


Kate MccGwire, artist: 'You have to be organised to work on a boat. Or you would be in a sea of pigeon'

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Quills and spills: Kate MccGwire in her studio on a barge on the Thames near Hampton Court (David Sandison)

Kate MccGwire works on the Barton B, a Dutch barge moored in the Thames near Hampton Court. I have been to many different types of studios: big and small, urban and rural, but never before to one on a boat. To add to the romance the boat is moored on an island that is close to London but it might as well be a million miles away. The island was a medieval willow bed before it became the site for factories that built torpedo boats during the Second World War, with women in charge of most of the production.

MccGwire's studio is as unusual as her practice. For her degree show, at the Royal College of Art, she made an installation from wishbones purchased from chicken suppliers to Chinese restaurants. She had to boil and clean the flesh away herself. "I use things that are impossible to buy," she says simply. She got a distinction for that work, Charles Saatchi bought it and it is still in his collection.

Turning her attention to feathers, she first started picking them up herself before contacting racing pigeon clubs and their members, who send her the feathers from their moulting birds. "I send them a stamped addressed envelope. I offer to pay and they say – do not be ridiculous, they would be throwing them out anyway."

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