

Boundless 2: Connecting

Boundless – Connecting Artists is a unique project which recently exhibited the work of artists

by Michael Prior, former Education Officer, Arnolfini

Building on last year's highly successful first Boundless exhibition, held in London, this year's Boundless 2 was held last month at the Grant Bradley Gallery in Bristol and was curated by artist Claire Wiltsher. It was supported by two leading learning disability charities, Choice Support and United Response, and Artists First, a Bristol-based group.

Boundless 2 presented a huge range of paintings, prints, photographs and drawings and there were many fascinating and beautiful individual works. But it was the connections between works that struck me most; the associations and relationships that are summed up in the subtitle of the exhibition, *Connecting Artists*.

Stories ran throughout this exhibition. In a few cases, an account was told of a whole incident, such as in Brendan Keeley's witty observations and Billy Andrews annotated drawings, but in most cases we saw just one moment in an unfolding narrative. Carol Chilcott's paintings were full of energy and life, as figures struggled or perhaps wrestled. Carol captured a moment, just as a third figure stepped into the scene. Something is about to change this story, but we can only guess at what. Laura Broughton's *Sleeping Dogs* and *Asleep* could be at the end of a story and showed scenes of total comfort and relaxation – almost exhaustion. Lizzie Lane's

My Singing Canaries were a great symbol of the power of singing and of joyful celebration. As Lizzie said in the accompanying leaflet, "They are in a cage and they are still singing" – they refuse to be restricted by their surroundings.

Tom Hodson's drawings could also be thought of as incidents and stood out as one of the first eye catching contributions to *Boundless 2*. The washes of colour combined with lively inked figures and forms. His objects appear spontaneously drawn, suspended in space, flying across the paper and spilling over the surface. In one of them a central figure has a large ear, as though listening out to the noisy active life that surrounds it.

Brenda Cook's painting captured *Liz and Molly*, out and about. Brenda captures this everyday scene in a remarkable, fresh way, one figure nestled in the other. Portraits such as this, both real and imagined, named and unnamed, played a significant presence within the exhibition. Both of Jacky Long's paintings showed the artist with her late partner, Roy. Jacky says these are recalled from memory, a way of showing how close they were in real life. The portrait of her and Roy with sunhats make a remarkable and humorous centrepiece to the exhibition. Nicholas Selway's *Male Face* exhibited a different kind of humour. The face is square and orange, with a perky, cheeky mouth. There's a twinkle in this man's eye's, as though he's about to utter

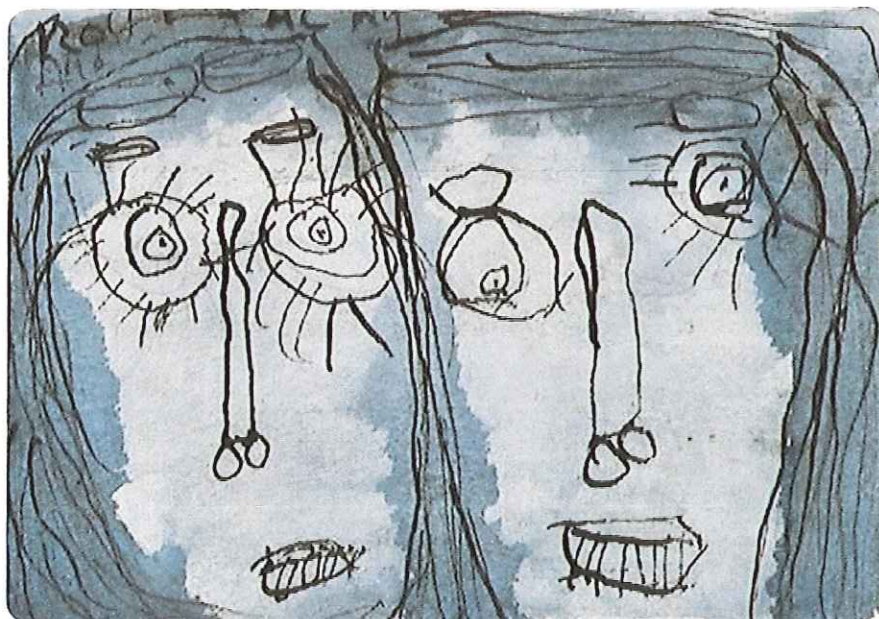


Peter Sutton - *Portrait of Penny in her wheelchair* - watercolour

a joke or witty remark. In contrast, Kerry Day's life drawings focused on the body, attempting to capture the personality without producing a portrait.

In contrast to Nicholas's portrait, Joan Clew's *Yesterday's Face* is deep in thought. Words and phrases shine through from the background, but from the title we are told that this is also a memory, as important for the artist to record and tell people about as Jacky's recollections of life with Roy. In his portrait *Penny and her Wheelchair*; Peter Sutton used a limited number of colours and styles so that the folds in Penny's jumper are in the same style as her flowing hair. It's a wonderful image.

