

In The Studio: Clare Woods, artist

'We sculptors worked in a shed while the painters had the nice studios'

Karen Wright | Friday 17 August 2012 |



Art of darkness: Clare Woods in her metal shed



Exhibits in Wood's show at Wakefield's Hepworth Museum earlier this year

"I always thought I was not good enough to be a painter", confesses Clare Woods as we stand in her studio. "I studied as a sculptor at Bath, where there was separation between painting and sculptors. We sculptors were in a shed at the back and the painters had the nice studios at the front. I still have that feeling."

Surprisingly modest words from a painter who has had two museum shows in the last year, at the Hepworth Wakefield and the Southampton City Art Gallery, and has recently completed an enormous project for the Olympic Delivery Authority – two walls together totalling 125 metres long composed from paintings transformed into 88,000 mosaic tiles in each.

Woods left London with her husband, fellow artist Des Hughes, for the countryside, settling in Kington, a small town in Herefordshire. With two small children, it seemed the right move, and perhaps not a surprising one for Woods, whose work derives its inspiration from landscape.

Her studio is not in a charming old cottage, but on a small industrial estate, in an inevitable metal shed, which gets so cold in winter, she says, that it is almost impossible to work in. She keeps her library in an office at home, only allowing the books she is referring to in the studio. Having moved to the country and surrounded herself by the subject that kick-started her career, Woods suggests that her practice is changing. She picks up a book on Francis Bacon, showing me the Tate's famous Crucifixion triptych. "I have been examining how he made the orange, all its layers." Nearby lies a book on Louise Bourgeois, another powerful influence. "How did she make that?" she marvels, peering at a Bourgeois textile head.

All the works in progress are in a new material for Woods: oil paint. "I cleared out all the gloss paints", she says. Woods's foray into oils has been a productive experiment, evidenced by a striking work in progress based on a detail from a stained-glass window. A finished work glows at the end of the studio, based, she tells me, on a Henry Moore head.

"Having not been formally trained as a painter, I am making it all up as I go", though she semi-jokes that her qualifications include winning a paper-snowflake contest aged five. "I wish I had more time to read," she continues earnestly. "I want to think more so I can be a better artist."