



LIMBO | BRETT MURRAY

During hard lockdown at the onset of the pandemic, I set up a studio at home. I needed to keep busy. Almost literally most of my work shows metaphorical moments of perceived life in society. I have only recently worked out that the process of making is itself is therapeutic. I am a slow learner.

While in years past my animal sculpture might symbolically mock predators, politicians, oligarchs, tyrants, the corrupted and the like, during lockdown I felt compelled to look closer to home for my subject matter. My intention had been shifting from perpetrators to people, and I have been wanting to transition from an accessory position to one that is more compassionate and empathetic. Something more personal. Not necessarily directly, but in a non-obvious way.

For a while I have been researching small Japanese netsume Limono figurines. Mostly of animals, they are delicately etched and pared-down decorative miniatures carved in stone, wood or ivory (though sometimes cast into resin). In one example I came across the Japanese tradition of placing a porcelain wooden figurine of a rabbit looking backwards outside houses and businesses as a charm to bring prosperity, good luck and fertility.

This seemed like a good place to kick off my lockdown therapy, so I started by making small symbolic portraits of the four of us at home at various times during myself and our two young boys. Small, loves rabbits, so it was natural to work and is represented as an owl. Kai is a mischievous monkey. All three looking to the heavens for guidance or as witnesses to an impending calamity. I held my hands looking down anxiously as a monkey and father, in hope and in fear.

These four seem to resonate effectively so I expanded the series, describing the intimacy and anxiety of isolation and of social separation that has been a necessary shared experience and that somehow paradoxically binds humanity together. Hopefully.

The first showing of the original set of Limbo houses was held at the Everard Read London gallery. An intense space. We painted the walls a deep red, womb-like. Unable to install and visit the exhibition myself due to COVID travel restrictions I had to experience the show long-distance. It is always in the showing – outside of the studio space and beyond context – that what you have made begins to reveal itself and fresh insights are discovered.

What I thought I had produced was a single-time body of work. A response to lockdown and our shared fears. A single intention. Our shared breath had been held for a few years.

On seeing the work installed, however, a broader reading seemed possible. Implicit rather than explicit. We are witness to environmental global warming, ecological and anthropological, a faded planet, wars and the struggle heavily on these works as they gaze backwards with both speculation and in a search for answers. That anxiety reflects my current state of mind.

Once the pandemic threat and society started to open up I shifted my focus away from familial intimacies. I have continued reflecting on the personal...but have started throwing some again. I can't help myself.