

IMMA

Presents

Tracing Memories

An archive of voices from Studio 10

Episode 1

Colours of Childhood

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Studio 10 participants

Narrator (N): We are delighted to bring you a themed podcast featuring voices of participants in [Studio 10](#), IMMA's Adult Gallery and Studio Programme. Our participants tell you their stories with insight and enthusiasm, of art encounters and art making throughout life. The first episode focuses on the transformative influence of art on young lives. Please sit back, relax, and enjoy listening.

'The joy of drawing on the wall'

N: First up, I'd like to introduce [Esmé Lewis](#), who is an artist, swimming instructor, mother and grandmother. [Esmé](#) described making her first drawing when she was two years old, much to her father's consternation.¹

Patricia Brennan (PB): Esmé, to start with, when and where were you born?

Esmé Lewis (EL): I was born in Dublin, in Hatch Street.

PB: And were you taught art at school?

EL: Not really, well when I got to senior level, yes.

PB: And do you remember when you first began to be interested in art?

EL: I was two, and I started drawing on the walls, (chuckling) with a crayon.

¹ *For Better, For Worse* Directed/Edited by Wissame Cherfi. Produced by Dublin 2020 as part of the European Capital of Culture Bid. Courtesy of Dublin City Council Culture Company

PB: And what did your mother and father think of that?

EL: Well, my father definitely wasn't happy with that at all, and I think it's the first time in my life he actually smacked me. I was in a cot and I always have loved drawing. It's something that, coming up through the war I didn't have access to a lot of materials that kids have nowadays, but I certainly would have had an interest.

PB: You always drew.

EL: Always. Later on, I would've got encouragement, a lot of encouragement.

PB: And who was that from?

EL: Well, I suppose, something I wanted to do and at home, very, very easy going, despite the beginning. I was in a cot, and I think I had managed to get a crayon, a blue crayon. I can still remember the joy of drawing on the wall.



Esmé age two



Esmé age eight with sister June

'My great-grandfather was an artist'

N: Esmé remembers many visits to Dublin museums and galleries en famille and she explained the reason for her mother's particular interest in painting.

PB: And do you recall your first visit to an art gallery, Esmé?

EL: Yes, definitely, and this was something I was talking about yesterday, in the art gallery. Because my parents would have brought all of us. There were four of us, I'm the eldest. But they would have taken us to the art gallery, been taken to the museums, and particularly the Dead Zoo, as they call the animal museum, as children. My great-grandfather was an artist and there's art in the family, anyway. My mother would have had an interest.



Henry Joy Junior, c. 1800
 Charles Robertson (1759-1821)
 Watercolour on ivory
 7.7 x 6.2cm
 Bequeathed, Miss Mary A. McNeill, 1985
 Photo © National Gallery of Ireland

PB: Was your great-grandfather a painter?

EL: I don't know all that much about him. He's on my mother's side of the family and they have a lot of his work, and I think in the gallery (National Gallery of Ireland). I tried to trace him: [Robertson](#).

PB: And was that around the house; the work?

EL: Yes, definitely, on the walls, and my parents would have had paintings on the walls. But I now think with the Robertsons, they did these wonderful little miniatures in the enamels, they have the desk in the archives room. His name was Robertson.

PB: And do you think he's related to your family?

EL: Oh yes, oh definitely, well that would be my great-grandfather.

PB: Oh, that is him, that's fascinating.

N: That's amazing to have a professional artist in the family history.



Esmé Lewis and Ries Hoek

Rotterdam

N: The second voice is that of Ries Hoek who was born in the Netherlands in 1938. Ries recalls a dramatic and overwhelming sensory onslaught of colour and noise when he was just a toddler. Ries witnessed this dramatic scene which seems just as fresh today and he described it for us.

PB: Ries Hoek, you're very welcome. When and where were you born?

Ries Hoek: Rotterdam. And I remember the bombing of Rotterdam.

PB: So, you said you were two and a half when the bombing happened, of Rotterdam.

