

# Changing the Viewpoint: Pat Carpenter, Katharine Barker, and Moira Lamont 20th January talk

January 2016 began in style with workshop presentations from three AMA members. Indeed, this report could equally have been titled 'Tales of the Unexpected' – not just because Katharine and Moira were late replacements for one of the listed speakers. Pat introduced a whole body of work, and some insights into her life as an artist, that will have been unfamiliar to many; whilst both Katharine and Moira talked about new projects and new ways of learning in disciplines – ceramics and paint – with which they are not usually associated.

## Pat Carpenter



One of the repeated but never stated tropes emerging from Pat's presentation was her utter seriousness and commitment as an artist, and the extent to which over many years she has been an innovator. A wartime child evacuee, her age and height (she can't be only ten!) meant that she could not find a place to continue her primary schooling, and spent the days instead exploring her new rural surroundings – and drawing, always drawing. This set up a lifetime habit. Secondary school was no better Pat even played truant and continued to draw until finally she was placed in a school of more academic approach, equipping her up with knowledge and skills that led to a professional career as a doctor. Already interested in people and portraiture, Pat's medical studies offered 'another point of view' for her drawings and enhanced her understanding of the human body – an understanding very obvious in her reductionist collages. It is surprisingly unsurprising that her tutors 'borrowed' some of her anatomical drawings for lectures: but failed to return them. It is difficult now to envisage just how unusual it was to be a woman doctor in the early days of the NHS: but in the end one way that Pat chose to counter prejudice was to celebrate her femininity with a flower in her hair, as well as quiet but surely steely competence.

Reengagement with art proved to be a vital antidote to the demoralisation of a move to post war Coventry. Finding and forming groups of likeminded artists, and utilising a disused school in Leamington, the gatherings developed over time into an informal protocollege, with tutors of the calibre of Roger Walker and Simon Lewty, as well as being the seedcorn for the AMA, of which Pat is a founder member. Pat managed her time to have a life in art, as well as medicine – and her art was noticed. There was an unexpected invitation for a solo exhibition in Buckingham Palace Road, London. There was at least one prize from the RBSA – which Pat failed to mention, but the certificate lurked in the gallery logbook that she was finally persuaded to pass round. This provided not just an insight into Pat's own artistic journey, but was a reminder to the less organized of us that we should be keeping our own record!

Pat kept a careful record, too, of her paintings, many of which are no longer in her possession, an outcome of successful exhibitions. There were huge 'nature' studies, infused with energy by means of unexpected viewpoints and understanding of the effects of colour. A monster cabbage was a

## Changing the Viewpoint Continued...

the edge of abstraction. There was nothing here of Georgia O’Keeffe, botanical drawing, or the traditional accomplishments of the Victorian lady. This was Pat’s personal vision, gloriously executed in acrylic paint. Portraiture and the human figure was a recurring theme. What was really interesting was the way in which Pat had clearly looked deeper than the observed form to capture something of the experience of the moment or of the person that lay beneath the flesh. In part this was achieved by way of rapid execution, broad brush strokes, and altered colour: but there was an engagement here that made the portraits, even of strangers, exciting. Pat’s is such a unique voice that it is difficult to draw comparisons: but I occasionally felt a light brush with Wyndham Lewis in his less structured moments. Very different in emotive feel was the flattened plane of an old lady’s conversation or was it standoff? with her pet cat. In a number of these portraits there was another conversation going on, of the artist with herself.

This seems to have been still more true of Pat’s abstract paintings – paintings whose beginnings could almost be described as urgent autogenesis and which, once begun, to some extent found their own way, but whose resolution is immensely satisfying to the viewer. Control came in part from the use of a restrained colour palette and Pat’s innate sense of right composition. Starting points were not necessarily obvious, and superficial serenity could obscure a huge emotional input very personal to the artist. These paintings invite a conversation: but it may be a very different one from that of their creator. And if you, the reader, wanted to know more – well it is one reason why you should come to the talks.

Pat’s still lifes are conversation pieces in different mode, and surely the product of a fecund imagination, as well as acute observation. Some earlier works were strongly reminiscent of Braque and Ben Nicholson, with multiple planes and viewpoints, flattened forms, and unlike either Nicholson or Braque, high colour. This theme continues into later, more monochrome work, using paint and drawing materials and collage, the form still recognisable but reduced to its essence. Collage, occasionally subversive, combined with paint, provided another way of working with the figure. Again the medium is reductive of form, requiring great discipline in the drawing and composition. Yet the result is extraordinarily free, and employs rich use of colour. Small images punched above their size; large images drew the viewer in as if more intimate works.

