



# Love me tender

CLARE KELLY MEETS LOUISE PRESLEY, AN ARTIST AND MAKER WHO TAKES TRASH AND TURNS IT INTO TREASURE

Photographs: Clare Kelly



**L-R: Old letters deliver promise; examples of Louise's work**

Louise Presley has stories. She has so many stories that you could chat to her for hours and never be bored. Some of these stories are embellished with anecdotes and some are still waiting for a happy ending. And that's where you come in.

A professional artist with a background in fashion and commercial textiles, Louise began Hope & Elvis in 2003 and started running workshops from her studio in the grounds of Welbeck Abbey in Nottinghamshire in 2005. The abbey's estate dates back to 1086 and this feeling of history is prevalent not only in the bricks and mortar which surround Louise's studio, but also in the workshops themselves.

Focusing on salvaged materials, these workshops touch on a variety of techniques, encouraging participants of all abilities to take something old and turn it into something new.

And the real beauty of these workshops is that you have unlimited access to Louise's giant stash of materials: pieces of jewellery in need of a little TLC; beads rescued from cardigans that have been worn and loved; vintage postcards with messages to people who held each other's secrets and intriguing curios – the origin of which is yet to be discovered.

A broken necklace becomes charms for a kilt pin brooch, a china rose from a broken mirror becomes a ring and photographs become a piece of art. But how can Louise part with it all?

'People ask me that a lot but I love to see other people bring something back to life, to see what they will do with it. I get given so many things, I think people sense that it will be going to a good home,' she says.

Sentimentality is key to Louise's workshops and her own practice: 'I want people to have a feeling of linking, of bringing



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the past into the future. It can make you feel connected and give an item a sense of purpose,' Louise explains.

Most recently, Louise has been preparing for her own show, taking a distinct interest in domestic sewing items and exploring how an object which has been displaced can become functional once again. For example, transforming a small doll's shoe into a pin cushion.

Though they are not the only shoes that have captured Louise's imagination:

'Someone gave me two shoes, both right shoes. One is black leather and the other is velvet and they are from the 1930s. I keep them in my house on a shelf because they make me laugh and have inspired me to think about a shoe installation.'

This raises an important question: how on earth did anyone end up with two right shoes?

'My friend told me this was because during the war, the left and right shoes were transported in separate lorries so

that they wouldn't get stolen. I'd never heard of this before but then someone else told me that she had a load of left slippers!' laughs Louise.

Humour is an integral part of Louise's making ethos and this may go some way to explaining why she has so many people returning to her workshops month after month (when I attended the *Loved Again* workshop, I met a teacher who visits the studio once a month as a treat). There's also a constant flow of tea and homemade cake.

Tea, cake and giggles aside, what keeps them coming back?

Louise says: 'The most common thing people say when they contact me to book is 'I just need another fix'. I hope I offer a warm and relaxed environment where people can explore, develop and make to their heart's content.'



## Making notes

### Louise's top 5 inspirational artists

Louise Bourgeois, Tracey Emin, Grayson Perry, Julie Arkell, Caroline Broadhead.

### Make a date with Hope & Elvis

To find out more and to book workshops, visit [www.hopeandelvis.com](http://www.hopeandelvis.com)

Having attended one of the workshops myself, I can testify that this is *exactly* what you'll get if you book onto one of Louise's workshops. The fact that I also managed to get through about three slices of the cake in question (lemon drizzle) only sweetens my experience further.

Louise also invites in other makers to host workshops at her, quite frankly, enormous studio and these include Janine Nelson of Smashing Chintz who recently led a mosaic workshop, milliner Mary Jane Baxter and textile designer Julie Arkell, who fuses craft and art.

This fusion is something which Louise is very aware of and explains: 'The line between art and craft is so fine and I am constantly striving within my own practice to consider materials, skills and meaning. My art is very different from my craft. I like to produce art that makes people feel very comfortable but I also like to make pieces that make people feel very uncomfortable and evoke emotions.'

Suitcases, like shoes, intrigue Louise, and she recently purchased a 'lovely old suitcase at a car boot sale.' Was there a story behind that? 'The suitcase belonged to a lady who used it when she travelled to Vienna with her mother for a holiday. I didn't know how she could bear to part with it.'

Dotted around the studio, you won't be surprised to see there are an abundance of suitcases just waiting to be whisked away on a new adventure. Some still have the luggage tags attached and Louise told me that she almost wanted to drop them back to the addresses scrawled on the labels.

A practical person, Louise does make things for her own home but don't expect pristine patterns and chintz.

She explains, 'It's usually essential things that get made for my home like cushions and curtains but I do love making things that are practical but make my home my own. My "God Save The Gas" doorstop and matching "Welcome to Redlands" Queen-inspired collage is a favourite. Making personal presents is something that I really enjoy, my mum has lots of things that I have made especially for her but she doesn't get to keep them too long as I keep borrowing them as samples for the workshops!'

Louise wasn't born into a family of artists but enjoyed discovering her creativity as a child, 'I enjoyed drawing and compiling sketchbooks as well as making clothes for my *Tiny Tears* but I was always interested in a jumble sale!'

She then went on to work in the textiles industry as a design manager for Courtaulds in Nottingham before completing a degree in fashion which enabled her to turn her hobby into a business.

'Making is good for the soul, it's good for the economy and it broadens people's minds. With sites like Etsy and Folksy, it makes things far more democratic. It's flexible and allows people to try things out that they wouldn't have been able to before.'

Marrying her time spent in industry with that in education has allowed Louise, it would seem, to keep a fresh approach and to constantly evolve as both an artist and maker. A true multi-tasker, she not only creates and leads the workshops but designs all her promotional material too.

When we catch up for a second chat on the 'phone, Louise is playing a game of hide and seek with her granddaughter and I feel a bit mean for stealing her away when time is so precious. However, it would seem that Louise is a naturally busy person 'forever juggling' and thriving on the variety that this brings to her daily life.

Could she pick her favourite part of the day?

'The obvious answer would be arriving at the studio but if I was honest, it would be getting into bed. It's nice to feel that I have achieved the things I need to during the day and that I have earned a good night's sleep.'