IMMA

Presents

Tracing Memories

An archive of voices from Studio 10

Episode 4

Wake up in good humour

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Participants of Studio 10 at the NGI with Joan Walker and Brigid McClean, 2019

Narrator (N): We asked participants of Studio 10 to name their all-time favourite artworks from IMMA and from other collections. Joining me and Studio 10 Participants in these conversations is Sandra Murphy, who took part in earlier episodes. I'm Trish Brennan, and like Sandra, I am a member of the visitor engagement team at IMMA, who facilitate Studio 10.
You may remember that in Episode 1, Ries Hoek retold his startling childhood memory of the bombing of Rotterdam, and his encounter with the transcendent paintings of the modern Dutch artist, Henk Chabot. Later in our conversation, Ries and I discovered a shared weakness for the Dutch masters of the seventeenth century.

'That little portrait of Titus'

Ries Hoek (RH): Oh là là, when I was so young, on Sunday afternoons I went to – most people went to church, I never went to church because I'm not brought up anything. So I went to the museum. And I had a fantastic time because you could see all the masters, and the great painters, and I'm doing a bit of painting myself. So, you know, I learnt a lot.
Patricia Brennan (PB): Of course, I presume the Dutch masters – was there anyone or any pictures in particular that interested you?
RH: Yeah, there were a lot. But I always remember Titus. Do you know who Titus was?

PB: The son of Rembrandt.
RH: Aha, you are right. Well that is amazing that you said that. And that little portrait of Titus, Titus son of Rembrandt, is in Boijmans in Rotterdam. And I always admired that, you know, how he painted his son.

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669). *Titus at His Desk*, 1655.
Oil on canvas, 77 x 63 cm. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam.
Photo © Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen

PB: What was so special about it?
RH: So well painted, you know, you feel – it's difficult to describe seeing a beautiful piece of art. He painted that boy as his son. Fantastic! Titus, the son of Rembrandt.

'Titus-itis'

PB: And Lucian Freud was an admirer of Rembrandt, did you know that, as well as other artists.
RH: But how could he not admire Rembrandt? (Laughing)
PB: But he said that he had "Titus-itis", that he couldn't paint Titus straight, because he loved him so much. I think he felt there was too much sentimentality in it, which I thought was interesting.
RH: Yeah, yeah, I didn't know that part, now, so. But it's good to learn that you knew Titus…

PB: I'm a big Rembrandt fan, as well, like yourself.
RH: Well, he can paint.
PB: Oh yes, he's so great.

Rembrandt van Rijn
The Great Jewish Bride 1635
Etching
21.3 x 6.2 cm
IMMA Collection: Donation, Madden / Arnholz Collection, 1989

Painting the Beloved

N: The tender portrait Ries referred to, *Titus at his Desk*, painted in 1655, shows the teenage boy at his studies, with pale face and dark eyes expressively and loosely rendered. Titus' mother Saskia is thought to be depicted in a small print made by Rembrandt in 1635, which is part of the IMMA Permanent Collection. It is titled *The Great Jewish Bride*.

'You could nearly pick the fruit'

N: Our next contributor's choice also references the Dutch Golden Age of painting. It appears to be a richly painted still life. Faced with the difficult task of choosing just one piece of art from 29 years of Studio 10, Jean Brady decided on *The Luncheon* by the artist Caroline McCarthy. *The Luncheon* was made in 2002; a huge photograph of fruit and vegetables including a few scavenging insects. However, close inspection reveals

that all is not what it at first appears to be.
Jean Brady (JB): I loved an awful lot of the – you know the paintings with horses and things like that and all different people. But I remember there was one huge big painting and there was – oh God, I thought it was very well done. It was with all fruit and you could nearly pick the fruit and it was a huge big painting on a wall and I don't know the name of it but it was – there was cabbage, there was everything you can think of.
PB: I think I know the piece you mean. It's a huge photograph with a dark background, beautiful colours in it and everything was made out of toilet paper and dyed.

Caroline McCarthy, *The Luncheon,* 2002, Photograph of wet toilet paper sculpture (Sculpture: toilet paper of varying colour, water, black bin-bags, real stalks, fake flies, disposable tableware), 196 x 114 cm, Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art, Donated by A.I.B., 2002

JB: I think you're right, yeah.
PB: I think it's Caroline McCarthy, I'll double-check her name. Yeah. That was – what was it that you liked about it?
JB: I just thought it was fantastic the way it was made and everything looked so real and – oh my God – I thought it was just brilliant done. And I think we tried to do something in the Museum because we did, years ago I did fruit painting, you know still life, but you know, they'd cut a tomato open and things like that and we did it. Now I know there was like a little Christmas card made out of one of them as well, one of the ones we did.

