

The art of Randolph Galloway

By Marshall Anderson

Marshall Anderson was a mixed media artist, freelance journalist and curator. For the majority of his working time he lived outside, travelling extensively throughout Scotland. His journalism appeared in various UK-based magazines. His curatorial work included SOLOISTS: Outsider Art in Scotland, commissioned by art.tm, Inverness.

The artistic achievement of scrap dealer Scottie Wilson who grew up in Glasgow's Gorbals is remarkable, for not only did he discover his ability late in life but his art was collected by Jean Dubuffet, Picasso, and museums internationally. Wilson too is acknowledged as one of the masters of Art Brut. Despite his status within this genre and the fact that his art is in every significant collection of Art Brut, and that Art Brut influenced so many of the 20thC masters, you will not find a reference to Scottie Wilson in Duncan MacMillan's "Scottish Art 1460 to 1990". This error is not corrected in MacMillan's subsequent book, "Scottish Art in the 20th Century", despite the fact that Wilson's art is in the collection of The Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh. Nor was Scottie Wilson included in the much acclaimed "Into The New Age: Scottish Art 1945 to 1962" curated for Aberdeen City Art Gallery by Iain Gale, former art critic for Scotland On Sunday. When asked about this obvious oversight Gale said that Scottie was supposed to have been included but was somehow overlooked in the final selection. What happens within so-called academic rigour that perpetuates such oversights? MacMillan's books and Gale's inexcusable lack of curatorial responsibility support an academic process that is blinkered and reeking of cultural exclusivity.

There are many similarities between the art of Scottie Wilson and that of Randolph Galloway. Like Wilson, Galloway discovered his creativity late in life, and like Wilson, Galloway denies perspective, invents his own decorative visual language and works outside of academic tradition. And like Wilson, Galloway deserves to be included in Scotland's public art collections.

Randolph Galloway was born in London in 1928 into a landowning family with extensive estates in Galloway. His interest in art can be traced back to primary school in Dunbar but by the time he was sent to Harrow on the Hill public school at the age of fourteen this interest had diminished. Geography became his favourite subject. Randolph was a hyperactive and troublesome child and as a consequence his parents, in accordance with the medical practice of the time, agreed to a lobotomy. Randolph was seventeen at the time of this operation and

was thereafter destined to a life of institutionalisation. After being diagnosed as schizophrenic he spent much of the 1950s and '60s in the Crichton Royal Mental Hospital in Dumfries. In 1975 at the age of forty-seven Randolph married but now lives separately from his wife. As a result of a mental breakdown in 1982 he was sent to Lothlorien, a large country house refuge where residents were encouraged to help tend the grounds and gardens. Randolph cultivated flowers and vegetables and rediscovered his interest in drawing and painting. The art of Randolph Galloway begins at Lothlorien. It is difficult to impose a chronological order on Randolph's prodigious output. None of his paintings are dated although they are carefully titled with the language of a cartographer. The ageing process of paper and colours provides the only clue as to when each piece was made. Some works have been varnished in an attempt to protect the impermanence of unstable felt-tip marker-pen colours and biro ink. Like any naive Art Brut artist, Randolph has little concern or knowledge of archival permanence and his use of materials reflects this. A lack of money to spend on more professional quality materials further exaggerates this built-in flaw. This characteristic being one of the factors that differentiates Art Brut from the art of professional, established artists.

Randolph Galloway's art-making is a process of recollection and personal mapping. His love of geography as a subject at school is highlighted through the descriptive landscapes of his youth and adulthood. These are diagrammatic, two-dimensional and not to any logical scale. They are, in reality, close to the nature of memory and the way our brains distort through a process of subjective exaggeration and abstraction. Galloway offers us an accurate picture of, or insight into, his memory of places visited and experienced. His lack of academic devices such as perspective enhances the purity of his vision and his lack of anatomical accuracy when depicting animals goes a long way to revealing their absolute truth. They are simultaneously fierce, funny and friendly with that disturbing ambiguity which is, more often than not, true to life. For it is not until one has accustomed oneself with an animal that its character can be fully assessed.

The crudity of Galloway's drawing and painting technique locate his art within the visual language of the 20thC. Such visceral mark-making techniques were common usage among surrealists and abstract expressionists who established a style that continues to be employed by many artists from David Hockney to Jean-Michel Basquiat and Joan Eardley to Lys Hansen. A free, gesture of calligraphy in harmony with loose, informal drawing signals a liberal attitude and tolerance within a society whose sophistication and intellect can embrace such freedoms within human expression. For many artists the use of this style is an affectation; a mannered form of visual language resulting from conscious thought and a need to make their art contemporary. For Galloway there is no decision, no affectation. This is the only way that he can express himself. His art then is a pure form of visual language that underpins any subsequent development that might manifest itself in trained artists' works.

Unconscious too is the use of playfulness in Randolph Galloway's pictures. Multicoloured animals, toy like vehicles, and reinvented perspectives combine to bring about humorous narratives which entertain, while challenging our perceptions of what art should be. If art is the product of a person's creative expression then everyone's art has a place within our culture and our understanding of the human condition. Art then cannot be the preserve of a minority group of trained specialists who operate within a coded language for those who are intellectually educated to receive it.

Sometimes Galloway's humour is a foil for something more sinister. There is a darker side to these depictions of places visited, remembered and considered. Often beasts have a duality being comic and terrifying. Their terror coming from a deeper psychosis as though denizens of nightmares and not simply reinvented caricatures.

When Randolph revisits factories and industrial sites his palette alters accordingly to employ a more monochromatic range of blacks, browns and greys evocative, perhaps, of unhappier recollections. Factory chimneys curving upwards produce a satanic effect that countermands humorous incidentals.

Randolph's family were habitual picnickers and this passion for being outdoors persists. Randolph is a recognisable feature in his local landscape as he bicycles and walks in all seasons visiting friends, art galleries and such favourite haunts as Lothlorien often wearing his kilt of Stewart tartan. According to his step-son, Randolph has a photographic recall for dates remembering precisely what occurred and what the weather was like on specific days. His approach to rationalising that experience is little different from that of any artist who engages with their environment. Galloway's art could hang beside that of William Gillies, the two complementing one another and coexisting without conflict.

The art of any individual is a measure of how they cope intellectually and creatively with their environment and life. To regard the art of a trained artist as being more sophisticated or more culturally acceptable than that of the naive self-taught artist is to miss the whole point of reaching an understanding of society through art. Both types of artist should be held in the same regard.

Notes

1 Jean Dubuffet (1901 - 1963): A French artist who rejected traditional techniques and waged war on bourgeois culture. He was influenced by the paintings of children, psychotics and amateurs.

2 Art Brut (Raw Art): A term invented by Dubuffet and defined as being, "characterised by spontaneity and a pronounced inventiveness, owing as little as possible to conventional art and cultured clichés, and created by anonymous people outside professional artistic circles." Dubuffet's Collection L'Art Brut is housed in Lausanne, Switzerland.

3 By contrast, in this context, it is worth acknowledging Julian Spalding's innovative and controversial purchasing policy for the Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow. His was a brave attempt to create a truly inclusive collection, bringing together art by Outsiders and establishment figures. He was much maligned for his stance, but his approach was forward thinking and an example worth following.

Further reading:

"it's all writ out for you. The life and work of Scottie Wilson" by George Melly. Thames & Hudson 1986

"Outsider Art" by Roger Cardinal. Studio Vista 1972.

"Art Brut" by Michel Thévoz. Booking International 1995. "Outsider Art" by Jean-Louis Ferrier. Terrail Editions 1997.