

JO ROBERTS: FINDING A WAY THROUGH
23 March – 20 May 2007

I have a little strap line that I refer to in relation to work – *'I want to work with interesting/exciting people at interesting/exciting places.'* So when Chloe Johnson (Curatorial Officer) asked me to work with them towards an exhibition at the Pump Rooms, the answer was a resounding yes!



The exhibition 'Finding a Way Through' was the result of months of intensive work both for me and the gallery staff. We were fortunate to be the recipients of an Arts Council England, West Midlands Grant for the Arts. This was an opportunity for me to really examine my practice, and take it into a more personal direction. I also had the freedom of exhibiting what came out of this process and critical discussions with Chloe. This freedom is naturally a very important aspect of the creative process.

What did come out of this very intense phase was a body of work that traced my life as a river – the River Jo. The title came from the fact that it wasn't until I was in my early forties that I found a way through to express my creativity as an artist. The inspiration for this body of work was from one of those little quirky things that just spoke to me.

The exhibition was to be held in the Temporary Exhibition Gallery. This room is an addition to the Pump Rooms building, added when the latter was restored. One wall of the space is an outside wall. On the outside the architects had designed pseudo window niches to be in keeping with the rest of the building. I discovered that if there had actually been a window there, the view would have been of the River Leam. I really liked the idea of this, because I felt that Pump Rooms building didn't acknowledge the presence of the river, and almost had its

back to it. I imagined what it would be like if you could see the river. It was from this that the work developed.

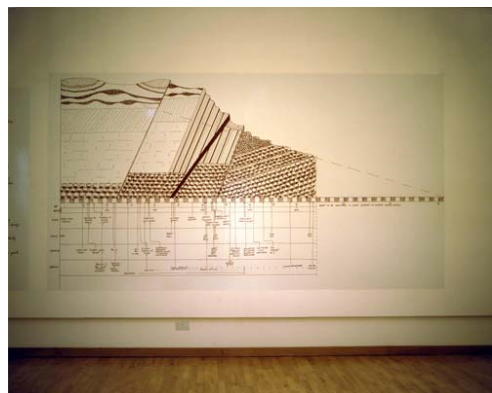


The exhibition itself consisted of several elements, a film, drawings – one of which was enlarged to cover one wall, a collage of photocopies of myself, my notebook and an interactive installation. From the outset I wanted to create a meditative space, a space that encouraged visitors to stop and contemplate. It was very important that the space had a quiet and reflective ambience. Meditation is something that has become an integral part of my life.



Upon approaching the exhibition space the film, *The view from here River Leam, 6.15 am – 6.15 pm Monday 5 March 2007*, could be seen, This was projected onto the outside wall and the projection measured approximately 200 x 400 cm. The film was of the surface of the River Leam. It had been recorded over a twelve hour period, from sunrise to sunset, close to the outside of the Exhibition Space. The resulting 21 minute digital film, with its continuous movement of water, surface bubbles and eddies, an occasional twig and duck, passing across the screen was quite mesmerising.

On the wall to the left were the original ink drawings of the map of River Jo, the long profile, the key and core samples taken at three different points in my life. *The catchment area of River Jo, 2007, The long profile of River Jo, 2007, Keys to*



'catchment area' and 'long profile', 2007, Core samples from 'long profile', 2007. Across the entire left wall the long profile had been enlarged and printed on to vinyl, an imaginary geological profile, showing how the rocks of creativity eventually came to the surface.

On the wall to the right was a case displaying my notebook. My work is very much about process, and both Chloe and I felt that this notebook should have a presence in the space, showing the thinking behind the work. The pages displayed showed the idea for the piece next to it, *Paper self, with thanks to Sarah Lucas, 2006.* Although I have been working as an artist for the eleven years since I completed my M.A., it was with this show that I really felt that I had 'come of age' as an artist. This life-size self portrait was a celebration of that fact, and empowerment of who and what I was.



The final element in the exhibition was *Installation, 23 March - 20 May 2007*. This consisted of eight perspex containers, one for each week of the exhibition. Visitors were offered to add a pebble to the container; each day had a different type of pebble. So by the end of the week a layering of pebbles and stones could be seen, such as the geological strata of the earth and what a river has to negotiate its way through.

To complement the exhibition various events were organised. Philip Cundall conducted a meditation session in the space, I gave a slide show about my life to the Friends of the Art Gallery, as well as a talk about the exhibition to the public, and I and Gallery staff hosted a stall as part of Leamington's Canal Festival. For me, these activities are an integral part of what I do, an important way for the public to gain a greater insight into how I operate as an artist.

The whole experience has been a very important stage in my artistic development; the work has entered a new, exciting phase. I have recently had a very successful exhibition at Manchester Art Gallery, working with Manchester City and United Football Clubs, entitled 'GOALS'. I'm also undertaking a period of research at the fascinating Ditchling Museum in Sussex.

I'm delighted that three of the original drawings from the exhibition are now in the Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum permanent collection. I will forever look back at this exhibition, and my time of working with the Gallery, with great fondness. I love thinking that my drawings are safely housed in the store room at the Gallery, which, when the staff receives a flood alert warning, it has its own flood defence system to stop the water of the River Leam sweeping them away!

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