

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

John Byrne

[Duration 6:52]

John Byrne:

I couldnae imagine doing anything else other than the human figure. Landscapes don't really interest me that much. Abstraction doesnae interest me at all and we're complex beings. And I'm the most complex person I know let's face it and we all are to ourselves.

And if we go round the corner here, this is my darling Jeanine with flowers behind her and there's my flowery self-portrait. And this is Robbie Coltrane, which is in the Portrait Gallery; and that had accidentally fallen ontae a front page of the Dundee Courier and stuck to the page and it wasnae mounted at all. So when they got it they mounted it up as it was. So that that was an accidental mounting in a way.

You have them drawn first of all and that gives you a chance for them to speak to you and just ask them a question and then you just set them off because they're slightly nervous when they come along as I am when they came along, but I've got something to occupy myself so they chat away and you're sometimes very surprised by what somebody reveals. Because they've nothing else to do but sit there and I don't say that much because I'm busy drawing them. Sort of teased out and they talk to me otherwise it's very very very boring.

Emily Walsh, Managing Director Bourne Fine Art:

John works himself into the ground and I suspect if it weren't for the restraining aspects of Jeanine making sure that he eats and goes to sleep that he would work round the clock. He's a man that can't say no to

anything, he's incredibly generous with his time and generous with his pictures.

There's a couple of works in here that of course he's done sort of pretty quickly of his children and you can see the intimacy in those. He can almost do as he did with the portrait of Tilda sitting on her scripts he can do it from memory as well, he's so familiar with their faces.

He's drawn particularly to people that he is intimate with, friends, family and also people that he likes and he is very selective about the commissions that he takes on for that reason. He wants to know and like the person that's standing in front of him.

John Byrne:

The intimacy comes from the subject matter and the pure straightforward and honest about the thing you're doing, that feeling will come across and is imbued in the drawing.

The drawing I did of Tilda which is there; well, she was taking the children off to the Gaelic nursery. we were living in Hill of Fearn which is near Tain at the time and it took 20 minutes. I said "hang on hang on hang on!" and I messed up her hair and I had red chalk and a black conte pencil and 20 minutes later she was off in the car with the twins. It was a labour of love, a 20 minute labour of love so it was very short.

This one I hadnae seen for a while. This is in the City Art Centre in Edinburgh and it's a kind of a version of me. I don't really recognise, I mean that's more like me up there, that one there, as I am now. But this was a while ago and it's slightly chubbier, chubby version *laughs*

Emily Walsh, Managing Director Bourne Fine Art:

I think any artist that repeatedly paints themselves there's always the accusation of narcissism and that just isn't the case with John at all. It is self-examination, questioning of why we are here and you can see from many of his portraits that he caricatures himself, if anything he makes a joke out of himself he makes it comic. It's almost self-examination of what's inside; the superficial is of much less interest to him.

John Byrne:

What do you think when you get up in the morning or what do you think when you go to bed? You never sort of quiz yourself and you've got the means to do that, forensic examination of your psyche and your exterior and what that exterior contains. It contains so much wonderful and marvellous things. People seem to skip over that quite lightly, the appearance of people and that's your outward face to their world, I cannae imagine why it doesnae intrigue everybody.

What you have to do is capture the spirit of the person you're drawing and I can see the spirit of all of them.

Emily Walsh, Managing Director Bourne Fine Art:

As time has gone on, his confidence has grown and he's become happier in what he's doing, even though it is singularly different from anything else going on in Scotland or in fact the UK now and in the last few decades.

I suppose what it says about John is that he bucks the trend. He's quite stubborn I suppose in that respect, charmingly stubborn. He paints what he wants to paint, how he wants to paint it and when he wants to paint it.

John Byrne:

It's a very private pursuit, painting and if you're not unconsciously thinking about the whole thing then it's pointless you know; so it is a conversation with your psyche if that doesn't sound too you know..

It goes on and on and on and I cannae put it more pretentiously than that, let's face it. *laughs*