'Certain pictures will move you'

N: Like Jean Brady, Olive Galbraith is open to new ways of making and looking at art. Olive articulated her admiration for a powerful work by an artist who gave an extraordinary, exalted beauty to the natural world.
Olivia Galbraith (OG): I know looking at certain pictures will move you, move me anyway, and sometimes it can be extreme. Sometimes I hate a picture, you know, not because it's

not good, but because I personally don't like it. I always – I saw a film, *Lust for Life* – Van Gogh – and I did see *Sunflowers* in Amsterdam, and I cried when I saw it. And Linda was with me and she said to me "Are you all right?" you know, and that's usually the effect it has on me. For the Mona Lisa, I was very disappointed. I couldn't make out what all the singing was about. (Laughter).

Vincent van Gogh (1853 - 1890)
Sunflowers
Arles,
January 1889
oil on canvas 95 cm x 73 cm
© Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam
(Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

PB: I think a lot of people do say that, and yet still, a great portrait. But when art makes us cry, is it good though, or?
OG: Oh, it's a good cry!
PB: It doesn't deplete you?
OG: No. Just like that, it sort of gets all emotions that are deep down, that you didn't even know you had, and they just come out and you feel lighter after it. It's a lovely feeling, it's not sad.
Sandra Murphy (SM): Yes. It's almost a high.
OG: Yeah.
SM: You can see it as it really is, something you've wanted to see all your life, and you've got this far.
OG: And here it is!
SM: And you're really looking at it now.
OG: You don't want to leave it.
SM: And you're just going Oh! Yeah, yeah.

OG: Exactly!
SM: It's a bit of an addiction almost, isn't it! You have to have it regularly.
N: Van Gogh completed a whole series on Sunflowers. Most of them were done in Arles from 1888 to 1889. From Van Gogh's incandescent Sunflowers and his retina scorching Arles landscapes to more contemporary themes and works.

Pop art

N: Ben Dhonau told us in Episode 1 of his partiality for pop artist Roy Lichtenstein's works. I questioned Ben further on this topic of taste in art.

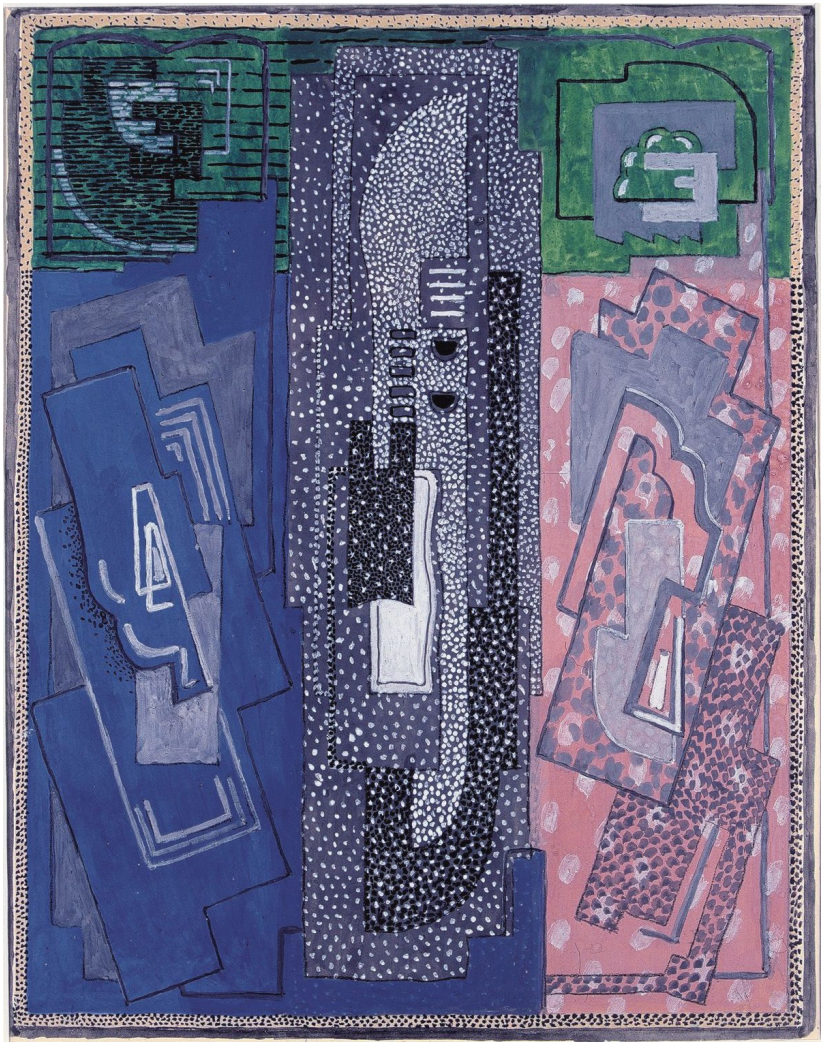
Roy Lichtenstein,
Bicentennial Print, 1975
Lithograph with silkscreen,
76 x 56.7 cm
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art, The Novak/O'Doherty Collection at IMMA
Gift, The American Ireland Fund, 2014