RH: Yes, never forget. I will never forget, because it gets more clean into your brain because you grow up in age, and then you start realising what all happened. When you're two and a half years of age you haven't a clue what is happening. But anyway, that is Rotterdam.

PB: And what – your mother tried to calm you, I think you were scared.

RH: And told me to get under the bed because then I'm safe.

PB: And did you?

RH: No, no. (Chuckles). Because I was fascinated by the red sky. So red. Unbelievable! But we were lucky, we were living on the other side of the Maas, of the Rhein. So, the inner city was all bombed and we lived a bit high so we could see a lot also, from the planes, it was in the night so you could only hear the planes, and it took only ten minutes. Boom, boom, boom! Gone. And a lot of young people died; a lot of people died. And I've seen a lot of people dying since... that five years' war of this madman called Hitler.



The Fire of Rotterdam, 1940

(Brand van Rotterdam)

Henk Chabot (1894-1949).

Oil on canvas, 120 x 140 cm

Collection Chabot Museum Rotterdam
on long-term loan from the Rotterdam
City Council

Photo © Bob Goedewaagen,
Chabot Museum Rotterdam

Red sky

N: Ries went on to make an extraordinary link between that early memory of the colour red and a painting he saw in childhood.

RH: But there is a famous artist you never heard of, [Chabot](#). Chabot. And he made a painting, and he lived just on the other side of Rotterdam and you see [two cows in a field](#), and you see a sky, and that was the sky I saw, this red sky. I have a card with his painting

on it. That is my first experience with colour, then.

N: That was powerful. I think Ries really brought us all back with him in time to 1940 and those events that reshaped Europe.



Cows grazing, 1948
(Grazende koeien),
Henk Chabot (1894-1949)
Oil on canvas, 120 x 151 cm
Collection Chabot Museum Rotterdam
on long-term loan from the Museum
Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam
Photo © Studio Tromp, Museum
Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam

‘Messing with paint’

N: I asked Ries about his own beginnings in painting.

PB: Were you taught art at school?

RH: Well, yes, yes, yes. I started when I was seven. I always enjoyed painting and messing with paint. So, I started very young.

PB: And did your teachers or your parents encourage you?

RH: Yeah, my mother sent me down to the art college, and I finished already when I came here. I was eighteen when I came here, and I had finished Art College already with two certificates; one for publicity, you know, the commercial part, and one for painting and drawing. But the certificates don't mean anything (chuckles) from an art college. Art is not art college. Art is inside you. You want to do it, or not! But I had to go the commercial way, and I am a commercial designer, artist, whatever you call it.

N: Ries managed to make art and design central to his life.



Installation view of 'IMMA Collection:
Then and Now, Janet Mullarney',
15 February – 13 October 2019,
IMMA, Dublin.
Photo by Ros Kavanagh



Installation view of 'IMMA Collection: Then and Now, Janet Mullarney', 15 February – 13 October 2019, IMMA, Dublin. Photo by Ros Kavanagh.

'Lords and ladies up on the walls'

N: Pablo Picasso said "All children are born artists; the problem is to remain an artist as we grow up." For Olive Galbraith, art that she saw in childhood was fuddy duddy. Olive's view of art is as irreverent and subversive as the works of [Janet Mullarney](#) and [Genieve Figgis](#), both exhibitors in IMMA.



Olive and Sarah Galbraith

OG: I was born in Dublin, in 1945, just after the war it was.

PB: What part of Dublin, Olive?

OG: I was living in Sandymount.

PB: And how about you, Olive, was there art at school?

OG: My first exposure, if you like, to art would have been in the church. Religious pictures and things like that. And I knew there was paintings in people's houses of – and state-ly homes, with scenes and say, lords and ladies up on the walls. That to me was art, in those days. Down in Castletown House and that and Muckcross House in Killarney. But they always looked fuddy duddy, kind of – they'd no relevance to my life. And then art had no relevance, really, in my life because it was for other people, you know. My life was different, you know.



Olive during her first year in secondary school

And then when I was in secondary school, five of us were picked to do Latin, we weren't allowed do art. So one day I didn't go to Latin and I went down to art 'cause a friend said to me "It's great," you know. So I went and we spent two hours painting a sheet of paper yellow, and I knew that was a wash, and I'll always know what a wash is.

