

ON: ONLINE RESIDENCY

interview with Lydia Denno

C.M: How does your work address this relationship of the digital and the physical?

L.D: I've been very aware of my technology – namely my phone and my computer - during this residency, which has become the liminal space between the physical raw material and the digital output. In previous residencies, typically on location, I've tended to work without digital equipment at all. Since my phone and computer have been necessary for transferring my images to an online space, I've tried to embrace them as extra tools within my kit. As such, I've incorporated photography, digital text and digital design tools into my typically "hand-crafted" practice. This helped underline obvious parallels with our increased use of technology during this pandemic.

Regarding content, it has been interesting for me to explore the space where physical and digital meet as a window into the artist's mind, behaviors and practice. As the residency progressed, it felt important to "appear" as myself, firstly through photographs of personal lockdown rituals and then via the window of a "videochat". I suppose this felt akin to people visiting a physical residency space to see work in progress.

C.M: The relationship between the body and physical or digital space has been a constant and fundamental part of your practice during this residency; how does this relate to audience participation? Is the performative part something you are interested in?

L.D: Fairly early on, I became interested in the notion that my body constrained in physical space could be paralleled by my illustrations being constrained within the digital space; in this case, the boundaries of the Instagram box echoing the boundaries of my inhabited architecture. In this way, although I was documenting an essentially personal experience, I hoped that the representation of it in this way could speak to an audience who might not be encountering the same level of isolation or experience of these new normals.

The incorporation of text also felt integral to, not only dialoguing with the imagery, but also drawing the audience into my thoughts and feelings. I nuanced the words with an intimacy which I hoped would offer an invitation to empathize with the project narrative.

Equally, the desire to journey from a somewhat bereft physical experience to a playful one came from wanting to advocate the scope of emotions we're feeling at this time and to encourage opportunity as well as grief in the face of such unprecedented times.

As for audience participation per se, I've been reflecting on the idea that technology both connects and isolates us. In the case of inviting participation, I have found that something of a challenge. I'm very interested in the performative side of my practice but I felt that the 'isolating' nature of the Instagram platform denied a dialogue between artist and audience. This was in part due to working to a set of rules which I had decided but which I couldn't insist on an audience to follow. I'll talk more about this later.

C.M: Did you find it difficult to adapt to the hybrid residency world? How did it feel using this new instagram language for your practice?

L.D: I think initially I did find it quite hard to adapt to the hybrid nature of the residency; there seemed to be some tension for me in knowing whether the Instagram platform offered a workstation or a gallery wall; was it a space to really represent work in progress in lieu of a finished product?

Secondly, as I touched on earlier, I became aware that I didn't have as much control over an audience experience as I might do in the flesh. I was keen to use the Instagram gallery format as a way of making my images dialogue with each other, in this way establishing and breaking the rules of boundaries (and ultimately having the whole 'order' disrupted when I relinquish the management of this page); but it became apparent to me that via the home feed and an audience interaction with one image at a time, they may well not be experiencing the 'narrative' in this way.

All this said, it was great for me to have the opportunity to see how the digital platform itself could become part of illustrating the themes of my project. I liken it to my book design work where the haptic experience of the book object itself is as integral to the storytelling as the words and images which reside within.

C.M: If you have experienced physical residencies as part of your work, what are the challenges you faced with the digital residency?

L.D: I feel I've probably touched on most of the challenges in my previous answers. I think the hardest for me was wanting to communicate something of a 'narrative' or 'journey' through this residency project but not being able to manage how an audience interacted with the online space.

I suppose fundamentally for me, my artwork is typically concerned with dialogue and encounter. Granted, this project was a particularly introspective one, but regardless I felt that the lack of rapport I was able to incite between artist and audience was a challenge. Equally by not being physically present at the gallery, I significantly missed interactions between other artists, practitioners and curators.

On reflection, I think I naively underestimated how the digital platform could elevate or further the project idea. It was only in doing, that I realized the capacity of the online space to dialogue, provoke and further illustrate my practice; two weeks later I feel like I'm ready to start another online residency to push that further!