

## **Small is Beautiful (an annual invited exhibition at the Angela Flowers Gallery)**

Twenty-nine years ago - at a time when it seemed paintings were becoming ever larger and quality could only come in big packages - Angela Flowers had just had a show entitled 'This Room is Not Small Enough For a Big Painting'. It was around this time that the concept of 'Small is Beautiful' was realised. Chosen artists would be invited to exhibit work in any medium, the only restriction being the size limit of 7 x 9 inches. Proof of its success is that it is still going strong after so many years. One of its strengths is the breadth of the selection - committed artists from graduating students to the most successful and eminent produce work, some years to a specific theme other years not but the result has always been a vibrant and exciting exhibition.

### **John Loker's Small is Beautiful**

Apart from sketchbook drawings I would normally work on a much larger scale than the SiB but I have always regarded this show as a way of standing back from familiar methods and taking on not only the smaller scale but also the subject.

All my work is a product of my experience of working and developing through the materials, it is visual and tactile but with a purpose. I could almost say it has always been and is about vulnerability; the fine balance between safety and danger, existence and nothingness. The images I use, not always literally, are images that in the first instance I found beauty aside from the obvious, they allowed a 'painterly' interplay, a playground for my senses. The whale for example, grace, beauty, power, but threatened and vulnerable. In my windscreen wiper series I loved the image, its visual impact but it would have no meaning without the original association to the twister in Australia. I was caught in the fringes and thrown across the highway whilst driving a heavy vehicle; pathetically I turned on the wipers a pointless action that spawned many paintings; were they about the pretty swirling rocks and the wipers sad attempts to clear? or about that split second when a good day could have become bad day?

I have had work in the Small Is Beautiful exhibitions since its beginning and have almost always made more than one piece, sometimes 4 or 5. At times I have struggled with the imposed theme, which has often opened up new directions or consolidated earlier thoughts. I have found myself seeing humour in the subject, #31 'Wipe That Smile' (theme - Self Portrait) or even black humour, #5 'The Next Millennium' (theme - Millennium) is it another can of worms? Or #32 'Desert Song' (theme - Music) the piece is a reference to the Gulf war. More often it is a more intimate exploration and development of current work. #8 to 12 were made both before and after the 2011 SiB the title 'Texas 1/2/03' is the date the Columbia Space Mission tragically exploded on re-entry to the earth's atmosphere. What more poignant symbol of power and vulnerability could there be? Another interesting move to come directly from SiB is the use of the glass layering. It would not have happened on a larger scale and yet these 7x9 inch pieces have become as important to me as my canvases of 7x9 feet.

Making an exhibition of these small works brings together many of the pieces that have not been shown before, as usually just one is put forward and shown at the annual SiB exhibition. Then my solo exhibitions tend to feature the bigger work and the smaller ones stay unseen. This exhibition is the first showing of many of the works and the first time even I have seen them together.

John Loker 2012