

Essay notes for Pete Codling

Here is an expanded version of a Wikipedia-style article for Pete Codling, incorporating more details than the website biography. Created for reference for journalists, students, researchers and curators.

If you are a Wikipedia author, please feel free to edit accordingly and post.

High resolution images of artworks, and portrait available on request.



Pete Codling (born 1969) is a British visual artist known for his large-scale public art installations, sculptures, and drawings. His work frequently addresses themes of history, community, and human experience, often incorporating elements of storytelling, symbolism, and social commentary.

Early Life and Education

Pete Codling was born in 1969 in Zambia, Africa. He lived in Cornwall and Scotland before settling from childhood in Hampshire, England. He developed an interest in drawing and art from a young age. In 1986, he began his studies at Portsmouth College of Art and Design, where he completed a foundation course and a Higher National Diploma (HND) in 3D Design. In 1991, Codling moved to East London Polytechnic, where he studied Fine Art Sculpture and Drawing, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts with Honors. He furthered his studies in Site Specific Sculpture at Wimbledon School of Art under the tutelage of Kier Smith and Vincent Woropay from 1992 to 1993. Codling completed a Master of Arts at the University of Portsmouth, whilst Artist in Residence with the Hampshire Sculpture Trust.

Career

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Codling began his career as a sculptor and public artist, gaining recognition for his innovative approach to materials and his focus on community-based projects. He is known for using reclaimed and natural materials, reflecting his interest in sustainability and environmental issues. He has worked “outside the white cubes” for most of his career but now is establishing a gallery presence across the UK and Europe.

Major Works and Projects

One Million Pebbles: One of Codling's notable early projects, "One Million Pebbles," was a mass participation public art initiative in Portsmouth. The project involved creating handmade ceramic pebbles, each individually number-stamped and thrown onto the beach in Southsea. From 1994 to 2011, Codling worked with 26 tons of clay, distributing wet clay balls for participants to make into their own stones, which were then left on the beach. This project explored themes of context, value, and authorship and highlighted the transient nature of public art. The pebbles can still be found on the beach, and a dedicated Facebook page serves as an archive where people share the pebbles they have discovered.

Dust to Dust: This large-scale charcoal drawing was created in 2011 on the walls of Codling's old art school studio, covering 300 square meters. The artwork took six months to complete and served as a farewell to the building, which was set to be demolished. "Dust to Dust" reflected on the transition of traditional art education to digital mediums, addressing the perceived loss of emphasis on drawing and studio practice. The entire process, from creation to destruction, was documented in a limited-edition artist book titled *Dust to Dust*.

Soup of Souls: During his residency at Saint Thomas Cathedral in Old Portsmouth, Codling produced a series of eight large, 3.6m x 2.8m, trapezoid drawings called "Soup of Souls." These monochrome, sail-like drawings each depicted a different local maritime story of loss at sea. The dramatic works were installed in the nave of the cathedral and remained on public display for nine months. They are currently exhibited at the Minghella Studio in the New Theatre Royal in Portsmouth. The project is documented on a dedicated Instagram page and in a limited-edition book.

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Naivety Drawings: This series of thirteen life-size drawings, 1.2m x 2m, depicts the main characters from the Christmas Nativity Scene. Codling utilized a mix of classical, modern, and contemporary references to create a contemporary interpretation of the Nativity. The drawings were first exhibited at the North Wall Gallery in Oxford in 2018 and have since been displayed at The Jack House Gallery and Portsmouth Cathedral each Christmas. The series was initially intended to feature new characters annually, but this plan was interrupted by the COVID-19 lockdown. Some of the drawings in this series have won prizes, including the Chaiya Art Award in 2019 and Best Work at The London Art Biennale in 2021.

Treadgoldfish Sculpture: Created in 2019 for the Portsmouth Seafood Festival, the Treadgoldfish sculpture is a steel artwork designed to raise awareness of plastic pollution in oceans and the environment. The hollow, rusty steel fish sculpture can hold up to twelve thousand plastic bottles, which are periodically collected and recycled. The abstract figurative sculpture, inspired by Portsmouth's star and crescent motif, has been displayed in various locations around the city, promoting environmental consciousness. It has a dedicated Facebook page tracking its travels and community engagement.

Kinship: This drawing, created in 2023 in collaboration with the National Portrait Gallery of London and Southampton City Gallery, is a contemporary interpretation of Pablo Picasso's Guernica. "Kinship" echoes the composition and main characters of the original while incorporating Codling's distinctive socio-political commentary on current global events, such as the conflict in Ukraine, the Middle East, and the migrant crisis. The work won the Taylor Prix at Art Capital in Paris in 2024 and was the centrepiece of a solo exhibition in Venice Saint Marco with Musa International, during the 60th Venice Biennale 'Foreigners Everywhere'. The artwork is archived on a dedicated Instagram page.

CROWD: Since 2021, Codling has been an Artist in Residence at Portsmouth Historic Dockyard, funded by Arts Council England and Portsmouth City Council. During this residency, he produced a set of replica sails from HMS Victory and the Tudor battleship Mary Rose. The first drawing, measuring 17 meters by 10 meters, was unveiled at Fratton Park Football Stadium and later displayed on HMS Warrior in Portsmouth Harbour. It is currently installed in Boat House 4 at Portsmouth Historic Dockyard. The residency is hosted by Portsmouth Historic Quarter.

