

Charles Harper



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"ART is part of the total person and a way of expressing oneself," claims Mr. Charles Harper, head of the fine art department at the Limerick School of Art and Design.

Born in Dublin, Charles was educated at the Crescent College and the National College of Art and he has been lecturing at the Art College here in Limerick for the past 12 years.

This week a selection of his recent work can be seen at an exhibition of prints and paintings at the Belltable Arts Centre.

The exhibition also features works from Charles's friend, Colin Murray. A friend from his college days, Colin now runs a print studio in West Cork.

"We have 35 works between us in the exhibition and they are all the product of the past two years," said Charles, who now regards himself as a Limerick artist.

He describes Limerick as a lively place now for the arts.

"We have a fair share of artists in the city. And not alone this but these artists show great diversity of taste."

"These artists ensure that

the wide spectrum of different tastes are catered for. And there is an appreciation for this among the people", said Charles.

"The city is a good home for artists. It's the people who are responsible for this," claimed Charles.

"This has a two-fold effect. It improves the quality among artists and creates a better awareness among the general public."

Plans set on Y. York

Charles believes that he rate favourably in comparison to other cities in Ireland with the standard of our artists.

"However Irish artists don't seem to do as well abroad as the inter European artists."

Charles himself has held shows in Switzerland and Sweden and now is planning one for New York. "Holding shows abroad costs money and it's impossible for the artist to finance a show single-handed."

He described both his shows abroad as critical successes but

to be a success it is not only necessary for the paintings to be sold but to be sold to form part of important collections.

Public collections containing works of Charles Harper include the Arts Council, Dublin; The Haverty Trust, The Gordon Lambert Collection, the City Gallery, Limerick; the late President O'Dalaigh's collection, the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art; the Crawford Art Gallery, Cork, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, U.S.A. His works are also featured in various Irish embassies throughout the world including Japan and the U.S.A.

Charles is critical of the lack of State sponsorship in Ireland for artists.

"In comparison to our European counterparts especially England, we are way behind. Increased sponsorship would be beneficial to the country as a whole."

"If people knew more about the culture of a country then it could favour the country on the industrial and the tourist front."

"Look how famous we are for our literature, so it's not just a question of money, the returns would be there," he claimed.

Exhibitions are necessary for the artist and Charles believes that artists shouldn't hide away their work.

"They must go out and show their work but sometimes the outlets for this are not so good."

Charles is extremely critical of the present situation which exists at the City Art Gallery, Pery Square, where the Options Exhibition is currently on display.

"It is an important exhibition but surely somewhere more suitable could have been found to house it for its duration, thus leaving the gallery free for exhibitions and other art works."

"There is an awareness of the importance of art for young children but this falls away when they reach the primary and secondary stages."

"A lot of secondary schools don't even have art on their curriculum. It seems superfluous to many," he said.

"Art is part of the total person and is a way of expressing oneself."

Becoming a broader person

Charles believes that an education at the School of Art and Design does not necessarily lead to a career as an artist but it does lead to a broader, tolerant and more understanding person.

"I see it as an education and not a training for a specific job. We must be careful not to produce people for jobs that are not there."

"We must strive to produce more adaptable and creative people who I believe would survive in the present climate."

Charles dispels the notion of the artist as a Bohemian type figure.

"Artists have become more business like and more organised who can present themselves and their work to the public in such a manner. The romantic notion still exists as some artists like to see themselves in that role."

A founder member of Eva in 1976, Charles is still involved at committee level.

"We held our first exhibition in '77 and it's running successfully ever since."

"It was formed originally by a group of artists but now consists of a cross section of business people, which I welcome."

"That's the way it should be and the art people should get on with their work."

Eva has been regarded as a very successful exhibition both at national and international level and is highly respected in other countries.

Continuing Charles describes Eva as the most exciting show in the country at the moment.

"It has arose some controversy in the past but everyone has the right to question. This is what makes the world go round but people shouldn't get bitter over differences."

Art for Charles is an honest expression of himself. "Whether ideas are whimsical or not art is an honest statement coming from within."

Imagery for Charles is sometimes repeated. He makes frequent use of frontal heads in grid form.

"This perhaps has something to do with my training at the College of Art where we concentrated a lot on portrait painting."

Training for the Art student has changed dramatically since Charles himself was a student.

"We had a set format dealing with specific history, skills and techniques but it has become much broader today with the ideas of the students playing a vital role in their training."

"The function of the college is to help develop the individuality of each student."

"During the mid-sixties the fix rigid training was rebelled against and after many protests, attitudes began to change—these attitudes had to change because the young people refused to tolerate insignificant courses—there are now many welcome improvements but everything isn't perfect yet."

"I would like to see art on the same medium as law, medicine or the technologies. More money should be put into the arts for the sake of the future which would assist the smoother flow of the development of our future."

"Art has a lovely knack of helping the spin off in other areas such as an improvement in the quality of life and potential investment," said Charles, who is a great admirer of the French School at the turn of the century and the American Abstract impressionists.

"One expects certain things from art. Modern art reflects new thoughts, ideas and possibilities but because of the conservative taste of some art followers, modern art doesn't enjoy the success it should."

"If we were to compare modern art to modern technology then we would see how necessary it is—if we had't revolutionised and modernised our technology then it would be backwards we would be going," said Charles who encourages all his students to travel as young and as much as possible.

"There is more to be gained if people become more open. If you don't understand something then you shouldn't just dismiss it."

"I don't believe a painting has to be nice to be acceptable but it must challenge and put forward a question."

"If art was only to please then it would be dead a long time ago."

"Art is a very total expression and is a response to living," said Charles who enjoys reading, films and computers.

"I like life and I like people. My paintings are a response to that," said Charles who is also a member of Aosdana, an artists organisation set up by the Government to honour artists and painters.

Charles lives with his Sheffield born wife, Patricia, in Castletroy. They have two children, Zuelika (17) and Mason (14).

Neither have expressed an interest in following in dad's footsteps but Charles admits that they both have a flair for the subject.

Charles has been involved in over 30 exhibitions since 1966 and he has received many national awards including first prize for an etching interpreting the Dantes Divine Comedy from the Instituto Italiano in 1965.

His exhibition continues at the Belltable until the end of the month.

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