withdrew into a sanctuary within and he searched for sanctuary in illegal drugs taken alongside those prescribed.

In the making process drugs prescribed for the cancer and symptoms of his illness were selected alongside the illegal drugs.

I experimented with firing temperatures with the tablets placed in bisqued porcelain receptacles. Firing transformed them into something else that was visually interesting with textural qualities and subtle tonal changes.

The friable drug traces were then trapped in glaze and other substances and re-fired for more permanent results; sometimes oxides were added to give colour tints. I fired other elements to help describe the degeneration of the body, the blood, the spirit, our relationship, the destruction of the being, the spiralling journey into the void, and the loss of the person I knew.

The final taxonomic process took the form of assembling and ordering the dishes into a collective whole. The arrangements sought to tell the story yet create their own patterns, involving opacity and transparency, tonal nuances, colour relationships, and textural contrasts. Drug traces, sometimes barely present, sometimes expanded, appear like debris from small explosions. At times the tablet form remains discernible.

The resulting body of work consists of a series of framed collections of the porcelain dishes, the main piece consisting of 144 ceramic receptacles containing fired traces of drugs and other elements that evolved into a symbolic narrative.

This piece shows a journey through lightness to darkness, separated by a diagonal from corner to corner of a seeping red trace that becomes darker and denser like deep spreading blood becoming contaminated. Other diagonals follow spiralling forms that become entrapped and almost hidden in 'oil slick' glazes.

The body of work remains a single and contained response to the experience and evolved as a need to cleanse memories and tell our story. ☐

1 Bisqued porcelain dishes of unfired drugs, 2010 2 *If You Were Dead Vivien? Remember*, porcelain dishes of drug traces and other elements, 2010, W53cm

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