

A story about the artwork

Little Mud was always ready to make a mark. Little Mud liked to mix, to bring everything together. Little Mud thought everyone should share right there and then whatever they had brought along.

When people hadn't met before, Little Mud had this phrase for introductions: 'My friends, be friends! Close in, close up!' It got irritating, no one was allowed to linger at the edges. The neighbours didn't like it either – the slide from early drinks to sprawling dinner to my-mate's-a-DJ-she's-brought-her-decks. The spill-over, the rumble, next morning all the bottles out in the hall.

Little Mud lay in a puddle, under the water but over the ground. If you stirred with a stick, Little Mud wafted in the water like smoke.

Little Mud was lazy, indiscriminate, down-to-earth, gregarious, messy, creative, inelegant, ubiquitous, steadfast, changeable. What else?

In the course of your travels, you take a knock or two, a scuff, a stain. Chip paper gusts round your legs and leaves a dot of grease. A loose paving slab tilts, kicking mucky water on your shoes. You're marked. If you step off the pavement, off the brick-weave, off the asphalt, off the surfaces of human pride and convenience, it's mud that takes the mark, takes notice, takes an impression. In the tread of your footwear, Little Mud goes with you.

When the world bore down, Little Mud shrugged, eased sideways. Heavy machinery, caterpillar tracks, charts and rapid non-consensual changes to the land; Little Mud oozed upwards through the cracks.

A charcoal drawing fell to the floor. Footprints scuffed the surface, dislocated the structure of strong lines that the artist had put there, broke the illusion of space created on the page. 'All to the good!' said Little Mud, 'make and unmake, a continuum.'

While the artist was away a storm ripped the roofing felt from their studio shed. Then a week of off-on rain pattered onto a stack of prints. Little Mud chuckled and sang decay: a slow refrain, the same notes over and over.

Little Mud liked paint, liked moving it around, smooth and slidy. Little Mud never cleared up but often came back days later. 'Crust on it like a rice pudding' Little Mud cackled, hacking at the paint surface with the wrong end of the brush. Little Mud always wanted another layer. 'Colour mixing' meant making sure no tube of paint had gone unused.

What did artists see in Little Mud? Nothing. Or nothing they wanted to encourage. They were after clarity or illumination or the striking vision. Little Mud always stirred in everything together, said yes to whatever came along.

What did the land artists see in Little Mud? They said 'I'm going to bury myself in nine stages. It's for TV. Could use your help'. Or 'I'm walking back and forth in a line across this meadow – I won't stop until you show up'. Or 'in this body-soil sculpture, do you think I'm more extension of the earth, or the earth is more extension of me?' In the artwork, or under their nails, or both, they thought Little Mud was authentic.

'Authentic? Like the opposite of thought and skill? Like it's just my existence that counts and not my actions?' Taking affront made Little Mud try to squirm free of authenticity. 'Anyway I'm not called Mud; my name is Aluminium-silicate.'

If those names wouldn't fit, then what about these: ambassador of excess, root mat influencer, aide-de-camp, co-conspirator and cover-up expert, herald of the slow slide into our constituent parts, repository of natural goodness, carbon sink, badge of the local, affidavit of belonging to precisely where we stand, final resting place, assurance of our return as something else.

Text by Lawrence Bradby

Written to accompany Jevan Watkins Jones' solo exhibition 'Hello Little Mud' at The Watch House, Orford, Suffolk, 2024

Photo: 9cm black plant pot trodden in mud, 2017, JWJ
Design: @consultingdesigner

The
Watch
House

