

Further information about this commission:

The Wind Seized Our Breath relates directly to the famous page from DW's Journal that shows the origins of the poem written by Wordsworth called *The Daffodils*. The development of this poem from its early origins as observational notes in the Journals of DW in 1802 through to the final version of the poem by William in 1807 is outlined in the book *'The Wordsworths and the Daffodils'*.

The Wind Seized Our Breath explores the idea developed by writers such as Coleridge and Wordsworth that there is a specific relationship between the word used to describe an object or thing and the object itself – a poetic, embodied relationship. Coleridge believed that 'words can embody, and not just stand for, thoughts and things' ... and he 'puts his faith in words as "living things" – as plants, as live bodies: "The focal word has acquired a feeling of reality – it heats and burns, makes itself be felt. If we do not grasp it, it seems to grasp us, as with a hand of flesh and blood, and completely counterfeits an immediate presence, an intuitive knowledge'

As a contemporary artist, I am interested not only in modern forms of expression but also their relationship to the past. For instance, the theory of an embodied 'use' of language outlined by Coleridge has been developed in a number of interesting ways by early modernist poets (for instance Ezra Pound and the Imagists) and those they subsequently influenced such as Gary Snyder and the concrete poet Ian Hamilton Finlay. However, these poets were themselves influenced by the Chinese Mountains and Rivers poets and Japanese Haiku poets such as Basho and Buson. This traces an interesting and complex line of development from Coleridge and Wordsworth to Gary Snyder and Ian Hamilton looking forwards and to the poets of China and Japan, looking backwards.

Leading on from the ideas expressed above, the basic proposition that lies behind ***The Wind Seized Our Breath*** is that the hand-written texts (the letters and journals) by the poets are themselves an expressive and embodied 'response' to the things they describe – and indeed that individual letters have a special quality that is related to the environment in which they are written (in this case, the Lake District).

I was curious about the way in which these complex influences have, over the 20th century, resulted in a poetry that pares back the structure of the poem and plays with its visual form whilst opening out meaning. I have

attempted, in the work above, to play with these ideas. For instance, in Japanese and Chinese poetry, the words run vertically, from the top to the bottom of the page, and I have used this form of 'writing' as a reference point for the work above employing colour as an added emotional tool to highlight the feelings expressed in DW's prose.

I have isolated individual letters from DW's Journal and 'created' words from the journal running vertically on blocks of colour. The text is as follows.

Gowbarrow
Misty morning
Daffodils

Thursday 15th April 1802

The wind seized our breath

These words can be found in DW's Journal entry for Thursday 15th April 1802.

In the **15th April 1802 (1)** and the **15th April 1802 (2)**, I have employed a more straightforward approach, working directly and intuitively with pastel over and into the words on the page. Here I am also responding to the place the words describe – places I have walked many times and understand well.

The Ring, is related to the famous page from Dorothy Wordsworth's journal of the 4th October 1802. In it, Dorothy describes her feelings on the morning of her brother William's, wedding. A number of the lines have been heavily crossed out. We are not sure who crossed them out. The words on this page have been the subject of much academic research – the whole text for the journal entry (which runs over a few pages) is remarkably clear in its observation of the events of the day (and indeed of the day's before the wedding – the entry was written retrospectively). However, the *words on this particular page* are more ambiguous than is normal in Dorothy's journals. She begins by explaining that she 'slept a good deal of the night & rose fresh and well in the morning – at a little after 8 o'clock I saw them go down the avenue towards the church. William had parted from me upstairs.' The next two sentences are the ones crossed out, after which she then goes on to describe how 'my dear little Sara prepared the breakfast'. However, the words that follow reveal the strength of Dorothy's emotions that morning when she says 'I kept myself as quiet as I could, but when I saw the two running up the walk, coming to

tell us it was over, I could stand it no longer & threw myself on the bed where **I lay in stillness, neither hearing or seeing anything.**

In *The Ring*, I have focused on two things. Firstly, on the parts of the text we **can** see. When Dorothy says that she '**lay in stillness, neither hearing or seeing anything**', what was she thinking? I have highlighted these words and leave you, the viewer, to draw your own conclusions. However, it seems odd that Dorothy should allow us to read her raw, emotional response to the day's events, whilst 'hiding' other parts of the text. Using Infra-red light, Wordsworth scholars have attempted to decipher what lies hidden, scored out in black ink on the page and two significant interpretations emerge. Dorothy had been wearing the wedding ring herself throughout the previous night and the 'translation' from the late 1950s (by Helen Darbishire) has her saying that 'I gave him the wedding ring – with how deep a blessing! I took it from my forefinger where I had worn it the whole night before – he slipped it again onto my forefinger **and blessed me fervently**'. However, more recently, Pamela Woof has suggested an alternative reading of the last four words (and one I prefer): '**as I blessed the ring softly**'. In all my three prints here I have deliberately NOT made reference to either interpretations. The words in these two sentences were, after all, crossed out. We are not meant to read them.

So, in my work, I have left them crossed out, with a strong focus on the physicality of the action of scoring/crossing out. I feel that this makes a bolder statement and we are left to guess what lies hidden within these two sentences. After all, not only is there some dispute as to what the words crossed out actually are – we don't know who crossed them out. Writing in *The Ballad of Dorothy Wordsworth*, Helen Darbishire wonders whether it might '... have been Dorothy herself, not wanting Mary to know about the earlier exchange of the ring that she was now wearing; it could have been Wordsworth, unhappy at the thought of Mary knowing that the ring meant for her had been shared with Dorothy; it could have been either Gordon Wordsworth, the poet's grandson who had the family papers in his keeping, or Christopher Wordsworth, the poet's literary executor and first biographer ...' Furthermore, the journal entry of which the reference to the wedding is but a small, retrospective, part, runs over a number of pages. In the full entry, Dorothy describes a series of important, life changing events alongside her usual direct observations of people, events and the weather etc. In the two prints, **4th October 1802 (1)** and **4th October (2)**, I have tried to capture something of this ambiguity – both darkness and light – by working spontaneously and directly over a printed image of the manuscript, using pastels.

