

ISOLATION INTERVIEWS

ANNA READING





ISSUE 4

Continuing the Isolation Interviews: a new series of weekly artist profiles highlighting current concerns, accompanied by a selection of available works.

We know that these are precarious and uncertain times for everyone and with so many people staying at home, self-isolating or social distancing, we want to be able to continue sharing some of our favourite art and artists with you. The Isolation Interviews are a weekly series of conversations with artists that will explore how these new circumstances are affecting their practices and productivity. We'll hear how they are finding solutions - and even opportunities - and what their plans and hopes are for the future.

Brooke Benington is committed to supporting and creating opportunities for artists. We believe that this is needed now more than ever. Most artists are self-employed, often supplementing their income by working as technicians, fabricators, assistants, teachers and a whole host of other jobs. Now, many have very suddenly lost a vital source of income. With this in mind, we are accompanying each Isolation Interview with a curated selection of work by that artist, available for purchase.

Thank you for your continued support. Stay safe and look after one another.

Lily & George
Directors, Brooke Benington

You have had a busy couple of years; The Mark Tanner Sculpture Award giving you the opportunity to work on a scale that had previously not been possible, and to show in some very different spaces than you had before. What has this experience taught you about your practice and how has it influenced the work that you are producing next?

The award was amazing because it gave me the time to push my work, my influences, materials and methods in new directions. At the time I received the award, I visited the Scottish Islands of Mull and Staffa. My eyes were drawn to the surfaces of these coastal landscapes, pebbledash, limpets on rocks, marine blue gloss paint, rockpools. I took these influences back to the studio, and I set about trying to

make. Mistakes happened, but I love that, they are the trampoline that ideas bounce off. Some failed attempts at making a mortar pebbledash mix led to the foam/gravel combo that populates my recent works. Frustrated attempts at applying shells 'naturally' to the works led to the repetitive rows of oyster shells. A relationship between the synthetic and the organic appeared as did a fascination with vulnerability, protection, camouflage.

Sculptures and wall-based panels hosting encrustations of shells and textures are where the work is going next. A chance encounter with some chip forks produced a set of works which appear to be coated in feathers inspiring me to bring bird figures into the works. This has combined with, pre-lockdown, regular journeys past Burgess Park's lake on my way to the studio, with its population of birds, in particular the cormorants which stand forebodingly airing their wings out like angels.

Could you tell us a bit about your studio routine and how, if at all, it has been affected or changed by the current social distancing measure and subsequent closing of business and facilities?

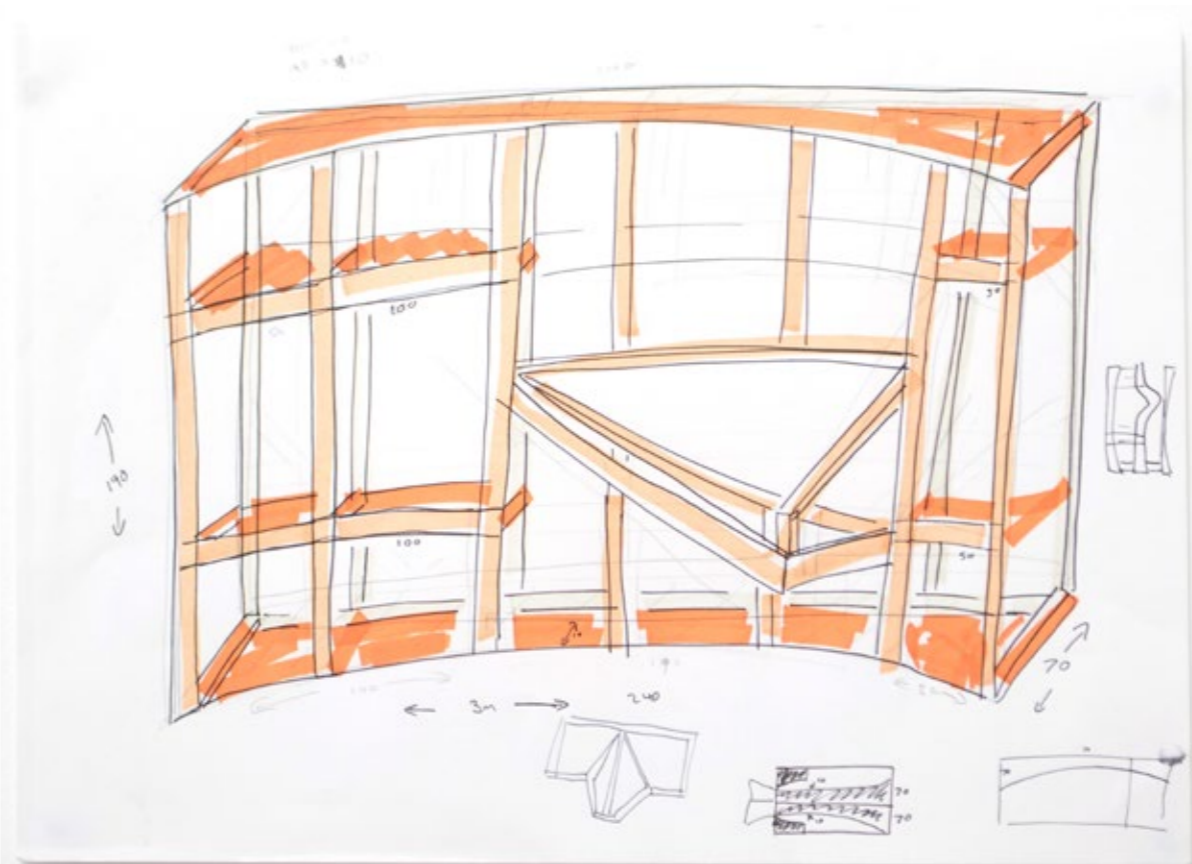
Before the lockdown, I would try to have at least one full week in the studio each month. My work takes time because of the layers of materials and drying times, so a stretch of a few days allowed progress. Other weeks I could also get in for a couple of days depending on freelance commitments. I plan ahead toward exhibitions, often scheduling in evenings to apply the next layer of material in between drying. The studio is very important to me, it is the system I have put in place to facilitate my work. It gives me space to make mess, space to tidy up and look, space for storage and space to think. But also, it gives me an



