

## INTERVIEW

# Katharine West

**Have previous generations of makers influenced your work in unique and unexpected ways?**

The value placed on 'looking' in my family environment was primordial to my development as an artist. The validity of making was never questioned in an environment where creativity was considered fundamental to existence. I grew up against the backdrop of an easel, a collection of precious, coveted tubes of oil paint, paintings by my mother and her contemporaries and most unusually an exquisite collection of old masters copied meticulously by my paternal grandfather. Then one only had look through a window or exit a door to find series of shapes and compositions. Years of entering into the interiors of my grandfather's 'Vermeers' sealed my preoccupation with form in space.

**How does this influence manifest in your work?**

My commitment to making was nurtured in early childhood. Making was a method of amusement, absorption and experimentation. Making became a discipline which had to be pushed, challenged and developed in adulthood. I believe in the fact that 'Making' matters no matter what form it takes, both as a rich resource of possibilities or something very specific was inherited but the choice to give 'Making' recognition and continue to 'make' is made as an individual outside of a family heritage.

**What is the most important thing you have learned from previous generations of makers within your family?**

Being taught how to observe and draw. Drawing never leaves you. It is loyal, accessible and never impossible.

**Describe the relationship between generations of makers in your family.**

Generational creative relationships can be very pure and special and important, but they can also be fraught. I value the genuine and have very little time for the inevitable insecurities which are predominantly destructive. Making is a belief system like any other and conviction is a decision which has to be adhered to.

**Can you trace the evolution of your inherited skills?**

Inherited skills are carried and can always be given recognition and found again. They are a foundation and of course they must be valued. I suspect they can only truly be retained through practice, but they are never very far away.

**How do you balance respect for tradition with innovation, against current design trends or the need to respond to the demands of the marketplace?**

I don't worry too much about the marketplace, but I do care that my work continues to evolve and that evolution is always a mixture of traditional making skills and some sort of questioning or innovation.

**Have you found your own voice, or do you feel that being part of a family tradition can restrict your creativity or originality?**

I do feel that I have found my voice but I left the family nest and the Island of Ireland to nurture my creativity and forge my own path. For me, leaving, experiencing other ways of thinking and forming my own approach to making were fundamental to the creation of my own perspective. One has to establish a structure of one's own in the same way that any individual would establish a belief system or philosophy of their own. In a way we all find a unique way to protect what is most precious to us and that structure is what nurtures the continuation of one's practice.

**How important is it to pass on your skills and culture of making to the next generation or ensure a sense of continuity?**

As an educator I have made a commitment to the sharing of skills and approaches to creativity over many, many years. I believe that as humans we are predisposed to the manipulation of materials. The moment in time in which one is suspended and absorbed by the process of making is what it is all about for me and watching the experience unfold for others in workshop after workshop is what sustains the continuity of the making process for me and those who, I hope will continue to make.