

Anne Dunn

Why choose to become an artist? My decision was made at the age of 13, when the painter, Kathleen Mann, questioned me on my plans for a career. Having excelled only in the art class I made a swift commitment then and there. Growing up in a house hung with wonderful paintings collected by my father, Sir James Dunn, this was an education in itself with careful study of Augustus John, Sickert, Ety, Marie Laurencin and various Florentine masters, to name a few examples. My father commissioned Alphonse Jongers, a French Canadian artist, to paint my portrait when I was seven. I was fascinated by his materials. Later, at school in England, Downham, a rare and wonderful teacher, Miss Lydiatt, introduced me to the work of Picasso and Matisse, then at my convent “Les Oiseaux”, Mother St. George revealed through her collection of books and postcards the wonders of Rubens, Rembrandt and Poussin. She persuaded me to enter a drawing competition at the Guildhall in London where I won a gold medal and saw my first work hung. Heady stuff. No turning back now although slated to study literature and history at Cambridge, I rebelled and was accepted by H.R. Williamson to enrol at the Chelsea School of Art, where in 1947, John Berger, the writer and painter was the star student of Ceri Richards. Disappointing at first, glued to instruction in “lettering” forbidden to use oil paint and finding life-drawing difficult, the models appeared miserable specimens, a desiccated male leaning on a staff, half-starved females reclining (rationing still strict) no sign of the voluptuous nudes of Rubens and Ety. Fortunately Graham Sutherland, an occasional visiting professor, encouraged my efforts and I became more enthused. I admit to spending many hours at the Art Cinema in the King’s Road, French films a

revelation, “La femme du Boulanger”, “Les enfants de Paradis”, Sang d’un poet, more relevant than the school classes. Life itself took over and I was much influenced by my relationship with Lucian Freud and time spent hanging out at the famed Gargoyle Club and the Colony Room filled with poets and painters and Francis Bacon holding court. This rackets life drove me to seek solitude in Connemara Galway, County Galloway working alone for six months. Restored, I returned to London where I met painter Michael Wishart. We fell in love and he took me to Benton End, Hadleigh in Suffolk, the art school run by Cedric Morris and Lett Haines . After a brief period we decided to marry. Aged 20 and 22, our parents were not enthusiastic about this union. However, a huge party was given by Francis Bacon in his studio to celebrate, an event lasting three days, filled with champagne donated by my reluctant but generous mother-in-law, Lorna Wishart. Exhausted, we travelled to Paris then the mecca for the arts, existential, Juliette Greco singing nightly in St. Germain des Prés. A whole new world was ours, the Louvre, the Jeu de Paume, the seldom visited Gustav Moreau museum, Delacroix in the Place Furstemburg and an introduction to the painter Jean Hélion, a considerate and enthusiastic mentor. His advice “take any opportunity to show, whether in a baker’s shop, a café, a bookshop. Conquer your fears, disregard small humiliations and rejections, spiteful friends, find your feet and confidence before approaching galleries, don’t expect an easy journey” sage words.

France appeared the vital country to live. We moved to St. Tropez, then more of a quiet fishing village than the horror of today. Signac, Segonzac, Collette among others had all lived there. The town was quiet and empty during the mistral tormented winter. At the café “Bateau Ivres” we would watch with awe Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir in

profound conversation. Moving to a remote farm building isolated in the hills, over the next years Michael produced enough good work for his first exhibition at the Redfern Gallery in 1956.

At this juncture, our marriage failed and I fell in love with Rodrigo Moynihan, then professor of painting at the Royal College of Art. We decided to move together and to live in Paris and Provence. After three years work, Rodrigo and Graham Sutherland considered I was ready to exhibit and encouraged the Leicester Galleries in London to hold my first solo exhibition in 1959 where I continued to show until moving to the Redfern Gallery in 1972. We both exhibited in Paris during this period in group shows.

A visit to New York in 1961 opened new territory, our introduction to Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, minimalism, Colour Field, we both became subject to various influence. Rodrigo showed with Charles Egan and Tibor de Nagy and I, over a period of years, with Fischbach Gallery. We had bought and restored a farm in Provence, still kept a toehold in Paris where the poet John Ashbery was then living. With John and Sonia Orwell we embarked on a quarterly magazine "Art and Literature" from 1964 to 1968.

I had lived much of my childhood at my father's camp, near Bathurst, New Brunswick, the town of his birth. I also attended school in Montreal and the Eastern Townships between 1939 and 1942. My parents decided to divorce late in 1941 and I was fetched by my mother and returned to England January 1941 much to my grief,(should be a new sentence) returning to Bathurst in 1961 and in 1965 we found a property with lakes and

forest in the Nigadoo area, the much loved fauna and flora of my childhood rediscovered plus the joy of bringing my two sons, Francis Wishart and Danny Moynihan to the same precious landscape and to Youghall beach where I had spent so many summer months. Our visits became increasingly frequent until 1981 when another project changed the course of events. Plans for a dump were launched, to be constructed on the watershed area between Robertville and Free Grant, a serious hazard to the lakes and tributaries of south Nigadoo river. This precipitated my first real awareness of environmental risk and degradation, the universal damage inflicted by industry and indiscriminate cutting, the advanced technology that allowed the central hills of New Brunswick to be stripped bare. In 1965 we had counted 80 species of birds. By 1981 few remained except for the crows, the leaping frogs that had abounded, occasional few snakes and the fish in decline. Could this be due to the spray programme? Friends and neighbours appeared increasingly prone to new neurological illness and cancer related death. The dump project had to be contested and a friend, Jane Kitselman, cellist and sculptor, arriving for a few weeks' visit found herself involved for the next four months in this fiery battle. The action moved to Fredericton, the battle against bureaucracy and on these many expeditions we met and made many new friends: Ian Lumsden, curator of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, his wife Kathy, Stuart Smith and Valerie, David Coon and Janice Harvey of the Conservation Council, among others, frequent telephone calls for advice and counsel with David Walker in St. Andrews. Holed up during this cold period in an unwinterised cottage at Youghall Beach, our headquarters, I rediscovered an old friend from childhood, Geraldine Young, who provided us with delicious cooked suppers, books on Bruno and Molly Bobak and an introduction to the painter Barclay Walker

whose watercolours we both admired. This had good results as it led us to meeting with Jimmy and Inge Pataki to buy Barclay's work. Hitherto exhibitions of my own work had been in more conventional areas, London, Paris, New York. I quietly asked Ian Lumsden whether he thought the Patakis might consider showing my work. The possibility of becoming an active member of the New Brunswick art scene, the province of my forbears, seemed too good to be true, a homecoming, at last a belonging. Thus began my relationship with Gallery 78, a most rewarding endeavour it has proved and one for which I am deeply grateful.

Anne Dunn, 2009