

Brighton Journal

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Artist of the Week: Catriona Millar

By Elizabeth Richardson -
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This week Brighton Journal spoke to local figurative artist, Catriona Millar. Catriona's work focuses on the interactions between people and pattern. Working with oil paint and a palette knife, she aspires to "catch that moment" when the lighting or mood "can change how we see a person so dramatically." Catriona graduated from Gray's School of Art in Aberdeen in 2005 and has since exhibited across the UK, including at the Royal Scottish Academy. She is currently working on a number of commissions from her studio. We discussed how people are at the centre of both Catriona's painting and poetry, as well as the audiobooks she's been listening to whilst working. Keep reading to find out more about Catriona's wonderful work.

What are you doing today?

I paint every day, mostly at night. I find the light is better when I can control it.

Describe where you do most of your creative work.

I have a studio in our flat with a large skylight. Its one of the reasons we bought the flat, it has so much light. It's a Victorian house with large rooms. My studio is one of the smaller rooms but thanks to the skylight I can use a large A frame easel. Its very tidy and ordered and full of things that inspire me. I'm not the sort of artist who gets paint on everything.





What's the most exciting thing you've worked on?

The painting I'm currently working on is always the most exciting thing, even when it's not working, because then there is a problem that needs solving. I also write and that's very satisfying. I write bespoke poetry and that can be very moving. I suppose everything I do is about people. That's my main interest, whether they're captured in paint or words.

What made you decide to become an artist?

I don't think people decide to become an artist. It's something that happens to you when you are young, normally in a Maths class. I remember always being creative in one way or another and I was lucky enough to go to art school twice. The first time I was only 15 and that was in Harrogate, the second time our sons had grown up and left home, that was Gray's School of Art in Aberdeen. I went in one type of artist and came out another. It was one of the best things I've ever done.

What are you currently working on?

I'm working on commissions at the moment and probably will be for the next 6 months. The current painting is one of a pair. It's a family portrait split across two large paintings, the parents are in one and the two children and their little dog in another. The client lives close to the sea so it's in the background of both paintings and when the paintings are hung the horizon and the colours will match up. Last year I painted an entire family, 17 people and their pet dog in separate portraits. That was quite a challenge but I loved it and was sad when they had to go.





What are the key themes in your work?

I'm not conscious of creating or working with themes. People and pattern are my main concerns and how they interact. The creative process is basically a primal urge to reproduce so it seems natural to paint people.

What attracts you to the medium you work in?

I work in oil and paint on canvas. Oil is the most forgiving medium and you can do so much with it, even more so when it's combined with wax. Paint just needs to come off sometimes.

What equipment could you not do without?

My palette knife which I mostly paint with. I have hundreds of brushes which I rarely use. But I like the shape they make when they are displayed in bunches. And probably Alexa as I listen to audiobooks when I'm working. I've recently gone through Elizabeth Strout, John Mortimer and Patricia Highsmith.





Who or what inspires you?

Again, it's people. Faces fascinate me. The slightest change in the light or mood can change how we see a

person so dramatically. If I can catch something near that instant then I'm happy.

How is your work affected by living in this area?

The light is startling in the south and very different to the north of Scotland where we lived for many years and that has an effect on my work, and the amount of different, interesting people. In the country in Scotland, I saw a lot of cows.

What's your favourite thing to do locally?

Walking. Walking on the seafront or through unfamiliar streets, particularly late at night. My husband Roddy and I go out walking every night for an hour a to clear our heads and reset. We're hardy so the weather has to be pretty bad before we stay in. But when we do we play deadly Table Tennis.





**What's your favourite gallery (or place to see/
experience art)?**

The Kelvingrove Art Gallery, but I love the British Museum and the V&A.

If you could collaborate with one artist, from any time, who would it be and why?

I'm not a collaborator I'm afraid. I don't know how people can do that. I'm strictly a solo artist.

What's your favourite colour?

The colour I've just mixed and to my surprise works a treat.

To find out more about Catriona Millar's work, take a look at her [website](#) and [Instagram](#).