'I like abstract art'

PB: Ok, so, and a general question: What artworks engage your mind and emotions? Lichtenstein is a favourite I think?
Ben Dhonau (BD): Oh he does. Well I mean as you said, Mainie Jellett does.
PB: They're very different artists, Lichtenstein and Jellett.
BD: They are. I have quite wide tastes, you know, I like quite a lot of sorts of art. I like abstract art too. I like paintings and sculpture. I'm not particularly into – I don't find installations and things like that, by and large, very interesting.

‘Getting addicted to art auctions’

N: I asked Ben how he first became aware of Mainie Jellett, the accomplished, French trained painter and advocate of cubism to a bemused Irish audience.
BD: Yeah, well Mainie Jellett was triggered in fact by *The Moderns*. I saw her work and I thought “this is fantastic” and very shortly after that –
PB: What did you like about her work?
BD: I haven’t really analysed why but I found it was particularly the – well I’ve always liked – I like pure abstracts in any case, but I also like her cubist nudes and things of that sort which she had when she was just getting started. You know, I followed up and it’s what started me off on getting addicted to art auctions too. Because the first picture I bought: shortly after that White’s had a Jellett, it was an early one while she was at the – or had just left the Westminster School so it’s purely – pure representational.



Mainie Jellett
Four Element Composition, 1925
Gouache on paper
28 x 21.5 cm
IMMA Collection: Donation,
Maire and Maurice Foley, 2000

‘Geometry, colour and what fits’

BD: Philip Taaffe, for instance, I would relate very much to his work and his geometry and so on. The Anthony Gormley made an impression on me, the one of his – the sort of the teardrop, but I’m not sure I’d say I like it particularly.
N: Ben reflected on his interests, closing in on why he feels particularly attuned to

abstract works.
BD: Well, I'm certainly – I'm interested in the pure abstracts, and the geometry and the treatment of geometry, and things of that sort. That or – and colour, and the mixes and what fits, so I'm interested in all of that. Otherwise, oddly enough, maritime pictures, I always find, I think everyone finds them attractive and I don't think –
PB: Do you like Turner?
BD: Yes! Well, of course, who doesn't like Turner? (Chuckles). Yeah, but, I mean it's – I've got to be careful, because it's not seascapes that interest me so much, it's ones with what-you-may-call-it, it's ones with ships and activity going on in them.
N: Who indeed does not like Turner, whose sublime landscapes and seascapes pre-figure abstraction.

Barrie Cooke
Lough Arrow Algae III, 1995
Oil on canvas, 97 x 102 cm
IMMA Collection: Donation,
Maire and Maurice Foley, 2000

'He was a great fisherman'

N: We move now to modern and conceptual Irish landscape artists. Barbara Keary's scientific background illuminates her reading of Barrie Cooke's work, as Barbara addresses Cooke's pollution series. Cooke was a keen angler who deplored the depopulation of fish in Irish waterways.
Barbara Keary (BK): He had a terrific exhibition in the RHA a number of years ago and the whole studio was covered with – they weren't domestic scale – big paintings of various kinds of pollution and he was making a statement about pollution and you had these sort of swirls of green scum, fish with their belly up and this sort of thing, and the one that I did was something like that one. He was a great fisherman and he would have known the life was squeezed out of them and the oxygen was squeezed out of the water by this scum.

