

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Joan Eardley | A Sense of Place

2016

[7:27]

Ron Stephen, resident of Catterline since 1945:

Catterline was a, I mean it was all we knew as young folks: a small village, working village, basically driven by the time and tide of the sea. You know we didn't have much connection with the more populous areas, you know, going to Stonehaven on a Saturday was a highlight.

Well we're standing here at the Watch House, and we're looking south. In the near, nearest to us down the bottom's the little white gable end building there: that was the salmon bothy. And that's where Joan would have worked quite a lot on the shore there, where all the salmon nets were hung up to dry.

Fiona Pearson, Senior Curator, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art (1983-2008):

Well I think she was actually physically taken there by Annette Stephen, who was friendly with her when she was having a show on at the Gaumont Cinema in Aberdeen. They were exploring around Stonehaven where Annette lived, and they came to Catterline, and it was a place Annette grew close to because she married one of the local fishermen. They offered Joan the Watch House to paint in, so that's what started the relationship.

Ron Stephen:

Well at that time, her moving here would be quite a thing because the place had been empty for a few years. You know there was water coming into it; the roof would leak and all the rest of it; no electricity; a toilet out the back that was a dry chemical toilet; no running water.

Voice of Joan Eardley from archival audio:

I suppose I'm essentially a romantic... I believe in the emotion that you get from what your eyes show you and what you feel about certain things. Well, I don't really know what I'm painting, I'm just trying to paint!

Fiona Pearson:

She was a very quiet person, a very self-contained person, but she had a wonderful sense of humour. She was very good at making friendships with people, which she did locally in Catterline. I think it did give her the isolation necessary to really do her art: gave her the freedom to really work, and she did huge series of paintings.

Ron Stephen:

I mean, if you can imagine her coming into a place that had a pretty serious work ethic to it, she would probably be seen as, 'what's the point in this'? You're maybe in the arts or something, people would say, 'go and get a real job' [laughs]. You know what I mean? But she was maybe just a pioneer. She was early days on that, you know?

Fiona Pearson:

It was Margot [Sandeman] that told me that Joan was reading Emmanuel Kant, the 18th century philosopher, and also that she had a copy of Burton's *Anatomy Of Meloncholy*, and Joan, like her father, suffered from depression throughout her life. So she was interested in the way of thinking about thoughts and feelings in a way that was quite analytical. And I think that she was a thinking painter as much as a feeling painter.

Ron Stephen:

I think she became very accepted in the village, and I think there actually might have been a quiet proudness of her, because she basically went about her business, doing her own thing. And I think people would have respected her because she would be working in conditions, you know, she'd be out there in a blowing gale, and maybe John Watt or some other fisherman would say to her, 'you shouldn't be doing this, lass, get up the brae'. She would just stand there and be in her element in the elements, you know, that's what she seemed to thrive on.

Voice of Joan Eardley:

I do feel the more you know something, the more you can get out of it... The more it gives to you. I don't think I am painting what I feel about scenery, and certainly not scenery with a name because that is the north east. It's just vast waste, vast seas, vast areas of cliff. Well you've just got to paint it.

Ron Stephen:

She would never explain in any way what she was doing. We would have no perception of her standing as an artist, we wouldn't be aware of any of that.

Fiona Pearson:

Hugh Adam Crawford, her teacher who spoke at the memorial exhibition in 1964 in Glasgow, said that she was one of the greatest painters of the century, so she was really admired by those who were 'in the know' in the art scene. She was having sell out exhibitions in London; and she was made a Royal Scottish Academician; she was invited to Buckingham Palace to have an award.

Ron Stephen:

When you see the paintings, I can put my feet in the spot. I can plant my feet where she was. It gives me another insight into what she's got there, which I'm maybe privileged to be able to do. There's no doubt about it, she was something else.

Fiona Pearson:

I think she's a great artist because she taps into the universal themes of childhood, and life, and nature, and so different people see different things. I think with Joan's paintings there is a huge possibility that people will find in them something that really resonates.

Voice of Joan Eardley:

You can't stop observing, I mean you're looking all the time, and things are happening and you're recording them in your mind... I feel it's important to know the people, to know buildings in the same way with landscape. The more I know a place, or the more I know a particular spot, the more I find to paint in that particular spot.

End.