OG: Next day, Mother Eamon called me over and she said to me, "were you in school yesterday, Olive?" And I said, "Yes, sister." She said to me, "You weren't at Latin". And I said, "No, I gave it up", as cocky as you like (laughter) So she said, "Oh no, my lady, you didn't. You be in Latin here tomorrow, in class." So that was the end of my art, for years and years and years. And anytime I went on holidays with the girls, when they were babies, I always brought a sketchpad and a pencil with me. I always had a longing to do something.

N: I think people didn't see the point of art as a school subject back then. It was not especially remunerative, for one thing.



Noel Moore

'I was sketching little things'

N: But some children did get lots of encouragement to pursue their art. Noel Moore was one of those, and, like many true blue Dubs, Noel grew up close to his extended family. Noel Moore: I was born in 1940, on the 25th of January, right in the middle of one of the worst winters, I believe, in the twentieth century. We lived up in Whitehall, but my grandmother lived quite close to there, she'd have lived down the North Circular Road. And then, my other grandmother lived up on Carlingford Road in Drumcondra.

PB: All right; and Noel, were you taught art at school?

NM: I wasn't, no. We weren't taught art until I left secondary school. But I was always interested in art and drawing. Even when I was a kid, I was sketching little things, doing things for me granddad and that and he used to say "Oh that's great!".

'The old names, like Great Britain Street'

N: Noel's grandfather worked in the heart of the Hibernian metropolis and intoned the old street names that were dear to James Joyce. Listening to Noel made Dublin history come alive.

NM: My grandfather always worked in the – in (the) [1901 census](#), he was down at the Kildare Street Club at that time. Well he was a waiter, he was a waiter in there. He died in 1969; but he always referred to, like, Dun Laoghaire as Kingstown, giving the old names like Great Britain Street for Parnell Street. But he was around forty years of age in 1916, so he grew up in the old pre-1916 Dublin. He was a bit of an artist, so I was always interested in him, you know. He was a nice man. Maurice was his name, that's my second name. Noel Maurice, it's very French! (laughter).

PB: Isn't it!

NM: It is.



St. Mark's Square, Venice, c. 1756. Canaletto (1697 –1768). Giovanni Antonio Canal. Oil on canvas 46 x 77 cm. Purchased, 1885. Photo © National Gallery of Ireland

‘Every aspect of humanity’

N: Noel went on to tell us about a [Canaletto](#) print that hung in his room in boyhood and sparked his lifelong engagement with architecture.

NM: My father used take us around art galleries. I used go myself to see the art. I used to have a print of a picture over my bed at home, years ago. I got it in Switzer’s or somewhere like that you see, and it was Canaletto, the Venetian artist. And I was always fascinated by the amount of detail he put into the work, particularly the buildings, and then all the people around them. If you look at it, there’s every aspect of humanity there, you know.

Sandra Murphy: Everyday life, yeah.

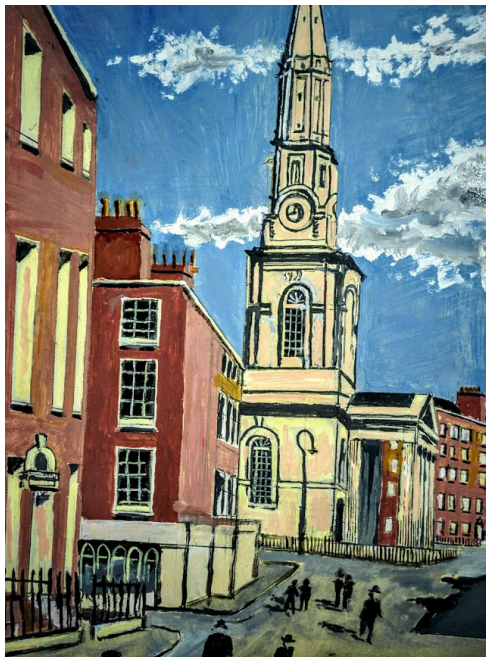
NM: It’s marvellous stuff, so, and that’s where I got my keen interest. I wished to god I could draw like that, you know, which I never could of course, but I wouldn’t have the patience to go into all of that detail. It was a lovely print; it was of Saint Mark’s Square in Venice; it had the Campanile ‘n’ all –

SM: SM: Oh lovely, yes.

