



Bryan Kelly is originally from Ireland, and paints wonderfully bright and cheerful naive paintings using a “pointillist” technique to add tremendous depth and interest. He pulls together his Irish heritage, his mental catalogue of the textile industry, and the technical knowhow of pattern to weave wonderful pictures in an instantaneously recognisable style that is a joy to look at.

Born in Ennis, County Claire, Ireland, at the age of ten Bryan’s father (an air traffic controller) moved the family to Limerick where the young Bryan was educated in the Christian Brothers’ school. He was uninterested in the arts. Bryan was taught arithmetic and learnt French and Latin through Grammar School, far away from the artistic world.

Bryan moved to Leeds and entered the textile manufacturing industry at the age of 16, starting as a pattern designer blocking out the shapes that would go on to be cut to create a garment. Working in the mills and with textiles, Bryan became interested in clay and began experimenting with it as a new medium. He bought himself a wheel and kiln and taught himself to throw. Buying up a corner of an old building he expanded his hobby into a business, setting up a studio, gallery and eventually a shop. He invited local artists to show their work alongside him. Two years on, flooding of the Leeds to Liverpool canal put a stop to the business, inundating the building with flood water.

After a spell in London, Bryan and his wife moved back to his native Ireland and settled in Wick. There he found himself without a studio and wheel and, by his own admission, was under his wife’s thumb.

She suggested he took up painting and he took himself along to a daytime painting class. His wife, a well respected painter in her own right, suggested he went away, bought himself some paints and started painting from the back and worked forward.

Bryan B Kelly - Continued.

Bryan describes his style of painting as naive and flat, using oil paint in bright greens, purples and rich blues. His paintings have an obvious link to his time spent in the tropics. Colours are in shapes, edged with detail, repeated motifs run through.

Despite this style the pictures are full of depth and texture, largely due to the use of the pointillist technique. Using a small paintbrush, tiny points of paint of varying size are placed on top of each other to create colour. Up to ten colours in each spot build up to create this texture and depth, often on a base of white which gives the light needed to provide depth. Like Van Gogh, depth is created by the size of the points of paint starting larger and disappearing into the canvas as they decrease. This technique enhances the depth in the wonderful avenues of trees and plants Bryan paints in his pictures of gardens and rolling landscapes.

Bryan went on to talk about the process of putting a painting together. He begins with the sky in areas of flat colour. An image from a magazine, a building, gatepost or tree is painted in a central area and builds out from that point. He searches out little pockets of beauty that build up on the canvas in small pictures which come together as a whole. In this way the pictures fit together much like a patchwork appliqué, with the texture of a tapestry, that can only really be appreciated in the flesh (Bryan has a serious need to put your hand out and touch the raised dots of paint and feel the texture). The texture of the paint also fit together much like the block patterns of a textile piece. I felt you could almost put your hand into the picture, catch hold of a piece of it and it would come up and fall together to form a three dimensional shape! When painting, Bryan describes having 'no end in sight', occasionally stepping too close to the edges, risking the loss of bits of the picture to the frame edge.

Using a fresh, bright colour palette many of the pictures are inspired by the Irish landscape. The pictures are wonderfully patch worked, the white low cottages with their low walled gardens. The pattern is repeated where a sunburst shape of striped lawn is echoed in the slats of a white wall. The scene interested is given with small birds, and butterflies, often in a deep red, punctuating the scene. Without a traditional artistic background, Bryan has been allowed to comfortably 'break the rules'. He runs roads directly up the centre of a picture and places buildings centrally, or maybe not quite centrally. It gives a feeling of an initially symmetrical picture, which on second inspection is not so symmetrical. A second road running up one side, sending the picture off balance again.

After completing a number of these paintings at his class Bryan approached the Pig Yard Gallery. They took them framed and asked if there was any possibility of having one of them hung there. After talking with the gallery's committee he was not just offered a hanging space for one painting but was given the opportunity to hold his first solo exhibition there. He entitled it 'Avoiding Reality' and by all accounts it was a huge success with 25 of his paintings hung and with a number of sales.

On introducing himself Bryan commented that he had never before spoken to a group in this way about his work, but he needn't have worried, he gave us a charismatic and engaging insight into his journey from potter to painter. A talk that I thoroughly enjoyed!

As Bryan said at the end of his talk, it's never too late to start something new. Had he not separated from his potting equipment and joined a painting class he never would have discovered the pictures and scenes lying within him. And he would have never have let them out to be enjoyed by us.

Victoria Smith