amazing community of other artists, and I miss that energy a lot.

Working from home is not easy because the system I had worked out to facilitate making has suddenly disappeared. Honestly, I think it's good to remove pressure for productivity and reassess. I've been easing in to it. Drawing is the obvious starting point and I have been drawing the

lamps in my house. They seem like strong solitary beings and are sculptural. I want new ideas to seep in during this time. I aim to work on collages layered with paint in the coming weeks. I also managed to salvage some materials from the studio and I hope to make some sculptures at a more intimate scale. I feel sorry for my housemates when I finally get my jigsaw out.



Your works touch on a range of themes and ideas, bringing in childhood memory, mythologies, cult science fiction, and ecology amongst others. Do these ideas embed themselves in the work as it develops or do you have a clear focus when you begin each piece or body of work?

Thank you, yes all of that is somehow present in the works. These ideas surface of their own volition. I definitely do not think too much at the beginning of a work. Usually I think about where I intend the work to end up. Is it for a gallery with tall ceilings, outdoors, a hidden space, a wall? Sculpture inhabits space, like a hermit crab choosing its shell. Ideas for new work tend to grow organically out of previous works; something I want to change or try differently. I have conversations with the work as I make. I am interested in what the piece has to tell me. Sometimes its pragmatic like, that material is too heavy, or too fragile, but, by the end, the sculpture and I have had a pretty in-depth dialogue, where I will learn about things that have resurfaced in the work, things I love, things I think are important, things I had forgotten. My



motivation is understanding what the work has to tell me, the reward is when it can communicate that to others.

Your work is instantly recognisable as your own, largely because of your idiosyncratic use of materials. Could you tell us about your process and how you developed this distinctive style?

I think the work really began to become itself when I started opening up to mistakes. While I was studying at Slade, I had tried to build an armature for a sculpture which I wanted to look like a kind of biomorphic airplane door. I like to work fast and so I build things by hand, and it became apparent that there was no way this thing was going to look like the injection moulding that had inspired it. The armature for this sculpture became far more resonant of my ideas than the original intention. This piece went on to feature in New Contemporaries 2018. The discovery of making without a fixed intention really allowed the work to take off in its own direction.

I still work in a similar way, beginning with a wooden armature, either ply or timber. I carve these armatures with a jigsaw, cutting away and adding until I am happy with the form. Then I apply a surface material depending on what I want from it. I either screw card panels on, or apply



material soaked in glue, one side at a time, to allow it to dry. Often, I paint the works with gloss to unify the textures. It really depends on how the piece feels; solid and fixed like a fossil, or vibrant and tenuous like a limpet colony.

You have previously collaborated with writers and performers, and you also write yourself. Are these aspects ancillary to your main practice or are they a flourish that comes towards the end of the process?

