



SCRIOBH 7 - CONFINEMENT DOSSIER - 2020

"The artist always precedes the psychoanalyst" J. Lacan

In times of confinement and restriction of social interaction, we invited several artists from a diversity of fields to tell us about their experiences during the confinement measures at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. We put to them the following questions:

Q1 - *What is your experience, as an artist, of the impossibility to carry out cultural and artistic events 'in the flesh'? What is different when the audience / spectator is 'virtual'?*

Q2 - *In your particular form of art, what are the effects of the exclusion of the body in the encounter with the body of the other, i.e. what is different / new?
Can you relate this to the notion of 'presence' (can you -as an artist- do without physical presence?)*

We aim at learning from them, since we believe that their experiences and know-how can contribute to our thinking about subjectivity and about the analytic encounter.

H E L E N A J O H N S T O N

Helena Johnston is an artist, originally from Gdansk, Poland and has lived in Ireland since 1975. During the last 25 years, Helena has completed art courses (adult education) and workshops in Irish art institutions. Hibernian Academy School courses in life drawing and painting and a number of landscape painting workshops in Provence, among others.

Helena's works "Road in Provence" and "Towards the end of the day" were purchased by the Office of Public Works and her 2015 painting "Provençal Castle" was accepted for the RHA Annual Exhibition. Helena has been drawing and painting human figure at RHA (without a tutor) for the last 4 years.

Helena is both studio (still life) and plein air painter (landscape). Changing light, fast moving clouds or overcast skies bring challenges which Helena likes. Painting outside enables her to be truly immersed in the beauty of Irish nature.

Last summer Helena took part in Dublin Plein Air Festival sponsored by Fingal County Council where she received "Highly Commended" recognition for one of her works.

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Q1

I have been confined to stay at home as I am nearly 70 years old. I became a painter later in life, nearly 25 years ago. I decided to cocoon earlier than the Irish Government announcement. First, I stopped attending my weekly life drawing sessions at Royal Hibernian Academy as a precaution. It has been now seven weeks since I drew and painted a human figure at the academy together with other artists. I haven't seen any of the fellow artists from the group, but we communicate regularly on WhatsApp.



Initially we were very active on this media - sending jokes and videos, advising on films to watch; but now 4 weeks since the official lockdown everyone has become much quieter. When at RHA, the work I was doing was flowing. Mixing flesh tones almost instinctively easy. Everybody was doing their own work in silence but at breaks we chatted, had lunches together, talked about art. It was inspirational time. Suddenly it is all gone. It is difficult to be creative with no fellow artists around and the gloom of the pandemic over Ireland and the world has killed all my energy it seemed.

Q2

Some artists whose workshops I attended previously started to send videos and projects to do at home and we were encouraged to send back finished work for critique. I haven't done any of the suggested projects. But I am studying the tutorials I received and planning to do them. But not yet. Mainly because they had to be done inside in the studio and I could not do them inside. I feel so isolated being inside and I can't concentrate. But my garden and the beauty of the spring forced me to go outside. I set myself up at the end of my garden under a blooming magnolia tree. It was difficult to start but I started to look at the blooms against blue sky and I found I was living in the moment. I did not want this to end. It was beautiful. The world was my garden and my garden was the world now and I was connected. It was beautiful and I started to sketch, then next day to paint. Luckily, most days the sun was shining. I was glad to hear people's chats in the far distance. By observing and listening to the nature I forgot about Covid-19. I started to paint small oil studies of magnolia flowers. At the end of daily 2-3 hour sessions I took a photo and sent it to my family in London for critique.



So far, I have done 10 small oil paintings and I am looking around for the next composition inspired by wonderful light. It is difficult, but at the end of each painting session I feel

energised by the process of painting and see everything in a positive light. I shall continue to work and force myself to investigate ideas but not to wait for a brain wave to come because it may not arrive.


