

FRANCIS BOAG

SCOTTISH CONTEMPORARY PAINTER

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Francis Boag was born in Dundee in 1948. He studied at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, Dundee between 1965 and 1969. From 1970 he taught in various schools throughout Tayside, before being appointed Head of Art at Aberdeen Grammar School in 1988.

In 1998 he suspended his teaching career to study for an MA (Fine Art) at Grays School of Art, Aberdeen and to concentrate on the further development of his painting.

"The move to the North East signalled a new direction for my work. The quality of light and the configuration of the surrounding farmland drew me to work out of doors for the first time since I had been a student, and I started to draw

what I saw around me. The drawings are essentially linear in character and explore the complex arrangements which occur where the organic forms of nature co-exist with the ordered geometric forms created by man.

Back in the studio I determine the composition of the paintings, and when I feel the main elements are in place, the paintings are coaxed into life, with colour organised and manipulated to evoke a particular sensation or emotion. Sometimes it is simply a time of day or season of the year, but often it is a more subtle mood or feeling which is being conveyed. The response to the colour and the rhythms set up in the paintings should, hopefully, be on a similar level to the response to a favourite piece of music and should directly involve the emotions of the viewer.

With the best works, even the most casual observer should obtain some feeling of pleasure from the recognition of a shared visual experience with the artist."

Since 1968, Francis has exhibited regularly at prominent venues throughout the UK. His work is held in numerous private and corporate collections worldwide, including that of the Japanese Ambassador in New York. In 1998 he was commissioned by John Lewis plc to produce three major large scale works for public display which can be seen within their flagship store in Glasgow.



the Artist

FRANCIS BOAG graduated in Drawing and Painting from Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art in 1969.

His work at that time and for many years later, dealt almost exclusively with the figure, either as a portrait or as an attempt at allegory. While he was often happy with the work on the figure, he seldom felt that he had resolved the problems with



the rest of the painting and still returns to these canvases in an attempt to reach a solution which fully satisfies him.

During this period Frank joined the Dundee Group (Artists) Ltd. and exhibited with them for several years until the studios closed and the group broke up.

A few years ago following a period of



relatively unfocused and intermittent work, several factors combined to prompt a change in direction, and he began to paint small, expressive landscapes, which he was looking to exhibit in commercially run galleries. This proved very successful and provided the encouragement he needed to keep developing and improving his work.

the Establishment

Boag feels that his work should be seen in relation to that of other Scottish artists of his generation. The fire and 'blue sky' ambition of youth have gone, to be replaced by the pragmatism of a more mature outlook. As a student in the sixties he looked toward New York and London, as twin centres of 'cutting edge' Art - Europe was peripheral and Scottish Art was a joke. But in the intervening years he has come to feel that 'the shock of the new' was often superficial and transient, while artists of integrity were working much closer to home. "I would now feel privileged to become part of the Scottish Art establishment which I once disparaged. I have found great inspiration in seeing work by Scottish artists in Scotland."



his Influences

Two retrospective exhibitions in particular has given the artist great pleasure in recent years. The first was a large exhibition of the Scottish painter Joan Eardley held concurrently in three venues during the Edinburgh Festival several years ago. Eardley's northeast Catterline landscapes were shown together in the Talbot Rice Gallery and the Glasgow tenement and childhood paintings were together in the Museum of Modern Art of Scotland. As well as responding to the energy and commitment in Eardley's work, Frank was intrigued by her ability to make compelling compositions with the most unlikely subjects and arrangements.

The other exhibition which had a significant effect on his approach to his own work, was the Alberto Morrocco retrospective held in Dundee in 1994. Morrocco, arguably one of Scotlands most significant painters of the last fifty years, and who originally hailed from Aberdeen,

died in 1998. He was Head of Drawing & Painting at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art for many years and was a teacher of Frank during his student days.

"I recognised many of the earlier paintings from these days but it was the sheer hedonistic joy of his later work which captivated me. His sureness of touch with unlikely combinations of analogous and complimentary colours was something of a liberating experience and, like Joan Eardley, his ability to combine shapes and colours to create a completely harmonious visual experience was something I found very satisfying. Thanks to the Exhibition Catalogues I have been able to revisit both these exhibitions many times, but the experience in print is always much more diluted and less satisfactory."

When pushed on his style of painting Boag will admit to the strong influences of the Fauve artists like Gauguin, Matisse, Derain and Vlaminck and to the closer-to-home influences of the Scottish Colourists, Peploe, Cadell and Fergusson.



his Philosophy

"In my work, I am trying to evoke in the viewer, a childhood memory of a day or a moment or even a feeling. However, in my work it is the sense of pleasure of a remembered day or time or feeling which I am trying to liberate. At present my work uses a combination of visual references, intellectual elements and emotional triggers to try to release the memory."

The visual references that the artist talks about are the trees, cottages and other recognisable objects. The intellectual elements are the sense of it being a 'real'



place, Cookney, Glen Isla, etc., and the emotional triggers are the colours, shapes and rhythmic 'marks' made as the painting develops.

In Boag's current work, he is slowly working toward diminishing the intellectual elements, refining and simplifying the visual references and trying to rely more on the emotional triggers, to elicit a response.

He feels his aim is to make work which will impact on the person seeing it in a sense similar to that felt on listening to a familiar or favourite piece of music.



his Methodology

During the last four years Francis Boag has made around 400 paintings and has of necessity, developed a working method which has succeeded in the situation he has found himself.

"The process usually begins with visits to sites in familiar environments for the purpose of making a visual record, usually a drawing. I have tried taking photographs, but find them too inhibiting. Recently, I have experimented, with more success, using video film, manipulated and grabbed from a computer, but drawing is still my preferred option."

These drawings are usually linear, with perhaps some indication of tone or pattern and form the basis for the composition of the work. Once he has a few drawings, he will begin work in the studio on several very small panels, working quickly and concentrating on the colour and surface quality.

These small panels become the starting point for larger pieces which will try to develop those elements in the smaller panels which he feels have been most successful. If the larger pieces are successful in their own right, they in turn become the starting point for even larger scale paintings. The process can also be reversed with larger paintings being deconstructed and reworked as small panels and then the process starts again.

