

Jill Randall
Changing Tack, 1990

It was an incredibly small art world at that point. It is hard to imagine now but there wasn't really much going on in the visual arts. Castlefield Gallery was the hub for all of the interesting exhibitions, so all the artists would go there and that was where you would meet everybody. Castlefield always had prestige because of its aspirations and ambitions, and to have a show and be connected with it was a really good thing for the future. You don't, at the time, see yourself as part of a scene or an era; I think that's only in retrospect. But of course, you always are, aren't you? Because artists are always of their time. When we graduated there was very little advice on how to survive as an artist. You had to slowly build things up and find it out for yourself.

I did a Master's degree at Manchester Polytechnic and then after we graduated a group of us founded a studio called SIGMA (Sculptors in Greater Manchester Association). It was an old-fashioned cooperative, a very friendly kind of arrangement in an old mill building near Castlefield. I already had a couple of shows under my belt at that time, an exhibition at Oldham art gallery, and other exhibitions that had been reviewed by the Guardian. It was a time where my career was slowly but surely taking off. The year after that I went to Barcelona on a travel scholarship, and I'm sure the exhibition helped.

Place started to become important in my work. It's something that I almost don't acknowledge even now, because to me it seems such a natural way of working. It's quite a subconscious thing but certainly when I went to Barcelona, a more site-based approach started to take off. A lot of the shows around the 90s were inspired by my residencies in different places, so this was at a sort of turning point.

The studio is still really important to me, as a base, and almost as a sanctuary. You're surrounded by the things you like and the things that remind you about what you're interested in and what you are doing, but it has changed for me. I refer to my studio as a mission control for things that might be happening all over the place – it's a source of ideas, but actual physical works might be located elsewhere, or being made elsewhere. You get a snapshot, but not necessarily a full impression of my production. After having done residencies abroad, I'm now not afraid to take my studio with me in my head and start elsewhere. Not everything I produce as an artist goes on in the studio.

Storage is a nightmare, because you have to have space to make new work, you don't want to have to be on top of old work all the time. You have your favourite things – that's probably why I've kept *End of the Line* for all this time, because I've always liked it. I've always had this idea that at some point it might find a home, which it never has. It's quite unusual for someone to come back to me to ask for work that's however-many-years old now, because generally you keep your most recent work, thinking your most recent work is the best. But it's actually really nice to have something like that. You've got to make those decisions about what you're going to keep and what you're going to get rid of. You can't possibly keep everything.

Working in metals is still my first love, but more recently I've been working with throwaway materials like card and wood and paper. I've always quite liked combining one thing with another, copper or steel or something quite valuable with something more ephemeral. I've got to the stage where I can work with fabricators, and that's given me the ambition to work

with really big pieces. I couldn't do something that big with the facilities I have here, so working with other people has allowed me to expand that.

I still feel to some extent linked to the art scene in Manchester, even though I've done things all over the place. The art scene in Manchester has expanded massively, and many artists in Manchester now have an international outlook. Artists are happy to show in New York, or Barcelona. And I think that's really healthy. Technology means your work is opened up to a much wider audience, but seeing yourself as part of that Manchester art scene, particularly at that time, is kind of interesting to think about.

Interview by Emily McKenzie