

# Issue 19 – Marie-Louise Jones

SOS / Sculptors on Sculpture is a series of weekly condensed interviews with early career contemporary sculptors.

Marie-Louise Jones is a London-based artist engaging with landscape as material. Predominantly working with sculpture and installation she gathers samples (physical or non-physical) of the material fabric of the surrounding environment, employing a range of techniques to manipulate, rework or re-imagine new forms that explore relationships between landscape, image, form and material.

SOS: In the midst of a third lockdown and at the beginning of 2021, I'd like to begin this interview by asking you about your hopes and ambitions for the year to come. Is there anything you'd like to accomplish this year?

MLJ: Completing my masters at Central Saint Martins is one of the first. I'm in the final 6 months of a 2 year course, and doing so in the midst of a pandemic has definitely been a challenge! Despite that challenge though it's going to produce some unique insights and outcomes from us as it's pushing us to work in innovative ways. Secondly, I'm hoping to still make it to Brazil to participate in my artist residency in the Amazon rainforest. The project is with LabVerde and I'll be part of a team of artists and scientists completely immersed within the landscape exploring ecological reserves and visiting forest zones impacted by the Anthropocene. It's such an exciting opportunity. I'm also looking forward to setting up a new studio later this year. Over the last 4 years I've had an array of temporary studios after leaving the UK in 2017 to work on international projects and residencies, then returning to London for my MA, and while this has been a great way to

develop new work by such shifting environments, I'm now looking forward to having a permanent HQ!

SOS: Your works are often comprised of various materials and textures, some salvaged debris and some newly cast. How does all of this begin? Do you start by drawing or is your process more intuitive with the materials themselves?

MLJ: I always start with the material and drawing is something I use at a later stage to figure out the physicality of materialising my ideas. Rachel



Installation view of 'Rugged Terrain' at The Koppel Project, 2020



'Redefined Horizons' 2020, reclaimed/reworked steel, collaged prints on wood. 120 x 30 x 90 cm

Whiteread said that 'drawing is like a conversation' so that's how I use it in my practice – as a conversation about what can work in the physical realm. The first actions tend to be observing, wandering, and collecting from my surroundings to create a sort of *kunstkammer* of the local environment that acts as inspiration or ingredients for the production of work. I'm interested in the materiality of the landscapes I inhabit and my last exhibition 'Rugged Terrain' was a body of work made during studio residence in a central London building in the process of being transformed into a luxury hotel. As part of a cycle of destruction and renewal I used my surroundings, which essentially was a construction site, and as the building was being torn down around me I recycled its ruins. Gathering its debris and other discarded

material to use for new sculptures to produce a site-responsive body of work that hybridised found and made objects that responded to the architecture and view from the building across the city. Nowadays I find myself working in a much more extended way, exploring digital processes such as photogrammetry, interested in how I can explore materiality in the nonphysical realm. As a sculptor I value craftsmanship, traditional materials and processes but consider how we can explore the interface between traditional and new media.

**SOS: [Guest Question]** This weeks question comes from an interview between Agnes Denes and Gabriel Schwarz in 2019. "Your work across sculpture, drawing, and environmental installations incorporates ideas from many non-artistic fields – such as philosophy, mathematics, science. What first drove you to work in this way?"

**MLJ:** I think partly because I have a deeply curious nature – inspired by all facets of life. I don't like to feel constrained or boxed into one area. I'm a nomad at heart, I like to be free to roam, not just in the physical sense, so being



'Simulants' 2020, giclee print of faux granite and 3d printed PLA stones. 30 x 40 cm.

able to explore different subject matter by examining them through an artistic lens is exciting to me. There's also an interest in the space between which is something I often attempt to locate with my work and the hybridising of materials, ideas or subjects is a way of achieving that. It's often where something new can emerge, in the collaborative sense too. I've just been part of a collaboration for UAL Hybrid Futures with a team of post-grads from Art & Science, Innovation Management and Material Futures. I'd been researching mining and resource extraction and had begun looking into the subject of mining asteroids. It's thought that asteroid mining could be possible within a couple of decades if certain challenges are overcome and I find this research interesting as part of my practice talks about how we wreck, mine and build our worlds. Referring back to your question, I find Agnes Denes land reclamation works very inspiring, along with the ambitious nature of her projects and ideology. When I encounter her work it inspires me to think more about how artists can be agents of change and how we are entering a new era of social imagination.

SOS: I'd like to ask you about what you do to cope in these lockdowns. Do you have any strategies to keep focused despite these restrictions?

MLJ: I'm a workaholic so the problem for me is how to let go of being so focused! This lockdown is a very different experience to the first one, back in March I was living in a tiny shoebox place and was barely ever home - always in the studio, attending talks or show openings. Then suddenly there was the lockdown and as well as worrying about the pandemic all the studios and workshops closed and I had no access to anything. No garden or



'Straightening the Line' 2020, reclaimed/reworked steel, tree branch. 60 x 60 x 6 cm

space to make physical work, which as a sculptor was a terrible shock to the system. I didn't have a chilled-out-time-to reflect lockdown a lot of my friends had. In some ways things were more hectic than ever. I fuelled all my energy into concentration, to focus on finding ways to adapt to the new digital environment and scope out advantages to the situation instead of getting caught up in the limitations. It was exhausting! But quite fruitful actually. Weirdly I achieved quite a lot in that time. In the current lockdown we have no access to our studios again but had notice and an idea of what to expect so I managed to bring home some equipment like my welder and other tools. I also moved in the summer to a bigger house with a huge garden as I've realised how important home life is now! At the moment I'm developing designs for our final show and will start to make the sculptures next month.

SOS: And finally to close, where does inspiration come from for you?

MLJ: I'm inspired by the idea of 'Long journeys into unknown landscapes'. I was on a residency in Finnskogen (The Forest of the Finns) in Norway and this line resonated with me as I was reading about the ancient agricultural 'slash and burn' techniques carried out in the area. At the time I was on a nomadic journey that eventually spanned 15 months across Asia, Europe and the USA. At that point my own adventure was unknown since I was keen to let my journey develop organically along the way, often not knowing where the next destination would be, filling me with an invigorating sense of freedom. I'd previously been on a residency in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, and used to get a sense of the city landscape by continuously wandering around its different districts. On one of my journeys I stumbled across a guy on the roadside selling local rocks and bought a huge piece of limestone around a metre long that I worked on back at the studio in the industrial zone.



'Digital rocks through preview windows' 2020, giclee print. 40 x 30 cm



'Detritus' 2020, c-type print. 50 x 40 cm

Sculpting with stone for the first time I loved handling this local ancient material made up of a millennia of fossilised sea creatures. While working the stone I discovered that my interest lay not in transforming the material to a new design but more with its organic form in contrast with the machine-made materials I was surrounded by in the studio at the Dia Projects production facility. The warehouse was next to a massive highway and I was surrounded by concrete, noise and pollution. Whilst working with this material from the natural landscape outside the city I would think about how things transform and how things interconnect. I'm inspired by the interconnectedness of all things and the contrast of seemingly opposing forces.

Interviewer: Josh Wright