Like all the best talks, this was a rewarding halfhour that left the audience wanting to hear – and see – more.

### **Katharine Barker**

Katharine began her talk with the words ‘and now for something completely different’ – not just to Pat’s long years of practice and achievement but more personally, a new departure for Katharine herself. One of the advantages of the informal ‘workshop’ presentations is that it gives the speakers a chance to share, in a more intimate way than in a formal talk, their trials and experiments, dead ends as well as successes, and the sheer excitement of artistic creativity and its realisation in a very personal way. Katharine’s formal art training resulted in a career with textiles, and art work based on textiles. A switch in creative focus just over two years ago to ceramics was made almost on a whim – not that textiles have been abandoned, as recent exhibitions have demonstrated.

## Changing the Viewpoint Continued...

It has proved to be a huge learning curve, requiring different skills, knowledge, and ways of thinking, not least in 3D and the use of a sketch book to explore ideas. Moreover whereas textilebased pieces could give immediate gratification and a strong indication of their final resolution, ceramics can be wayward, and the demands of the clay impose a much longer time scale between first idea and end result. Katharine's talk conveyed her huge excitement, the fun she was having in being in a sweetshop of clays, glazes, oxides, firing processes, and new ways of working. There's a freedom in being released from expectations of success – although having reached a level of competence, Katharine is now skilling herself to try and produce work that is flawless to fully professional standards. Current pieces are slabbuilt sculptural shapes at once both complex and minimal, in which forms and negative spaces play off against each other.



For the audience there was great deal of fun to be had as Katharine pulled out trial piece after trial piece that enabled us to follow her evolving thought processes and the paths by which she was finding her own voice as a ceramicist. Even horrible pots could have wonderful glazes with lessons to offer; and creative thinking in using domestic objects to form pressmoulds gave a chance to experiment with form and glaze. Trial pieces with impressed fabric and rubbed colour had a beauty of their own, finding resolution in internal textural surfaces glimpsed by piercings in externally smooth sculptural vessels. These were subtly enhanced with lowkey glazes or raku firing using slips of coloured clay. Katharine paid tribute to the workshop opportunities and courses offered locally at a time when resources elsewhere are being cut. She has also seized the chance to continue her learning in a very practical way, as a ceramics studio assistant at The Ceramics Studio at Ettington. There's an exhibition coming up in the summer!

### **Moira Lamont**

Moira's story, too, was an encouragement to try something new. Her Damascus moment was hearing an interview with the worldfamous sculptor Anthony Caro. Well known for his huge welded pieces, Caro had an idea for a new and rather different sculpture. But it couldn't be realized in metal. His thought for a solution was papiermaché, a material he had never used. But how? The answer – he was going to look for, and indeed found, a course. A great artist never stops learning, and in so doing feeds creativity. Moira offered two very personal examples, both Pandora's boxes with very much happier endings. Wanting to stitch into her etchings, she found Sue O'Grady – thus beginning both a friendship and a very individual way of working. Wanting to renew her acquaintance with paint, she looked for a painting holiday – no domestic duties, just good accommodation, good food and drink, and the opportunity to spend the whole time drawing and painting in a new environment, within a small tutor group. This was a brave decision, as Moira the art teacher became Moira the student, exposing both her strengths and her weaknesses. Looking around, she chose watercolour as a medium, and Morocco for the first experiment.

## Changing the Viewpoint Continued...

Looking around, she chose watercolour as a medium, and Morocco for the first experiment. She returned to Morocco twice more with the same tutor, whom she also followed to Sicily. These hardworking 'holidays' resulted in a whole series of paintings and sketches, some complete in themselves, others to be mined as a treasury of ideas for further paintings and etchings done at home. Moira's skills in selection and depth of composition, in drawing, and in conveying an emotional as well as a pictorial response, were well in evidence. But actually more exciting, over and above Moira's obvious and infectious enjoyment, is the way in which these holidays have triggered and will continue to trigger ideas for new work and new ways of working, from the conventional to left of field thinking such as threedimensional drawings using sand.

All three speakers are notable for having a distinctive voice, and at the same time have allowed their work to change and evolve. To be allowed to share that private conversation over the course of an AMA meeting was both a privilege and a treat.

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