

A Conversation with My Mother.

My mum was born on the 20th January 1925 at her home Ithaca, on the banks of the Essequibo river, near George Town in Guyana. She now lives in Surrey, cared for by my dad, who is 95 years old.

I can't remember exactly when my mum and I stopped talking about life.

We moved into a pattern of reassuring loops of supportive phrases which we needed to help us navigate our way from one moment to the next, and one day we arrived at a silence between us. All that was left was a searching in each other's eyes for something we had both lost.

I make this work firstly for me, a reminder of the night my mum and I were able to talk again. The night I heard her voice, not the voice I last heard, but her voice from 20 years ago that was clear and vital, unravaged by dementia and medication.

I make this work for anyone else who finds themselves in the same situation, feeling the same sense of loss.

As an installation artist, this is my way of describing this human condition. Others might use words or go on a hike to raise money – whatever the way, a person needs to express a sadness which is eked out over a long time.

The Dream.

Artists have always used dreams as a source of inspiration. Many of my installations have started from dreams that have stayed with me. Often I have gone to sleep with a loose idea, and a dream will help me to shape it. What was different was that this dream felt like an extraordinary event. My mother's voice was so loud it was as if she was in the room with me, not of the same quality I have experienced in dreams before.

On waking, I realised how much I missed our conversations. The content was not of importance, rather the exchange, the reassuring rhythm, learnt over a lifetime between us. I realised how beautiful the dream was; an oasis in a desert of frozen grief.

The image of a boat on a lake in the moonlight, the gold, the magnolia petals as if dropped by a tree, are all strong archetypal symbols and need no immediate explanation. But the power of the mind to evoke imagery to work through complex emotions does amaze me.

The Boat.

The boat is made of many diverse bits of old waste wood, shaped, bent and then gilded in a concentrated effort to create a precious object. In the same way, a dream can collect old memories, feelings and emotions and crystallise them into a single extraordinary vision.

The Petals.

Unexpected consequences of making art are always a joy for me. My mum loves Magnolias. She has three in her garden.

I wanted to get a quality to the petals, so I asked for help from friends and friends of friends to come and help make them from hand painted silk. The response was overwhelming, I had seventy women and a couple of honorary men. We spent a beautiful day together surrounded by pictures of our mums. We made a thousand petals and shared a lot of stories of love and loss. The petals you see are all individually made.

The Sound.

In 2012, I made a work for the cultural Olympiad and I wanted an older person to recite a John Clare poem as part of its sound piece. I asked my mum. At this point she could access a part of her brain where she was able to read, but not really to have a conversation. This was the last time I heard her speak for an extended period.

I have recorded myself reciting the poem alongside her, perfectly in sync, copying her mistakes and stumbles (of which there are only a few), as a way to be completely with her in dialogue, a moment for us to be back together in waking time.

Mary Branson, February 2018

Prints.

I have made a painting to go with the exhibition, and signed limited edition prints are on sale during the show, price £10.00.

50% of the profits will go to CRUSE – The National Bereavement Charity.

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