

Touching the stuff of creation

Sophie Hacker has worked as a professional artist and teacher for over ten years, having studied at the Slade School of Art. She leads art classes for adults in Salisbury, holds workshops and exhibits work regularly around the country. Her work is used internationally by publishers and designers, particularly in Europe and the USA.

At present she is artist in residence at Sarum College in Salisbury's Cathedral Close. She finds that most of those who come on courses want to start with the landscape around. "People want to engage with the stuff of being human – what it means to make their journey of life on this land."

Surprisingly, her own journey began with a childhood spent in London amidst the traffic of Battersea. "But across the road was Battersea Park and that was crucial for me as a child."

When she came to live in Salisbury with her husband and daughter, the landscape had a profound effect on her. In the open spaces around the city she would walk her dog Holly. "It's not rugged like Derbyshire or Yorkshire, nor has it the Celtic interest of Cornwall. But coming here opened my eyes to see what it meant as a human being to engage with nature."

She found something quite magical about the undulating countryside, the way the light moved, the changes that took place. "I just love the way light is so transient, what happens to the form of the earth when it is wet or dry, and how you can get liquid molten movement across a field."

Wood and stone hold an inspiration for her. She picks up bits of wood – "a tree has its roots in the earth – bits fall and



die, they are ravaged by weather, tossed around: the countryside is imprinted with so much."

Sophie uses stone which was once part of the Cathedral – "800 years ago that stone was part of the rock base underground. It was dug up, shaped, and put on top of the land to create an image of architectural perfection. So it emanates an earthiness as well as great spiritual power, and represents human history at an unbelievably deep level." As she works with this stone, she aims to honour the craft and purpose of it – to point to God.

So whether she is working with wood or stone, whether she is sculpting or painting, she feels she is engaging with nature nature given by a creator God. She doesn't see herself as a pious person, but as she works so she prays. "The way I pray is in the doing – the manipulating of the material." It is prayer as action, not words, but "I can't extract God from my work. Everything I start to make

is not self given but given by a creator God."

Around the walls and on the tables of the small studio where she works on the top floor of Sarum College are paintings of landscape and pieces of wood. There is a sense of touching the stuff of creation, for in Sophie's words "Touching the stuff of creation grounds people." And this is located in particular places. "Where you live is tied up with who you are, and becoming more open to where you are makes you grow."

Sarum College is fortunate to have its artist in residence. ■

Judy Rees, Salisbury.