NM: Beside the Doge’s Palace.

SM: San Marco.

N: Nowadays, Noel exhibits and sells his own architectonic paintings.



St George's Church.

© Noel Moore

Photo courtesy Noel Moore and Tony Strickland

Safe Cross Code

N: From Venice to [Vincent Van Gogh](#) and a letter he wrote to his brother Theo: “In spite of everything I shall rise again: I will take up my pencil, which I have forsaken in my great discouragement, and I will go on with my drawing.”² To her chagrin, Sarah Galbraith was told at school that she couldn’t draw or paint, despite her interest in the subject. Sarah told us her story.

Sarah Galbraith: I was born in Dublin in 1976. I lived in Newcastle in County Dublin.

PB: Ok. And Sarah, just to continue, were you taught art at school in Newcastle?

² Van Gogh, Vincent; letter 136, 24 September 1880, *Vincent*, http://www.vggallery.com/drawings/main_az.htm

Ben Dhonau: I was born in [Sheringham](#) in Norfolk in the east of England, and when? Oh heavens! Tenth of June 1943. Long time ago.

PB: Ah not so long. Different times – that was during the War.

BD: It was. I don't remember the War, I mean I was what? Two, by the time it finished and I can remember bits and pieces after it.

PB: I'm sure; but there was still that legacy, and the recovery afterwards and rebuilding.

BD: Yes, yes, I remember that. I remember bomb sites in Norwich and in London and so on ok. And indeed, there were all sorts of bits from the War, in the little town I was brought up. It was on the coast and so there were gunning placements on the hills and there were still loads of soldiers around the place.

'My brother turned up my school reports'

PB: Sure, and Ben, were you taught art at school?

BD: I was, but I don't remember it. I mean I can remember because my brother turned up, when my father died, turned up my school reports and gave them to me. And, rather surprisingly the – I had quite good comments from the art master. Because the main thing he was interested in (was) pottery and I wasn't. Or whether I was interested or not didn't matter, I wasn't any good at doing ceramics. (Chuckles).

N: I think Ben is being modest there.



Whaam! 1963. Roy Lichtenstein (1923 – 1997). Acrylic paint and oil on canvas. 172.7 x 406.4 cm
Tate, Purchased 1966. © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein, ADAGP Paris/IVARO Dublin, 2021. Photo © Tate

Whaam!

N: Ben was a very young boy during the golden age of comics in the 1940s and that may explain his affection for the pop artist Lichtenstein. One of Ben's cherished childhood memories is of a visit to the Tate to see Lichtenstein's [Whaam!](#)

BD: We used to go – our holiday was to go to London, and we would then spend our time going around museums and art galleries and things of that sort.

PB: I suppose you'd go to the National Gallery, the British Museum?

BD: Yes, yes. So, I remember one or two things from there. I remember ... for some reason a collection of Michelangelo cartoons.

PB: Was that in the British Museum...

BD: I remember going to see Lichtenstein's Whaam! Except the only problem is, this is a false memory.

PB: Is it?

BD: It is.

PB: Did you not go?

BD: Yes, but I can't have been when I thought I was, cause I used to visualise myself, I thought I saw it when I was about ten. There's a problem with that: he didn't paint it 'til I was twenty.

N: And that memory from Ben finishes this first episode. IMMA would like to thank everyone who contributed to the Tracing Memories archive: Jean Brady, Ben Dhonau, Olive Galbraith, Sarah Galbraith, Barbara Geraghty, Ries Hoek, Barbara Keary, Esmé Lewis, Brian McCoy and Noel Moore who took part in the project. Special thanks to Sandra Murphy. Tracing Memories was edited and mixed, with additional post production by Simon Kenny. You can find out more at imma.ie.

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