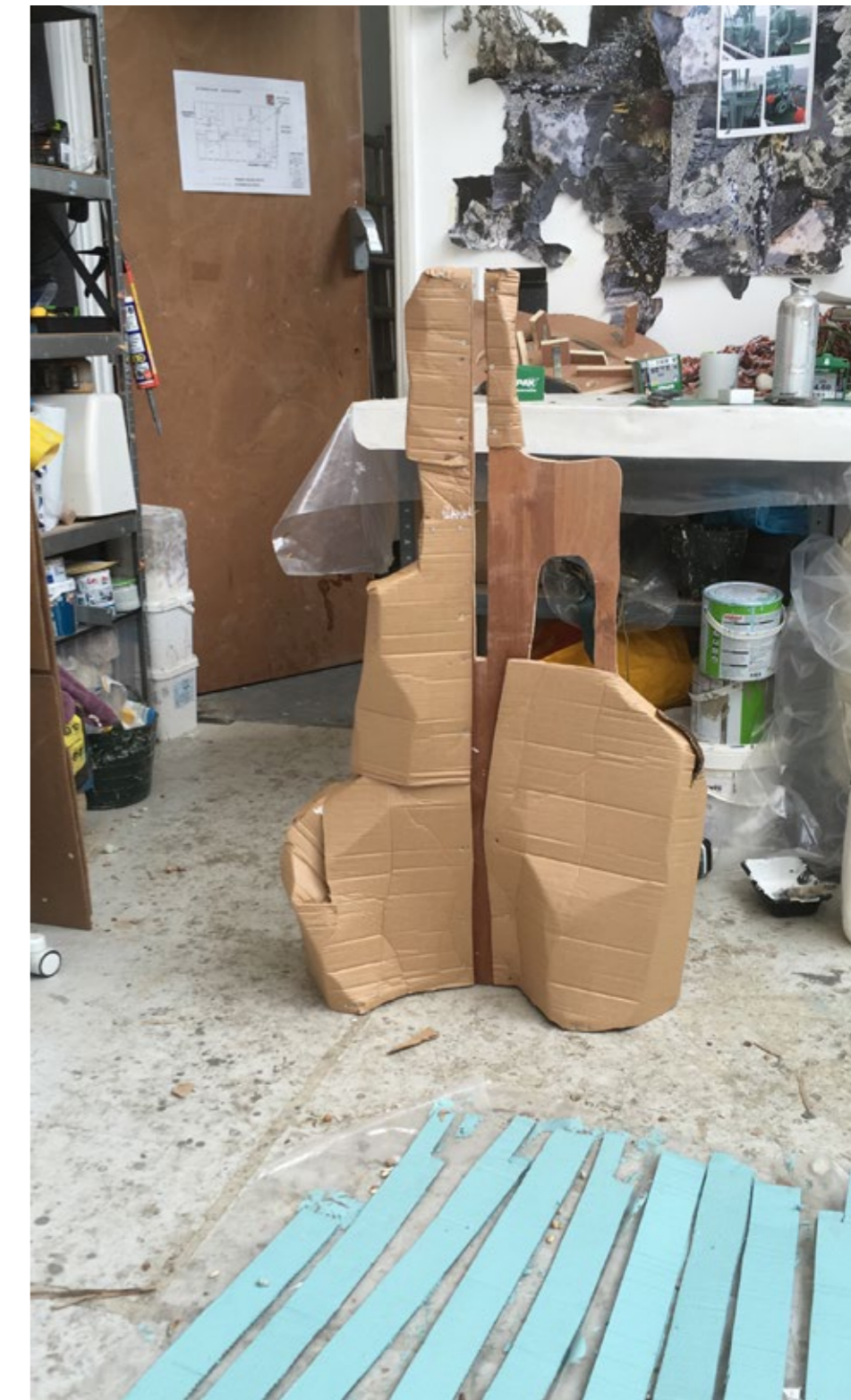
They are completely interlinked with the main practice and are just another set of materials. I have used written word as a way to make sense of my tangled ideas in the past. Likewise, I have worked with writers and other artists in collaboration to tease out ideas. I wrote a poem comprising all the exhibition titles which I discarded before hitting on 'The Pothole', which is included in a publication I made about the exhibition. The publication also includes writing by Hannah Regel and Carey Lifschultz who wrote responses to my work after studio visits. I have collaborated several times with the artist Justine Melford Colegate, mixing performance with sculptural props, and our mutual work is rooted in our friendship and dialogue.

As you look forward from this uncertain and potentially transformative moment in our history, can you foresee any positive change, in the arts or within wider society, that might come of it? And has it made you assess or evaluate your role as an artist within society?

This situation has led to anxiety and suffering for the most vulnerable, including arts workers who are, by and large, precarious workers, freelancers or on zero hours contracts and not forgetting the countless hours of free labour that artists put in to realise exhibitions and promote

and sustain their practices. We need a system that prioritises wellbeing over profit. Maybe this moment will be a reminder.

