

I FELT THAT

CURATED BY JOSEPHINE BAILEY

30 JUNE – 3 JULY 2022

An interview with Jenny Williamson



Q: Can you introduce yourself and your practice?

A: Hi I am J Williamson and I am an early career visual artist working predominately with clay. My work often explores materiality, bodies, science fiction and mother earth.

Q: Why did you apply to I felt that?

A: Having struggled with chronic almost daily migraine attacks for almost the last decade, experienced debilitating menstrual cramps, and having been a child carer from the age of 7; 'I felt that' spoke to me as away of exploring some of these experiences and the wider themes that affect many women and non-binary people. The project also made me feel quite uncomfortable and resistant to apply, which conversely made me think it was even more important to apply and challenge myself and my internal prejudices and fear.

Q: What have you gained (if anything!) from working within a collaborative & intentionally caring set up?

A: I have gained a huge amount of support and inspiration from the other artists and Josephine, our curator. It has been inspiring to see so many artists create incredible work without having to hide their realities and never questioning that of course we are capable despite our 'broken bodies'. It really made me feel the strength of chronically ill women and non binary people. Work wise, it just felt very liberating that if I was to have a flare of ill-health and be unable to make anything physically, there would be so many other ways I could contribute to the exhibition.

Q: Your work draws a lot on Mother Nature and Science Fiction - do these ideas sometimes juxtapose ? How do you deal with this?

A: I guess it is about being connected to our past and our future. Mother Earth is permanence and roots us to our earth and its past, but there is also permanence to be found in the promise of our future. Both contain a sense of awe, reverence and a yearning for something intangible - an escape from our own physical bodies.

But I have also chosen a material which connects both of these themes. When I fire a new piece, I am taking a truly ancient part of the earth and shaping into a new form that will last far into our own future. With clay, you are at once connected as a conduit between these two contrasting points in time. Where will these forms be in a

millennia? Will they be discovered, cherished or discarded? Will they return to beneath the Earth, or will they find their way somewhere else?

Q: Can you talk about the work you are exhibiting in the exhibition. I love the contrast you've managed to create as well as a sense of tenderness.

A: The vessel to me is often representative of the body, so the work features stacked broken vessels and slumped, exhausted forms. I wanted to convey the sense of generational pain and historical layers of prejudice towards womens bodies. I work in an instinctive way, being drawn to forms and material, then reflecting on the subconscious connections within the work. I definitely wanted to create a sense of care for others and oneself, so I am glad the idea of tenderness has come across.

Q: Why do you find yourself drawn to installation?

A: I am always looking to incorporate a sense of life-force in my work and feel that installation gives the opportunity to create a tangle of instinct, ideas and feelings layered on top of each other. After working with Painter Vivien McDermid in 2021, we realised we had a shared artistic language that we both feel helps our work to sit in this 'life soup'.

Q: Has there been a particular moment of inspiration or research that has inspired you in the past three months?

A: After researching and discussing with the other artists, I became drawn to certain aspects of medical history and the use of plants in pharmaceuticals. I was struck by learning about historical medical prejudice; especially wandering uterus theory and the green sickness, uterine amulets and waxy anatomical Venus models. I wanted to blend these historical prejudices with my own experiences of having a body. I was thinking of the idea of veils of truths and false perceptions of reality that women bodies are viewed through. Many medical prejudices that come from history were based upon men's feelings, yet women's own feelings about their bodies were/are seen as weak, false or hysterical.

Also exploring plants and there uses in historical and contemporary medicine. Many plants such as snowdrops or foxgloves are used in pharmacological medicines (for heart issues and denentia) but carry the connotations of new age spirituality or possibly even witchyness. So continues my ideas in exploring truths and prejudices.

Q: How do you want people to walk away from your work, in the context of the project, and feel?

A: I want people to respond to the work however they choose. But I hope that the work conveys some feeling of strength and fragility and the tension between peace and struggle that you often navigate when suffering from long term ill-health.



J Williams, Layered Forms 2022, Glazed Earthenware and Fabric, , Dims Variable