

# HIGNELL

## GALLERY

About 30 years ago, during an exhibition trip to Vancouver, Ryder and her family took a break to explore the Rocky Mountains. Travelling through the stunning landscape, a wooden hand-painted sign caught her eye.

'Naturally, I had to investigate!', explains Ryder. 'We parked the car and walked where the arrow was pointing, and there in front of us were five or six large holes in the ground each full of pigment, ranging from yellow ochre to burnt sienna. I went running back to the car and made everyone eat a yoghurt; I washed out the pots and dried them so that I could fill them up with the pigments. It was incredible, like going into a chocolate shop and being allowed to help yourself for free!! (Although I'm sure we weren't allowed). Apparently, they were naturally formed pots and the Native Americans used to use the pigment to dye their clothes and paint their faces. I painted the girls' faces whilst we were there.'

Returning to Vancouver Island, Ryder had the idea of a composition of three figures with three dogs, 'It just came to me as the idea that I had to make, maybe it was my girls, my dogs and me' she remembers. 'It just felt right. When I get an idea for a piece, it feels so strong, and I have this terrible urge to make it happen. With a piece like *Paintpots*, it feels like a story that I was meant to tell.'

Ryder first painted the composition using the pigments she had retrieved in the yoghurt pots. Ryder went on to create a screen print, a life-size bronze and two smaller ones. Ryder recalls 'It's a very satisfying piece to me. The whole composition feels right and interesting from every angle'.

Ryder's characters spring from a fusion of fairy tales, dreams and mythology. Her central enduring character known as the Lady Hare combines a female body with the head of a hare, a mystical creature in folklore. Lady Hare is often autobiographical as it is modelled on the artist's own body and allows Ryder to describe her own thoughts, feelings, sexuality, and spirit.

The mask allows the figure's identity fluid and enigmatic. With her highly personal, often playful, style and narratives. The mask is merely to conceal the identity of the human beneath, allowing onlookers to be able to invent their own narrative.

Dogs have been part of Sophie's world since she was a student at the RA Schools, where she was the youngest student since JMW Turner aged 17. 'I had a lurcher and brought him in every day, saying that he was my model, so then I had to start drawing him. Since then, I have always been surrounded by at least four small lurchers' she explains.

Discussing *Paintpots* Ryder says 'I am surrounded by my 4 dogs, 24 hours a day, so for me, it doesn't feel very unusual. I don't even think about the figures being naked the idea of them wearing clothes feels very unnecessary'. Ryder's ability to weave personal stories into a universal language is evident in *Paintpots*.

Ryder loves to reimagine the traditional plinth. Viewers may notice another playful twist, the base of *Paintpots* is the form of an upturned Victorian grate.

The repeated sequence of figure and dog has the feel of a reel of film or zoetrope images giving the illusion of movement. It's also reminiscent of a gesture drawing taken in a life drawing class throughout the history of art. This gives the sculpture a timeless quality and the ease and spontaneity of a sketch. It also adds a playful and dynamic dimension to Ryder's storytelling.

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