I have been encouraged by the openness of individual people reaching out to offer community and support to artists, as well as seeing people getting involved in crafts and creativity. People love art and I have been reminded of its power to soothe and disrupt, its openness and humility.





ANNA READING

Anna Reading (born Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK) lives and works in London. She held the Mark Tanner Sculpture Award 2018-2019 and was selected for Bloomberg New Contemporaries 2018 after graduating from MFA Sculpture, Slade School of Fine Art in 2017 where she received the Siva Finestone scholarship. Recent exhibitions include solo tour *The Pothole*, Bury Art Museum and Sculpture Centre (2020), Cross Lane Projects, Kendal (2019) and Standpoint Gallery, London (2019), *Flock*, The Broadway Plinth, Letchworth Garden City (2019), *Snails For Eyes*, Kingsgate Project Space, London (2019), *Sugar Mountain*, curated by ThorpStavri, The Silver Building, London (2019). *Shell Shelter and Raven Ravine*, The Bomb Factory Art Foundation, London (2019), *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, The Art Foundation, Athens (2018) and *POND*, Kaitak Gallery, Hong Kong (2017).

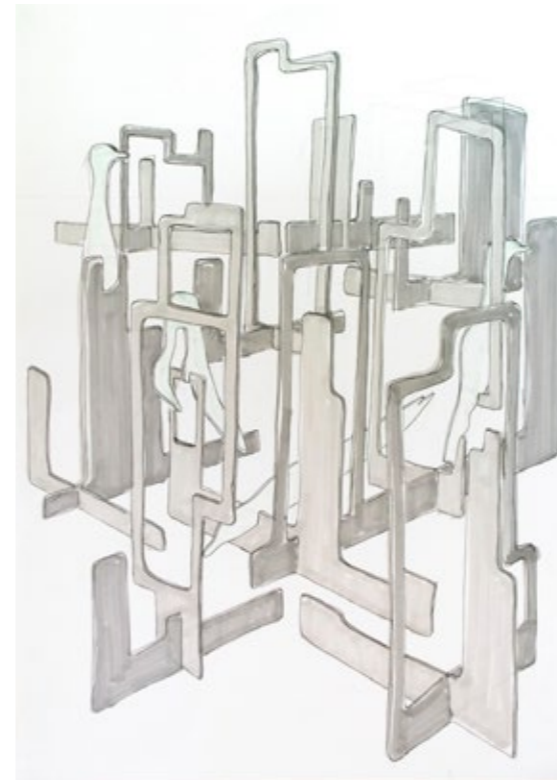
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Egg, 2017
Pen on Paper
29.7 x 21 cm



Sign, 2019
Wood, emulsion, shells, silicone
40 x 105 x 5 cm



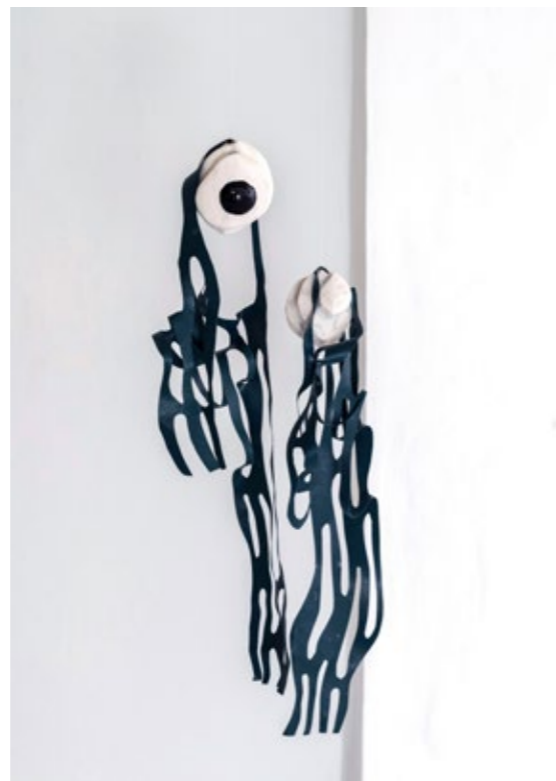
Study for Flock, 2020
Pen on Paper
59.2 x 42.2 cm



The Fisheaters, 2019
Wood, chip forks, staples
87 x 40 x 4 cm



Roy, 2020
Wood, card, shells, plaster, gravel, clay, glass, glass paint
35 x 83 x 12 cm



Oceanic Eddies, 2018
Plaster, glass, tarpaulin, eyelets, wire
50 x 10 x 10 cm (pair)

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