

A Walk in Clay

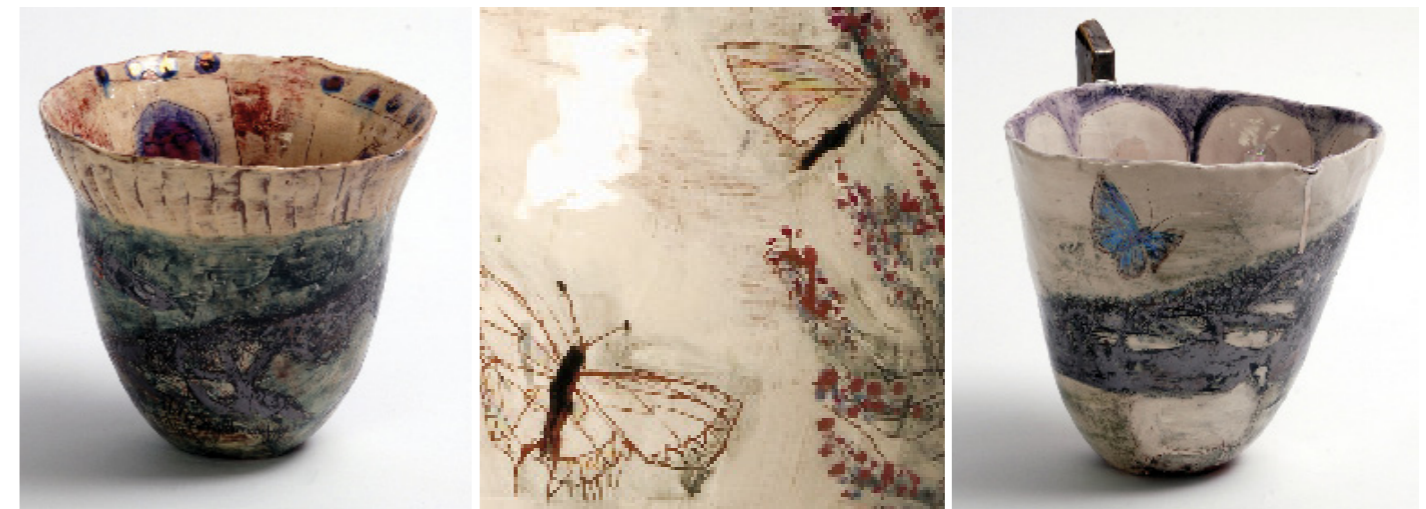
Ceramicist Jacqueline
Leighton Boyce

Naomi Cudmore

Jacki and Banksy photographed by Jenny Steer www.jennysteer.co.uk



THE DRAMATIC CERAMICS OF JACKI LEIGHTON BOYCE ARE A CELEBRATORY WALK THROUGH EXMOOR'S SEASONS IN CLAY. AND FROM MAJESTIC VESSEL TO TILES ALIVE WITH SHIMMERING FLOWER AND WING, JACKI'S WORK ALSO DESCRIBES AN EVENTFUL PERSONAL JOURNEY THROUGHOUT WHICH THE LANDSCAPE HAS REPEATEDLY CALLED HER HOME.



Opposite: *Exmoor Gorse Plate* (26cm d.), £45 (sold); *The Red Stag and the Hawthorn vessel*, 40cm h., £160 (sold). Above, from left: *Hedgerow and Moth at Midnight*, 17cm h., £110; detail from *Exmoor Heather Jug* (see page 52); *Hedgerow by Daylight*, 19cm h., £120 (sold). Below: *Turquoise Moth Jug*, 30cm h., £110 (sold).

The farmhouse kitchen table is surely the heart of many a good story. Consuming gallons of tea in the timewarp kitchen at Gulland Farm and asking Jacki about her life and work, it soon became apparent that I was in the most appropriate spot possible for the unfolding tale. With her inseparable whippet Banksy listening in, Jacki explained how it was that at this table she had received a great deal of her later schooling after the development of a form of arthritis called ankylosing spondylitis left her, at 14, in too much pain to attend school in Minehead.

Up until this point Jacki had envisaged a life centred very much around horses, but it became immediately apparent that this simply was not going to happen. "I used to compete in cross-country and so on on my pony Robbie, who had been bought for me by Miss Helen Dashwood at the next farm. She had also built me a cross-country course and I was completely obsessed. But once I was diagnosed Robbie was sold and school lessons started at home with Mr Stapleton." This turn of events, which sounds rather more picturesque than was surely the case, yielded little in the way of academic progress – although Mr Stapleton did, apparently, teach Jacki lots of useful things like 'how to bet on a horse or judge a stag's age by its antlers'!

After a year at said table, with the pain more or less under control for the time being, Jacki began to take long walks in many of the places where Robbie had carried her before. "My three siblings had left home and I obviously didn't see much of my school friends, which was the worst part, so I basically became a bit reclusive. It wasn't much fun really but I did start to draw a lot and to some extent this is probably where it all started."

In her late teens, after developing arthritis in both hips, Jacki decided to put the gloomy medical outlook to one side as much as possible and even took herself off to the USA where she worked as an au pair 'living on pain killers' and generally getting on with it.

"Then, at 21, my sister, who had done fine art, suggested I go to art college – an idea which had never entered my head before. I did an O Level evening class, having come

away from my schooling with very few qualifications, and then a foundation course at SCAT, where ceramics was the final module of the course. Up until that point I had thought I would go on to do printmaking but my love of ceramics was immediate. One major inspiration later in my education, at Central St Martins, was tutor Richard Slee, who has been the grand master of sculptural ceramics in Britain since the seventies and of whom I was frankly terrified! But I think I knew even before my first piece was out of the kiln that this was for me. Using my hands to mould the artwork felt wonderful."

