

*The work of Caroline Cleave, whose sensitive but impactful style celebrates a strong sense of home.*

Caroline's home on Cornwall's north coast is her sanctuary. Situated at the very heart of Port Isaac but with a location that's hidden from view, Caroline works from her valley studio creating paintings and prints that explore folklore and truths, underpinned by an appreciation of nature, simplicity and authenticity. Community, renewal and reconnecting to a sense of place deep within are re-occurring themes in Caroline's work and her passion for inclusivity has seen her work frequently in collaboration with other artists alongside an involvement in Cornish cultural and community arts events, plus wider International Arts Festivals.



children who weren't high academic achievers a voice through art." Married to Fisherman's Friend Jon, the couple decided on the birth of their first child that they would move back to Cornwall and the village of Port Isaac where Jon grew up: "The transition from city life to a tiny, Cornish village was huge, but great. I was still in teaching at that point, and was spotted by the Creative Partnerships programme, which was a government-run initiative bringing creativity to the curriculum. I cut my teaching down and embarked on a project talking about why creativity was so important in the learning process and identifying what areas needed to be developed."

Caroline's career began not in art in the studio sense but in art education. Trained in Bristol, Caroline taught in some really tough inner city schools: "My job was about giving

"I was fortunate to work with lots of artists, filmmakers and creatives across the whole of Cornwall many of whom I'm still in touch with. We did some amazing installation projects in some of the large Cornish gardens

MAIN  
Caroline Cleave

INSET  
Port Isaac Harbour





and clay pits across Cornwall. At that time I was the organiser, the facilitator rather than the artist; my own artwork was never seen and although I loved my job, there was a sense of frustration and I felt I little bit removed from what I loved to do.”

It’s often the curve balls that are thrown at us in life that change our path and direction and for Caroline a breast cancer diagnosis stripped her to the core: “It was a real defining moment in my life; I thought it’s my turn now. I locked down everything else, retreated to my studio – a private and tranquil space in Port Isaac – and started to explore what I really wanted to say. What I found that I wanted to say was how this place has sustained communities for years, and what it is that that has sustained it.”

Caroline’s work was quickly picked by a local gallery, Whitewater Contemporary in Polzeath, and at one of the exhibitions was noticed by designer Emma Ball. An out-of-the-blue email from Emma a couple of months later asking Caroline to design for her was the catalyst for what followed: “I had gone from tentatively putting my foot in the water, to being asked to design for a world-renowned product range – it was really affirming for me to know that people were seeing and listening to what I was trying to say.” Caroline’s collaboration with Emma



Ball has seen her work on merchandise sold across Europe and as far afield as Tokyo.

Closer to home, what Caroline loves about Cornwall is its supportive network of artists and the resulting arts community. Cultivator Cornwall, a business development programme that supports the creative sector in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly encouraging them to move forward, played a big part in Caroline’s own development. “They actually funded me to go to Newlyn School of Art,

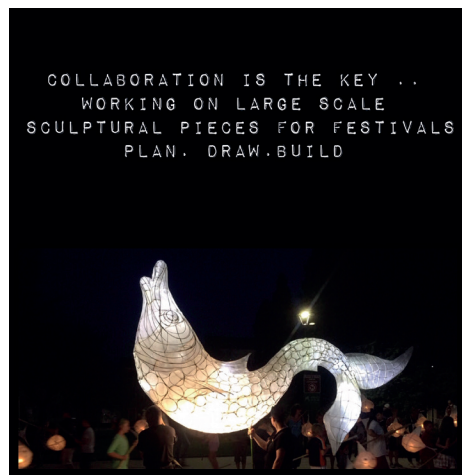
where I was able to undertake a defining practice course which has subsequently led onto being mentored. It was a time for me to step out and start to play again. I met John Howard, a member of the Royal Society of Printers, there who runs an incredible printing studio in Falmouth. I had the utmost respect for him and was lucky enough to be invited to his studio to further develop my practice; I accepted and I have never looked back. The best way I can describe it is that I found my way, I found my voice. This enabled me to really reach a place where I was very happy.”

“And even better, my gallery, Whitewater Contemporary, was prepared to go on that journey with me, allowing me to exhibit my new work... and there’s not many galleries that would do that. Sometimes, the art world can be guilty of imposing a single dimension



INSET  
Caroline Cleave designs for Emma Ball

ABOVE  
Full Blom In June



LEFT  
Lantern installation

TOP  
Spring Flowers II

RIGHT  
Caroline's Port Isaac studio

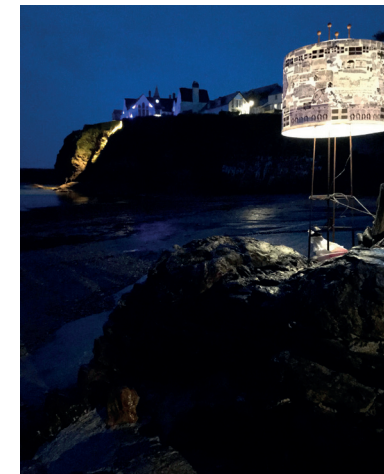
on an artists, and that's something that I'm really not. I'm multifaceted, because I do a lot of community work as well. It's not just about me and my art. While I can switch off and immerse myself in my work, for me it's more about giving back and I like to give back to my community. I want to enable people, young and old, to meet a real artist who's making it work. I want to encourage."

