

Annika Reay our speaker on 13th December



Annika Reay with Weathervanes

Katharine Barker writes:

Our talk today was given by the most extraordinary, talented young woman. Annika Reay not only delighted us with her finely worked, imaginative drawings but told us her personal story with an honesty that resulted in the loudest and most enthusiastic round of applause that I have heard at the conclusion of an AMA meeting.

Annika began by telling us that she is 31, lives in Leamington and has been exhibiting at the Slate Gallery for the past couple of years. She introduced her partner, who sat supportively at one side, and told us that they are about to buy a house in Warwick, where she will gain a studio space, rather than having to work at the kitchen table. At this stage, it was no surprise that her talk was delivered with a broad beam on her face and a strong sense that she was a young woman who knew what

she was doing.

But Annika's story is not one of easy success and she gradually introduced us to a darker period and side to her life. As a schoolgirl she painted with obvious talent and passed round some very pleasing copies of Degas ballerina studies. In 2004 she went to Staffordshire University to begin her art studies and, at this time began to focus on drawing. Her drawing style is one of fine detail, carefully controlled, gradually building up dots to form shading and textures. She spoke of her high level of absorption in the process of her work and how she almost enters a meditative state. At this young age, what she described as an "insatiable thirst for control", led down a dark path to the unlocking of suppressed childhood memories and then to anorexia.

Painfully thin, she became a hospital inpatient for two and a half years, where her desire to draw became "a mirror" and gradually helped her to deal with traumatic events. She showed several works from this time: skeletal female figures in states of anguish on swirling black grounds. But what is so amazing about Annika is that despite all she was going through, she took the opportunity to learn from and assist fellow patients, many of them struggling with drug addiction. Feeling lucky to be able to work through her own emotions by means of drawing, she approached the Warwick art and framing shop, Picturesque, receiving generous donations of materials which she used to help others within the hospital.

In 2010, very under weight, she met Neil Moore and became one of his models. While



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modelling, they had long conversations and this led to a joint project and exhibition dealing with the subject of anorexia. Neil set her challenges for her own work and persuaded her to return to university to complete her art degree.



Replay

Much of Anneka's work is monochrome, or with the barest hints of colour. An interesting snippet of information was that her Grandfather was one of the colour chemists who created fluorescent pigments and, while she did not understand the science, she absorbed his enthusiasm and passion for the subject. Earlier work was carried out using Biro's and pencil, both ephemeral media which either fade or can be erased. She now uses fine line ink pens, often in grey to appear like pencil. This permanence and lack of opportunity to alter work represents her "unadulterated truth". She does not and cannot edit her story.

Anneka admits to continuing to fight anorexia everyday, obsessing about food and calories consumed for much of the time, but she now regards this as her challenge. She says, "I LOVE to draw I WILL NOT let anorexia spoil it". She is fortunate in having built up a small group of friends who provide support and opportunities to talk and to get out into the world. Her talk to AMA, delivered with a confidence and fluency, more normally associated with more experienced speakers, was part of this process. She held her audience in raptures and I am sure we will all follow her career with interest and fascination.

Tammy Woodrow writes:

Anneka's work immediately reminded me of other woman artists' practices like Leonara Carrington and Frida Kahlo. Anneka uses unconscious subject matter by generating paintings by automatic drawing. She makes marks by working in an almost meditative state during which she sometimes just watches her hand move. Leonara was part of the Surrealist movement in the 1930s and much of her work is informed by depicting a world which she visited in her dreams. Both artists also share that they insert autobiographical details and thoughts about female sexuality in their pieces. All Anneka's pieces have their own personal background stories. At the beginning of her career Leonara was convinced like Anneka that she was only making work for herself and that nobody would be interested in buying it.

Frida deals with many of above surrealist elements similar to Leonara's and Anneka's work. They all mix realism with fantasy and explore questions of identity and existence.



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These 3 artists furthermore share that they had to make work in order to continue to exist and to deal with the world; art therapy in its most extreme form.



Frida Kahlo, 1949 The Love Embrace of the Universe



The Poms of the Subsoil, Leonora Carrington (1947)