After SCAT Jacki went to Falmouth where she did an HND in ceramics. "I had always been very good at sport and athletics at school and ceramics turned out to be a great way to express that need to release energy through art. I really went for it, helped along by the fact that, while at Falmouth, I had my hips replaced for the first time." Having found her calling, Jacki added more qualifications – a first-class ceramics degree and then an MA in ceramic illustration, both at Central St Martins in London.





The physicality of ceramics has stuck as Jacki's overriding reason for choosing this medium, and it has also helped dictate her style of working, both in terms of form and decoration. All of her pieces are hand built rather than thrown, keeping the working style as physical as possible and lending itself to completely unique, irregular pieces. And her decoration has been inspired by her physical surroundings, most recently by the Exmoor landscape which she explores most days on foot.

"I think that clay has just about everything – colour, texture and three dimensions. You can incorporate any kind of art form into it. You can use graphics on ceramics, as I did for a while when studying in London, or you can use the surfaces of textiles. You can approach ceramics in the manner of someone like Grayson Perry – as a fine artist – or you can approach it as an illustrator, or even a jeweller. And there is even product design, with ceramics being used for industrial purposes."

Jacki puts her love of touching clay down to her rural childhood, throughout which mud and 'scrabbling around in it' were very much par for the course! "I have always been strongly influenced by my physical environment and whereas when I lived in Cornwall my work had a kind of organic, Mediterranean feel to it, with lots of rocklike surfaces and turquoise, now it is more inspired by having come home to Exmoor once again, where for the first time I am working as a full-time ceramicist."

Until this point, Jacki has been balancing her ceramics with regular office-based jobs, which provided a more reliable income, but found that she really needed to be outside walking or building her pots in order to stay well.

"After some years in London, I brought my kiln home to Gulland where I installed it in one of the barns and decided to really look after my health. And I feel so much better." It is important for Jacki to keep herself straight and exercise as much as possible so that her joints don't stiffen, so she walks endlessly with Banksy and when she is not walking she is busy using the natural world in her work.

"I really feel now that I do not want to live anywhere else but Exmoor. Much as I love to travel and there are places that I want to see, like Japan, I love it here, particularly because of the deer which first inspired my grandparents to buy the farm. My grandmother hunted with the D&S and they wanted to be somewhere near the hunt and with lots of deer on the land, which we do have plenty of in the woodland here."

Above: *Exmoor Heather Jug*, 48 cm h., £170 (sold).
Below: Jacki has a website specifically for her tiles.
See www.roughdiamondtiles.com for a wide range of samples and contact details.



Above, from left: *Detail from Exmoor Souvenir Plate: The Deer and The Moors with ceramic stand*, 20cm w., £65; *Kitsch Springtime Jug*, 30cm high, £125 (sold); *detail from Exmoor Souvenir Plate: The Two Stags*, 26 cm w., £45. Bottom right: *Turquoise Moth Bowl*, 27 cm h., £110.

Photographs of ceramics by John Andow except for the 'Gorse plate' which was photographed by Jonathan Thompson

One thing that struck me when I first went into the chilly studio at Gulland was how huge some of Jacki's pots are – and their drama somehow makes it easier to grasp the physicality of building them.

Jacki does not use any processes such as slip or plaster moulds, although she does press-mould a few of her plates. Even her tiles are all hand-built – hence 'Rough Diamond Tiles'. Hand-painted with bespoke flora and fauna designs, they are all original, with no design being replicated. They measure 11cms x 11cms and are priced at £14.50 each. These tiles are generally bought for table-top use, but Jacki is also in the process of designing lower priced textured tiles with a simple and colourful contemporary design. "They are meant for creative, warm and colourful kitchens where, as an antidote to a more clinical, minimalist space, people want to create a more inspiring place to cook, live and eat." (Jacki's tiles have their own separate website: www.jacquelineleightonboyce.com)

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The decoration on Jacki's ceramics is delicate, sometimes jewel-like. Another of her passions is gardening and she has a garden-design qualification from Bicton under her belt, which was motivated by her fascination for flora and fauna,

'the madness of hedgerows and the density of how much wildlife you can find in one tiny patch of grass'.

Her botanical interests stimulated experimentation with a style of decoration called scrafitto, whereby the surface of the clay is scratched before being painted with a white slip. This is then left to dry, scratched once again so that the terracotta comes through and then painted with underglaze oxides to give a light, subtle and delicate decoration which is very detailed and fine.

"Butterflies and beetles lend themselves to working in this way because of their legs and wings. I fire my work three times, building up layers before finally applying metal lustres on top of the already fired glaze, sometimes adding a bit of gold as it's great to add a touch of glamour too!"

Most importantly, these are works designed to be looked at as clay, with the material retaining its tactile raw presence which in Jacki's words 'people tend to love or hate'. Personally I fall into the former camp, am the proud owner of a beautiful butterfly tile and do recommend visiting a stockist or the studio to decide for yourself. Jacki can be contacted via email: claygirl62@hotmail.com or call 01398 323364. Visit Floribunda (Dulverton), Griffin's Yard (South Molton), Nails Art Gallery (Bristol) or www.jacquelineleightonboyce.co.uk, which includes a list of exhibitions. Broomhill Art Hotel, Sculpture Gardens, Art Gallery and Restaurant (Muddiford, Barnstaple) will be exhibiting Jacki's work in March/April.



Reader offer!

To receive a 10% discount when buying direct from Jacki's studio simply quote code ECM50. Offer ends 1 June 2010.