

Oliver Makower Tribute by Angela Cork

23rd April 2024

I was asked by the family to say a few words about Oliver and Bishopsland. I am sure I speak on behalf of all that have come through Bishopsland, when I say what a privilege this is to be able to speak about such a wonderful person who has contributed so much.

A LITTLE BACKGROUND ABOUT HOW WE MET

I first met Oliver when I went to live and study on the residency programme at Bishopsland. For two years I was encouraged to focus on my practice, to strive for excellence and to achieve what was known as 'the Bishopsland Standard'.

Later, I was a recipient of The Makower's Precious Metal Loan Scheme, at the Royal College of Art, enabling me to pursue work on a more ambitious scale, free of the worries of cost.

I re-joined Oliver and the team at Bishopsland as a tutor and enjoyed many a lunch catching up with Pope and Oliver, over tutors' soup and good conversation.

Oliver was a firm believer in learning through taking part and over many years I was afforded opportunities to assist with and join in many of Bishopsland's public events. One of the most generous outcomes of this was being connected directly with the clients, helping me quickly establish my network and business. True patronage indeed.

As an experienced collector, with a great eye for detail, Oliver enjoyed challenging makers to take their work to higher standards and into new directions. There was one occasion where both Pope and Oliver held me to task on my finishing, something I am known well for in my work. I had just completed a new piece commissioned by the P&O Makower Trust for the National Museum of Wales, and I met Pope and Oliver fresh off their Brompton bikes in the London Assay Office, where I was ready to deliver my work. On revealing my vase, it was gently suggested to me that I might consider a more 'illuminating' finish. I took their advice and on doing so I can tell you it looked far superior! Pushing me to excel and was an important moment in my development and one I will forever be grateful for.

Many of what I consider my 'good' attributes were honed during my time at Bishopsland and through Oliver's quiet and constant encouragement and advice. He was a true mentor, never telling you directly what to do or editing written proposals. Instead, he took great care and attention handwriting letters with thoughts about how you might take something forward. I was always surprised by how much time he gave me.

OLIVER – THE PERSON

Oliver was a warm, generous and patient man with a can-do attitude and infectious positive outlook. Known well for his cheery good humour, he made life at Bishopsland, a special place and a real home from home. He would often joke with Fellows on completing the year, that we had ‘survived’ it. Of course, we knew how lucky we had been.

Oliver much enjoyed people and bringing them together. He believed in the need to create a strong network, later creating with Pope the important Fellow’s and Senior Fellow’s community and he developed and fostered many local and national opportunities for promoting Contemporary Silver. He forged a host of personal and professional relationships, to allow people to come together and create a wider network of support; a vital necessity if you are to succeed in this industry.

He dedicated much of his life to supporting young and emerging craftspeople gain the skill and confidence they would need to launch their careers and succeed to become the best versions of themselves. Always approachable, he would make time for everyone, and it goes without saying that for anyone that went the extra mile, he would also go beyond what was expected, to push and stretch them further still.

His support did not stop with the programme he had co created with Pope at Bishopsland and he would continue to nurture people towards establishing their professional careers, whether this be taking the next educational step, supporting international students to obtain the necessary visas required to remain and work here in the UK, or to provide commissions and opportunities to exhibit and sell work. There was no greater advocate- or better salesperson on any exhibition stand and he was brilliant at bringing the importance and uniqueness of contemporary silver design to the attention of new audiences.

Oliver, forever modest, enjoyed telling people that Pope was the real creative behind Bishopsland and that he was just her ‘assistant’, but in truth, along with his kindness and enthusiasm, and hard work behind the scenes to make Bishopsland viable, he was a truly knowledgeable teacher and worked tirelessly for us all.

All the Fellows that have passed through the doors of Bishopsland will relate when I say we were always in Oliver’s thoughts. And of course, it was amazing to witness the hard work and resourceful team effort between Pope and Oliver.

HIS IMPACT

In an excerpt from the Bishopsland newsletter 22 years ago, Oliver said: ‘If Bishopsland is a bridge between college and professional practice, it is a bridge that is getting progressively sturdier’.

He may not have seen then, what a significant place Bishopsland would become today, but Oliver, with Pope, have both been responsible for breaking new ground, creating lasting collaborations with curators, museums and societies, to bring contemporary silver to the fore and to support those makers that are part of that industry.

It was a true privilege to attend and continue to be a part of Bishopsland – a special place, which over its 30-year history, has helped to nurture, shape and support the future of silversmithing. His was a tremendous and truly philanthropic contribution, and he leaves an inspiring legacy.

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