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Recent Works

In recent years, Codling has continued to create public artworks and installations, focusing on charcoal drawings in his studio practice. His recent works reflect on themes of humanity and the role of the artist in an age dominated by digital technology and artificial intelligence. New works and pieces for sale are available on his website, and updates on his studio practice and commissions can be followed through his social media channels.

Style and Influences

Codling's work is characterized by a strong narrative quality, but he tries to avoid the role of illustration and remain open to interpretation by the viewer. He frequently draws on historical, cultural and religious reference to create complex, multi-layered pieces using allegory metaphor and symbolism.

His mature style blends contemporary figurative sculpture, street art, and traditional drawing techniques. The themes tackled in both the early conceptual work and later figurative works are a mixture of traditional cultural familiarity; like his Naivety series, and mythologies like his Minotaur series, alongside the socio-political and 'context over value' issues such in his ephemeral wall drawing Dust to Dust.

His love of draftsmanship, composition and narrative, shows influence from the likes of Rubens, Gustave Dore, Francisco Goya, William Blake, Stanley Spencer, Pablo Picasso, Käthe Kollwitz, and drawing contemporaries like Frank Auerbach, William Kentridge and Barbra Walker and Anita Taylor.

Influence is also shown to by the old school surrealists such as Rene Magritte, Dali, Leonora Carrington. Codling did his BA Hons dissertation on Jean Tinguely's Métamatic Drawing Machines and his Master studies in Site Specific Sculpture brought in creative influences from Henry Moore and Barbra Hepworth to Cornelia Parker, Richard Serra and Richard Long, Rachel Whiteread.

His contemporary influences and likes are still diverse but include the Chapman Brothers, Grayson Perry, Matthew Collings, and sculptors like Richard Wentworth, Bill Woodrow, Antony Gormely, Laurence Edwards, Beth Carter and Yinka Shonibare. Codling studied at Wimbledon School of Art under Kier Smith and Vincent Woropay whose emphasis on classical reference and poetic object language remain with him. Although diverse in style and materials all of Codling's influences and references relate

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to the common themes of the human condition, material and site-specific empathy and maker skill.

His postgraduate degree, started in Wimbledon but finished in Portsmouth, focused on the conceptual idea of Objects of No Fixed Abode. The phrase NFA was used to describe his (UK) social security status in the early 1990s in what he saw as the antithesis of the site specific, a way of understanding one through experience of the other. This body of Arte Povera work often included ready made and pound shop purchases, like the children's wellington boots locked to bicycle racks and lampposts. These ideas were driven by notions of context, authorship and value, as a dichotomy with hyper capitalist London Brit Art of the era. This formed his first official post graduate solo exhibition at Aspex Gallery Portsmouth in 1994 under the curation of Les Buckingham. This bearing well for the start of his public art practice and the commissioned project work that demanded the sense of place and ownership for local communities in a socially engaged and participatory art practice.

A recurring theme in Codling's later 2D work is the solitary human or animal figure, often as a tool of pictorial engagement with the audience. The second half of his career often prioritizing storytelling and socio-political figurative imagery over abstraction and conceptual art. By its publicly funded nature, the public art is depoliticized and neutral in messaging but his personal studio work, almost in response to that restriction, has become increasingly engaged with current affairs and global issues.

Codling is well-versed in late 20thC conceptual art, his early student works and first public works such as "No Fixed Abode," "Washing Line," and "One Million Pebbles" often integrated conceptual ideas into the physical and political context of the art's location.

His emphasis on process, value, and anti-consumerist, anti-capitalist themes is evident throughout his career; from performance pieces like "La Rue De Barb 2012" (shaving of his long beard in public post Jasmine Revolution in Tunis 2011) to the ephemeral nature of "Dust to Dust" wall drawings and the subtle presence of the massive 26 ton "One Million Pebbles." This approach has allowed him to balance the impermanence, spectacle and arte povera of his earlier works like Turfing the Guildhall steps 1996 or Dust to Dust in 2011, with the intended transcendence and monumentality of his later pieces like CROWD 2024 or his latest body of work in bronze.

Exhibitions and Recognition

Codling's work has been exhibited in galleries and public spaces across the UK and Europe. He has received several awards and significant grants from Arts Council England for his contributions to public art and his innovative use of materials. Many of

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his projects have been supported by arts organizations and community groups through public funding, reflecting his commitment to a collaborative, socially engaged, and critically reflective art practice.

Personal Life

Codling lives in Portsmouth, England, where he remains actively involved in the local community. He frequently collaborates with schools, charities, and community groups on various art projects and workshops. Additional information about his work and artistic philosophy can be found on his official website and through several documentary interviews that explore his practice and perspectives.

External Links

Official Website

<https://www.petecodling.com/biography>

<https://www.petecodling.com/videos-film>

- [Instagram](<https://www.instagram.com/petecodling>)

Reference:

Publications:

Dust to Dust ISBN – TBC (PDF copies available on request)

Soup of Souls ISBN – NA (PDF copies available on request)

Kinship ISBN 9781914615771 – PDF or hardcopies available from the artist