Caroline has recently been involved with the community film project Behind the Postcard, a creative collaborative response to Cornwall hosting the 2021 G7 Summit. "We created a giant lampshade designed to light the beach at night. We gave a voice to our community, asking them what would they say to the world leaders about their village and their community and then incorporated these onto the lampshade so that the responses could be illuminated. Some were really poignant.. "every child should have a beautiful place to live in in a lovely community" was a quote from a six year old and among some other really profound statements."

Caroline has seen a shift in perspective in her own work since her time at Newlyn. "I think a lot of artists can get locked into producing work just because it sells. I think it's very hard to pull away from that and to actually continue on your journey. I believe that an

artist's journey never ends, and I think my work now will be completely different to work that I'll be doing when I'm 93. It's a continuum, and you have to be courageous and brave, knowing that if you stay true, it's alright to move along that line."

"There was such a diversity in the students at Newlyn, and we were just given the freedom to play. I kind of went wild and did things that I'd always wanted to do but not had the courage to previously. One day we went



down to the beach and I collected this huge piece of kelp that I painted pink and stuck lots of dots to. I loved the ripple of the edge of the seaweed and I collected stones, drawing on them where the water had left a line as the tide had come across. There was no negativity at Newlyn, nobody questioned what we were doing, we were free to just get out there and explore and pull in what was really interesting."

"Alongside the encouragement, there were also criticism, but it was constructive criticism. I think a lot of time artists work in isolation and they don't experience critique of their work. Informed critique is really good, really healthy, especially if it's coming from such an intellectual, grounded and substantial base as Newlyn School of Art. They bring in brilliant tutors from really established studios across Europe

INSET  
Behind The Postcard



to talk to students about their work and the information they impart can't fail to percolate through you, making you rethink your own practice."

Inspiration for Caroline comes in many forms, not least from her late father: "I know this sounds silly, but I have always really liked massive things. My dad always used to say, "go big!". He was brilliant, he could make, paint or draw anything and always brought humour to what he was doing. I still love working on a large scale and although, he's not here anymore, if I'm wrestling with some great big thing, I often think of him sitting there looking at me going, "Caroline, what are you doing?!" Her current large installation can be seen in Lemon Street Market, Truro hanging in the atrium.



Caroline also takes inspiration from where she lives: "We are very fortunate to live in an old captain's house nestled deep in a valley. Even though we are right in the middle of the village, we have total privacy, our own little world, and that's really important to me. I tend to look towards the countryside rather than the coast, although as a gig rower I do explore the coastline from the water. I often find that a lot of my images are subconsciously looking from the boat towards land, and I think that your subconscious, whatever it is, always comes out in your work in some way. That was something we explored

at Newlyn, that no matter how much you try to suppress these things, they will appear."

"I love the idea of a safe harbour, a safe place to return to and home is really important to me. I know it's clichéd, but I like to look at nature. I like its permanence; that nature is a constant and that it will endure when all around is flailing – I draw a lot of strength from that. I also like the wildness of it and the fact that nature is untouchable, something we can't always tame. I believe that this is

something we hold within ourselves as well, that as humans we also have a wildness that a lot of people don't want to tap into. I don't actively look for things in nature, I let them come to me. For example, I might go for a walk and constantly see a broken egg in my path. Or I might see a particular Stone Chat who's really loud and won't fly away. The folklore behind these events appeals to me, and I'm currently

a little obsessed with wrens... when I see one it makes me think are they a messenger or is something going to change? I like to bring these elements of lore into my work. I let the paint do the work when it comes to backgrounds, and then print over them, symbolic in a way of man imprinting onto our world. So, when you look at my prints, they work on two levels; the first is purely visual while the second offers a subtle message." Sadly, lightning has struck twice for Caroline



INSET  
Lemon Street Market installation

ABOVE  
Lament



TOP LEFT  
The artist at work

ABOVE  
Lobster Trio

TOP RIGHT  
Merring Tales

and she has just finished treatment for a second diagnosed cancer diagnosis. In her own words: “fortunately, I’m very, very positive person. So I can tell you, that this had made my work and what I’m trying to say touch on something much deeper. It has made me even more determined to throw away any fears I have about my work not being good enough and I just want to pursue it with new energy.”

“More than ever I want to celebrate coming through something myself again, and also us coming through this pandemic. It’s about reassessing, relooking and rethinking what really matters to us and those are not necessarily material things. I’ve thought a lot about image as well and how we had got so drawn into how we look, and how that changes when there isn’t an audience. It raises the question who is this person? And is this person an authentic person?”

Caroline has recently produced a large print for her family based on these thoughts, entitled *Authentic Life*. It was accepted by the South West Academy of Fine Arts in an exhibition in 2020 to mark artist’s responses to an extraordinary year Exeter and depicts





a stunning harvest jug with markings on it about friendship and community. However, as Caroline explains, “it also has a darker side to it, concerned with where is your true north? Do you have a direction that’s true and good and honest? As a print, it not only embodies the authentic self but also liberation.”

When it comes to colour Caroline favours printing in burnt umber, but indigo also features highly, representing the sky, the sea and the earth.”



In a nutshell if I had to become pigment I would be indigo,” says Caroline, “I still don’t consider myself a printer, I have to work stuff out. When John Howard came to Newlyn he taught me the dry point technique, which I love because it encompasses my love of drawing – it’s the foundation

of everything I do. Each print starts with a drawing and deep exploration object and it’s a genuine, authentic way of working. The end result is something that’s truly me and truly mine.”

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INSET  
Moments