

When the outcome is greater than the sum of its parts

Earlier this year, Sanlam was the lead sponsor of the prestigious 2020 Collect Open Award at the International Art Fair for Modern Craft and Design. The latest in our series of exhibitor interviews is with Lorraine Robson – a Scottish artist whose craft is an emotional and intuitive response to the world around her.

When we caught up with Lorraine, she was busy working on a commissioned piece for the walls of the redeveloped Edinburgh Haematology Centre, which is part of the Western General Hospital in the city. Funded by Tonic Arts, Edinburgh & Lothians Health Foundation and coordinated by Round Table Projects, the commission underlines the importance of art and craft to mental health wellbeing, and how it can bring a sense of calm and comfort to people in times of distress.

Working on projects like these is what makes Lorraine's pursuit of a career in ceramics worthwhile. But it hasn't always been easy. She graduated from art college in 1988 with an honours degree in sculpture and took a job in a commercial studio making large fibreglass models for private companies, including National Trust. The work was physically hard, financially unrewarding, and failed to inspire her creatively, but it also gave her invaluable commercial and production skills which she carries with her to this day.

Fortune favours the brave

While working as a professional Artist, Lorraine became disillusioned with the art world. She said: "Despite having success exhibiting sculpture with the Royal Scottish Academy (RSA) and Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh, it was extremely difficult to make a living when every piece is unique and can be many weeks and months in the making."

To make ends meet, Lorraine returned to her previous career, prior to attending art college, as a cartographer. While working, she bought a kiln and continued her love of clay and ceramics as a hobby. After 10 years, she had built a successful career and had no intention of showcasing and selling her craft. But when her husband pointed out that the house could no longer hold any more ceramic vessels, she threw caution to the wind and decided to look for somewhere to exhibit them. She said: "I honestly didn't think anyone would want to buy my work. But a gallery in Edinburgh called Open Eye gave me a chance. I got my break, and that's all it took to persuade me to give my passion another go."

In 1994, Lorraine was invited to exhibit her work at the Roger Billcliffe gallery in Glasgow, after showing new ceramic coiled vessels at the RSA. This was followed by a sell-out exhibition in New York. Her success continued and she became a regular exhibitor on the circuit, and from 2006 she boosted her income by undertaking arts residences and freelance tutor work.

No such thing as perfection

There has been a common thread running through our interviews with Collect Open exhibitors. An artist is never completely satisfied with their work. The need to improve and adapt is what drives them creatively and commercially, and Lorraine is no exception. She quickly became frustrated using glazes on her ceramics, likening it to pouring treacle over intricate formations. She was awarded a Creative Development grant from the Scottish Arts Council, which allowed her to invest studio time experimenting and developing diamond polishing techniques and a new body of work. This became a pivotal point in her career, as it enabled her to develop her trademark earthenware surface, which is as tactile as it is beautiful. Simple, yet striking.

She uses handheld diamond pads and spends many hours polishing and re-polishing each item until the surface is just right. The process is very time consuming and, over the years, it has taken its toll on her hands. As a result, she has adapted by making moulds from unique coiled, pinched or slab-built vessels. A technique known as 'slip casting' has enabled her to create multiple pieces, cut and alter forms. She can now marry her love of sculpture with her expertise in ceramics

For the greater good

Lorraine used this technique for the Collect Open exhibition. Her *Hit Me Shake Me Blow Me* ceramic installation was designed to invite tactile engagement with her work. Its provocative title was aimed at raising awareness of dementia, particularly highlighting the positive effect art and creativity can have on cognitive function and those with dementia diagnosis.

She is also using this approach for the Edinburgh Haematology Centre commission. She explained: "Abstract installations are a great way of creating something calming and soothing. This piece connects with nature, and stems from my concerns for the planet, but in a subtle way. I've cast the footprints of deer, deflated pods of kelp, and paths formed by water from the Forth estuary – all in the middle of the Covid-19 lockdown."

As with all her creations, the result only starts to become clear as it builds. "My work is intuitive. It either works or it doesn't. I rely on a lot of trial and error, playing and experimenting with shapes, and working out arrangements by drawing. When it comes together, it can feel like a 'eureka' moment. When it doesn't – well, I've been known to drop it on the floor and start all over again."

She concludes: "People will bring their own experience to art, and it will speak to everyone in a different way. My hope is that this piece for the Haematology Centre will help patients momentarily escape from the clinical environment they have found themselves in. If I'm successful in achieving that, then it's worth more to me than any amount of money or commercial success."

The worlds of art and wealth management are surprisingly similar. We set out to craft something meaningful and of real value that lasts for generations to come. The same spirit that guides and inspires artists to create cultural wealth is what drives our wealth managers to grow and preserve clients' wealth. The traits and characteristics typically associated with artists, such as inspiration, innovation, hard-learned skills, comprehensive experience, care and patience – even the need to take calculated risk at times – rings true for portfolio managers and financial planners and reflects our brand proposition, Wealthsmiths.

[More information on Lorraine's work < http://www.lorralnerobson.co.uk/> .](http://www.lorralnerobson.co.uk/)