‘You learn an awful lot’

BK: One of the things that I started to do was to go to auctions, because you learn an awful lot, so, through the course at IMMA and that, I could recognise the work of a lot of people now. Like, I could know who painted it.
N: Barbara mused on other Irish landscape artists and the thoughtful way they have opened up the many themes associated with the genre in Ireland. Barbara is affected by Maria Simonds-Gooding’s steel and plaster interpretations of landscapes.

Maria Simonds-Gooding, *Earth Shelters I*, 2007, Carborundum, 67 x 87 cm, IMMA Collection: Donation, 2014

‘His Irish ones tend to be muddy’

BK: Well, Maria Simonds-Gooding is interested – I don’t like some of her stuff – but she’s interested in land, and markings on land, and the way land is formed, and the way people live on land and communities. And then, Tony O’Malley – I like his Hawaiian ones which are lovely and colourful, and if you had one of those I think you’d really be lucky –
SM: Yes, sunshine every day –
BK: ’Cause you’d always wake up in good humour if you had it on the foot of the bed, right? But his Irish ones, which tend to be rather muddy, but Ireland was rather muddy and, his marks on land, the “land-marks” that he makes, his ideas of mountains, and the way he sees land, and the in-cuts of the sea, you know, the high land and then low land and the shapes of the in-cuts that – that “cuttings-in” on the land. His take on land is very interesting too, and it’s different. He sees land in colours, and Simonds-Gooding’s is

really more black and white, and more white than black, you know what I mean. They're different. O'Malley's land is lived in, and sort of poorer. Simonds-Gooding's is the purer take on communities and a more academic version of land and architecture and things like that. So I find them interesting to look at.
SM: Maria Simonds-Gooding is an older living artist as well and is still working well into her eighties. And I think she is producing a book of her memoirs as well, which would be interesting.
BK: Interesting to read, yeah.

1. Tony O'Malley, *Patio Reflections with Susie and interior, Paradise 2 Bahamas*, 1980, Gouache, pastel and coloured chalks on paper, 77.5 x 52 cm, Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art, Heritage Gift from the McClelland Collection by Noel and Anne Marie Smyth, 2003.
2. Barbara Keary, *Untitled.*

'Minimalistic'

N: Staying with Irish artists who balance figuration with abstraction; a painting by Patrick Scott made a strong impression on Brian McCoy. While on holiday in La Spezia, Italy, Scott had seen a woman carrying a load on her head, and her graceful image stayed with him and inspired two paintings.
BrianMcCoy (BMcC): There was a few things. The Patrick Scott, the girl with the stuff on top of her head.
BMcC: Yeah. It's blue and she's standing, and it's very, very minimalistic, it's just plain. But it's a big painting and she has a load of sticks on her head. I will draw it for you now.
PB: And that made an impression?
BMcC: Yeah.

N: The canvas that Brian saw is titled *Girl Carrying Grasses*, from 1958. The other painting on this subject by Scott is called *Woman Carrying Grasses* and it is in the MoMA Collection.

'Men out in the currach'

Brian attended the landmark exhibition *The Moderns: the Arts in Ireland from the 1900s to the 1970s*, which opened at IMMA on 20th October 2010. As he walked through the galleries, a remarkable film caught Brian's eye.

Patrick Scott
Girl Carrying Grasses, 1958
Oil on canvas
183 x 122 cm
Private collection

BMcC: And *The Moderns* – what impressed me there was an old – *Man of Aran*. They had this screening and I think they preserved a bit of it, and it was about the Aran Islands and this young fella with the rope between his toes, fishing. And the men out in the currach, that impressed me. I thought that was – even though it was a film. O'Flaherty made it, or something, the *Man of Aran*.
PB: That's right, in the '30s.

A masterpiece in celluloid

N: *Man of Aran*, directed by Robert J. Flaherty, is a fictional documentary made in 1934. Despite its fictional elements, the film's irresistible narrative of man's struggle with the extreme forces of nature and its unforgettable cinematography, have ensured that *Man of Aran* is admired as a masterpiece in celluloid.

N: That contribution from BrianMcCoy rounds off Episode 4. Thank you for listening and we hope you have enjoyed sharing in these conversations about Studio 10's favourite artworks from the seventeenth century to the twenty first. Until the next time.

N: IMMA would like to thank: 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 Tracing Memories 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

Brian McCoy at IMMA, 2017

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