Sarah McGreevy's *Jester* was full of life, dancing with its head thrown back, apparently leaping with mischief and the humour continues in Stephen Canby's *Having a Laugh*. There were also abstract works in this exhibition, showing the great ability of all the artists in their use of colour and form. Claude Rimmer's *Desert Road Signs*, showed mysterious shapes, perhaps of his own devising or maybe inspired by photographs found in books, but certainly a striking and powerful painting. Similar in scale was Joy Reid's *People*, overlapping groups of figures spreading across the surface, each with their individual characteristics, and Dawn Anderson's *Untitled* works were a calm and serene presence. Like the nearby *Harbour* by Kevin Hogan and *Still Life* by Kathy Stewart, the confident use of colour



Jacky Long - *Roy and Me* - ink and wash

Artists

with learning disabilities alongside mainstream artists.

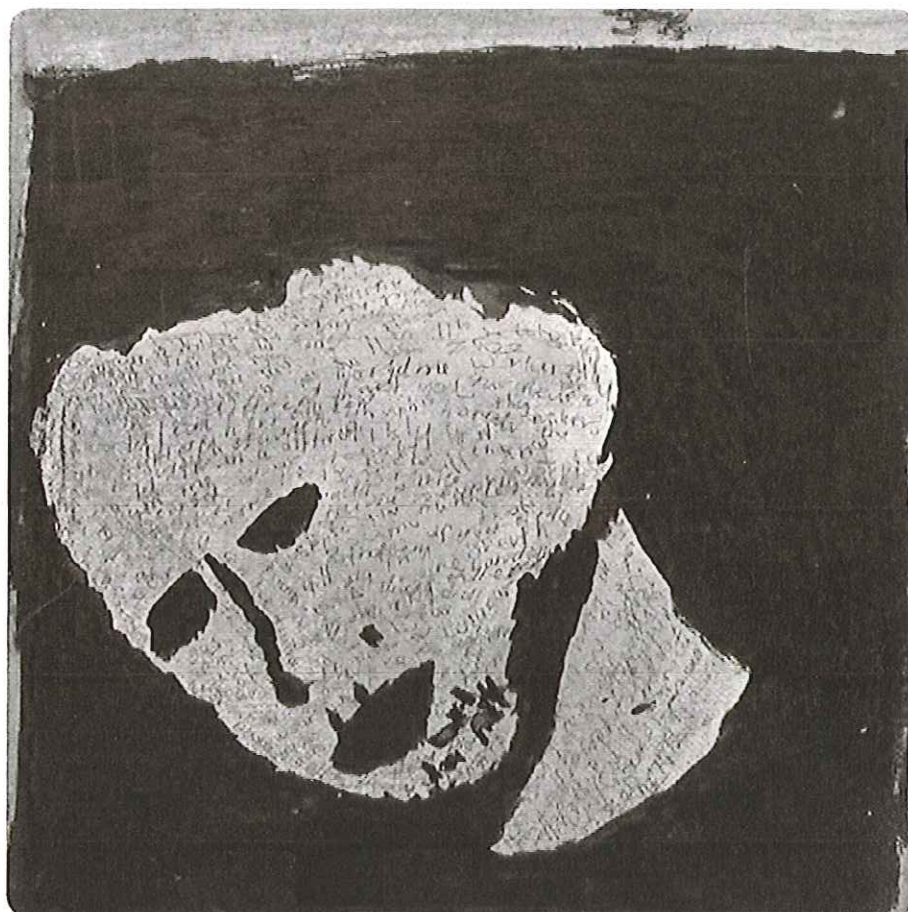
and shape made these powerful, potent and commanding paintings.

With a contrasting approach to abstraction, Ivor Epps used small rollers to make his overlapping and undulating shapes, whilst Tina Kelly's *Landscape* was an abstracted version of what it is like to be in a place, using blocks of colour to great effect. Next to her work were three landscapes by Mark Noble, which were very skilfully painted scenes of calm and still places, empty of people, which made an interesting comparison to Billy Fowler's collages and photographs of nature and landscape.

This was a remarkable exhibition brought

'it was the connections between works that struck me most...'

together by Claire Wilsher, who also showed her landscapes elsewhere in the gallery. The accompanying leaflet was a powerful aspect of this exhibition and in it, Nicholas Selway remarked that 'Art makes you see things differently and that includes yourself', revealing a passion to not only make art but get it exhibited and shown to others. Everyone involved in *Boundless 2* should be congratulated for achieving exactly this.



Joan Clews - *Yesterday's Face* - ink

The Artists' Views

Brenda Cook

It was a great evening, most people were there and it was a great get-together. It was quite a night and I was interviewed by Tim from United Response. It is always important to get our art out there for people to see it and it is very important to get the opportunity to talk about our art. In the past disabled people with learning difficulties didn't get the chance to do that.

I thought the exhibition was marvellous and it was great to be able to meet and talk to people that we knew already and to meet new people. It is great to talk to people about our art. I stood next to my

painting and people came and asked me questions about it.

Nicholas Selway

It is very good to share our art with people, I said to people 'artists first belongs to everyone!' Gareth Chilcott, the ex Rugby player, opened the exhibition. He was very respectful, open and friendly. He was very interested in the artwork. He shook hands with us, really looked at our work. He made a nice opening speech about how he used Rugby to push the boundaries and to express himself and how we all used art to do the same. He was a very nice man,

showed great interest and respect for us as artists and our work.

We thought that it was very important having *Boundless* in Bristol and having a mixed show is great because it does mean you meet new people, you share your art with other artists, you share your artwork with people you already know and people who are new to you.

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For more information about Artists First and the *Boundless* exhibition visit www.artistsfirst.org.uk
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