FAIRY TALES

Everyone knows the story of the tooth fairy, but fine art degree student Cordelia Cembrowicz has transformed the mythical figure in a most unusual way. By Arveen Bajaj.

After having problems with her wisdom teeth for quite some time, 21 year old Cordelia Cembrowicz decided to have her upper right wisdom tooth extracted.

During the recovery phase of the extraction, the second year fine art degree student at the Falmouth College of Art started to consider how to turn her extracted tooth into a work of art.

"I asked my dentist if I could keep the tooth, not really knowing what I would do with it. In the autumn term at college that year, I started producing work in a miniature format using copper plate etching to create scenes of people as small as I possibly could."

"I started to think about how the story of the 'tooth fairy' has turned into an urban legend in Britain. She is commonly seen as a magical figure who rewards children for the ordeal of having their teeth out, she is a figure who brings comfort after a time of pain.

"As I was already accustomed to working on pieces on a small scale, I wondered whether it was possible to create

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something out of this tooth myself. The form of the tooth fairy is simply a literal interpretation of the folklore. She is normally thought of as the fairy that collects teeth and leaves money in return. Paradoxically, in my work, the painful tooth has now been transformed into the healing fairy. Something quite precious and beautiful is created from an object normally seen as redundant once it has been removed."

Cordelia explains that working on such a small scale is both physically and mentally demanding, and requires intense concentration. She keeps in mind the miniature art works of other artists in

Foulmouth Fairy 'Roots'. Molar tooth carved into the shape of a fairy.

Foulmouth Fairy 'Wisdom'. The fairy is pictured with the other three uncarved wisdom teeth.

order to stretch her own potential. "There is a great Chinese tradition of carving objects in miniature, for example, tiny faces of the Buddha on a walnut shell."

After showing her design proposal to the sculpture technicians at her college, she was given a small drill. However, she

found that the drill pieces were not small enough to sculpt on that scale.

After several phone calls to dental surgeries in the Falmouth region, one very kindly donated several drill bits and polishers to her to start the project and also donated some old molar teeth to add

to those that members of her family had donated.

Before she starts to carve the tooth, Cordelia makes sketches of it from several different angles, to help her get an idea of the form. She then draws guidelines of the general outline on the tooth, and begins to gently carve the material until the general shape is symmetrical. She carries on this process of drawing and carving throughout the creation of the piece. Due to the composition of the teeth, Cordelia has found that she needs to be careful when carving, as they become increasingly fragile the deeper she carves. "The tooth is an interesting material to carve, as the enamelled top is very tough, whereas the inner area is relatively soft and you have to judge what pressure and speed to use the drill with. One of the teeth I carved is a molar, with an amalgam filling. Its shape lends itself well to the form of a fairy in flight."

It takes Cordelia approximately 15 to 20 hours to sculpt one tooth and she spent around three to four weeks making the two fairies from start to finish. Her work is called 'Foulmouth Fairies, Roots and Wisdom', as the wisdom tooth is named Wisdom and the molar is named Roots.

Foulmouth Fairy 'Roots'. Sideview showing the original amalgam filling.

She says, "When I returned to my dentist to have the rest of my wisdom teeth taken out, I told him I'd 'chipped my tooth', as one of the wings had fallen off my wisdom tooth fairy. He was quite surprised to see me take out the tiny sculpture, and he helped me repair the damage. I now have the rest of my wisdom teeth and am going to sculpt them too."

Cordelia's work has already been on show at the Falmouth Arts Centre and she hopes soon to set up her own studio practice. For more information please contact Cordelia Cembrowicz (Email: cordeliabombelia@hotmail.com).

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