

Faith Caoili interviewing Lesley Bunch, July 2022

This interview was part of a Year 11 work experience project

Faith Caoili (F): **What inspires the colours and mark making in your paintings?**

Lesley Bunch (L): This series is a result of developing research.

While I was studying art at Goldsmiths' in the 90's, one had to justify why one would paint when it had been pronounced "dead", and this conceptualising, critical approach to painting has stayed with me. I stopped painting for 10 years after university, until a friend requested I paint some portraits. At that moment, I rediscovered my love for the act of painting.

I continued to approach the process of painting by developing a concept first. I wanted to make work that both questioned the act of painting itself, but also began to think about how we structure 'reality' through language, and how this affects our perception of ourselves, our sense of identity. Although I love to use traditional painting techniques, the development of the idea behind the work is still paramount.

F: **Do you take inspiration from other artists? If so, how do you incorporate them into your work?**

L: In my first year, a professor suggested that there are no totally 'original' ideas; every artist is influenced by other artists whether consciously or subconsciously. A painter that has always stood out to me is Gerhard Richter. I believe he played a key role in proving that painting was very much alive, through his investigation of many different approaches to painting. I am inspired by his research into the relationship between photography and painting.

F: **What piece are you most attached to or proud of?**

L: I am most attached to my paintings that look like representation of 'believable' 3d objects. At this stage, my favourite is Shadow Sculpture 2. It is the painting that seems to grip viewers the most. However, my Shadow Language photographs are so much fun to create, the process is quicker and there is more room for creative thought and quicker development of ideas using photoshop as a 'sketching tool'. In my Lacunae Series of shadow language I like the contrast between the ancient text and the digital.

F: **Are there any techniques or methods that you use while creating your pieces that you think are unusual?**

L: People often ask me what genre my recent "Shadow Sculpture" painting fits into – is it abstract, surreal? representational? It is difficult to attach a label to it, as it appears abstract or surreal, but in fact commences as fairly representational of the shadow I composed.

I suppose the subject matter doesn't fit neatly into a traditional genre, and perhaps in this way is unconventional.

F: **Where did the idea for this series begin? How did your initial idea develop into the pieces we see today?**

L: Once I rediscovered my love for painting the question was what do I paint now? My current shadow series is not about shadows, but about how we construct reality. My work today is part of my ongoing development of this concept. I have used other subject matter to present the same theme, like unidentifiable parts of the human body, and machines without any apparent function.

F: **How do you deal with art block?**

L: Walk away for awhile. I give myself space. I sometimes struggle through with a painting that is just not coming together easily, but there comes a point when it is best to take a break. The block will pass. If it helps, try to research, read, and further develop the ideas behind your approach. A well researched and clear concept can act as a great support in making that first mark on the canvas.

F: On the complete opposite end of the stick, how do you deal with too many ideas?

L: Write them down. Personally, I keep a book full of all the ideas that pop into my head. Once you have written them down, give them time to marinate. Come back to them later, by then you may look at them and think that is not something that I want to pursue. Writing down your ideas can help you filter through them to find the ones you really want to continue with.

F: Do you ever get a new idea while in the middle of a piece, how do you continue?

L: Sometimes the work “talks back” and can lead you in a direction that you did not anticipate, I think “happy accidents” can be exciting and help you to develop as an artist. Often they can actually help you refine the themes that permeate your work.

F: Do you ever reach stages where you dislike the piece you are creating? How do you deal with it?

L: Yes, very often! Again I walk away for a while and return to it later, sometimes years later! Sometimes my best work is that which I struggle with the most. The hope is I can come back to it later and be able to turn it around. However in the worst-case scenario when I feel it is going to go nowhere, it is quite therapeutic to grab a Stanley knife and scrap it!

F: When do you know when to stop painting?

L: That is a very interesting question, and it is very difficult to put into words. In my current series, although the paintings start as a fairly close representation of the shadow which I composed, they eventually move into abstraction. Certain elements are exaggerated, or re-structured. I let the painting take over. I would say I know when a piece is complete when it somehow becomes ‘believable’, when it takes on a sort of confident ‘objecthood’.

F: Is it hard parting with your pieces?

L: There are some pieces that I would not sell. These are pieces that I view as important milestones in my work, either through a leap in my technical ability, or a more compelling display or development of the theme I am working with. However, ultimately I think it is important to get your work out there and to see how people respond to it. I do not just want to make art and then hide it away. I love it when my pieces get a dialogue going.