



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, politician, 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 abstract quality 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 Limbo's features. Mostly of animals, they are almost always white and pared-down decorative. Additionally carved in stone, wood or ivory (though ivory is no longer used). In one example I came across the Japanese tradition of placing a wooden monkey outside a shop 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 pieces of the form of it at home at animal. My partner myself and our two young boys. Small loves public, so it was better 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 first four seemed 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 pieces 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-19 restrictions I had to experience the show long-distance. It is always in the showing - outside of the studio space and busy corner - that when 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 failed state, war and the struggle heavily on these works as they gaze heavenward with both aspiration and in a search for answers. That directly reflect 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.