

St Augustine's Centre, Halifax

English for Life in the UK

Season 3 - Episode 9 - Interview with an Artist, Kate Lycett

May 2022

(Music)

Mark

Hello and welcome to the podcast "**English for Life in the UK**". This podcast was set up to help people to improve their English and at the same time, to learn more about life in this country.

In this season of the podcast we have been interviewing a number of people who have interesting jobs or experiences. Today, one of our team, Christine, has been interviewing an artist called Kate Lycett. As she is a visual artist, it would obviously be helpful to see her work, so to do so, you can either look at the transcript for this episode, which will be available on our website in a few days' time, and where we will include some pictures, to show you Kate's work, or you can go to Kate's own website - that is:

katelycett.co.uk and her name is spelt : k-a-t-e-l-y-c-e-t-t

The podcast is produced by a group of volunteers from the St Augustine's Centre, a charity, based in Halifax, Yorkshire where we support, in particular, asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. You can find out more about our work and how to get to the transcript - which also includes footnotes on the more difficult vocabulary and phrases - by listening to the end of this episode.

Meanwhile, here is Christine and her interview with Kate, which we hope you will find useful and interesting.

(Music) (2 minutes:22 seconds)

Christine

I'm very pleased to say that today, Kate Lycett, an artist from Calderdale has agreed to be interviewed. So Kate - would you start please by introducing yourself? Tell us a little bit about yourself and perhaps about your work.

Kate

I am a landscape painter, primarily. I paint a lot of local places. I use inks and water colours and acrylics, and my work is very luminous, and you can usually recognise it by: it always has gold threads and gold leaf in it, which kind of adds a certain something and makes you know that it's alive.

Christine

It does add a certain something, doesn't it, Kate? It's [They're] so beautiful - your paintings.

I thought of interviewing you immediately, when we talked about interviewing an artist, because I like your work so much.

Kate Thank you.

Christine Would you tell us how you started as an artist?

Kate

I started, ever since I was little - typical story - but, I've always known what I wanted to do, right from about the age of 5. I knew that I wanted a studio¹, before I knew what a studio was. And my grand-dad was an architect, so he taught me technical drawing when I was really quite small. I've always been interested in kind of buildings and landscapes, because of him.

And then, after school, I went to art college and from art college I specialised in textile design for a long time. And the lovely thing about textile design is that it's an area of art where you're allowed to create beautiful things, rather than fine art courses, where you might be encouraged to - I don't know - have a message or be *angsty* ... and that's not me - *I'm a rose-tinted spectacles kind of girl, my glass is definitely half-full*². And I see the world in a very beautiful way - so *edgy* art is not for me.

So from textile design, I stayed in Yorkshire to work in the textile industry. The textile industry gradually fell away, went abroad, all the mills closed, and I started selling my work in markets and local galleries. And then I had a family and so I gave up the sensible job - took a risk - gave up the sensible job of corporate textile design, which wasn't very interesting and - yeah - paint landscapes for a living.

Christine Very good. And you now have your studio - as you've always wanted to have.

Kate I do I have an epic studio that I can't fill. It's wonderful.

Christine Well done ... well done.

Would you tell us how you go about creating a picture? I've only seen the final result - I'd love to know how you create that.

Kate

Over the years, I've worked out that I paint places much better, the better I know them! And it's to do with the feeling of a place, the light, the heat, the way it smells, the way the wind might blow

¹ studio - in this context: an artist's working space;

² see the discussion of these phrases in the Language Support section towards the end of this podcast

over certain hills. So I can't ever paint a good landscape just from a photograph. It doesn't work for me - I have to know what it feels like to be in a place.

So I tend to kind of it's kind of familiarity - so it's partly very quick drawings when I'm out. I've always got a tiny little sketch book in my pocket; I have it in my running pack, I have it when I'm out walking with the kids and, literally, sometimes - I have like, one or two minutes to just note something down. Sometimes, if I'm organised, I have longer to kind of sit and draw properly and then I take photographs but in a way, I'm photographing ... that's back-up³ - the main idea happens in a sketch book. And then the photograph is just all the extra bits that you might not have managed to note down. And I'll take a note of things - like, you know, which direction the sunshine was coming from, how cold it was and certain colours that I want to remember even if I'm just working with a pencil - so I'll just note all those down in my sketch book.

And then I might come back and work them up into grander sketches and then, when I work the painting up - I work on water colour paper and I work very loosely in layers of, kind of, inks and watered down acrylics⁴, and I tend to work, starting off with quite dark colours and then building layers up so they ... colours glow beneath colours - so its almost like a ... kind of an enamel effect⁵. There's a lot of richness there.

And there's an awful lot of happy accidents and I don't really know how things are going to end up, until they're finished.

Christine

So you don't start with a plan? You start with a ..

(7:42)

Kate

I start with a plan of the composition - so I know what's going to go where - erm ... but what I don't know, usually, is the colour and the feeling - erm - that just happens on the page and sometimes I might start a picture thinking it's going to go one way and the picture has its own idea and things go another way.

Christine

Very interesting. Very interesting. What are you working on at the moment, Kate?

Kate

I'm currently working on an exhibition: it's called "Whispering Ruins" and it's a gallery in Ripley, near Harrogate and it's an exhibition all about North Yorkshire ruins⁶. And it's been nice because they all have different atmospheres - just capturing the different atmospheres of the different

³ back-up - a secondary support for her primary source of sketching

⁴ Acrylic paint is a water-based fast drying paint often used in the form of a paste

⁵ An enamel effect means a glossy, brilliant coloured, metal-like effect

⁶ Ruins - the remains of buildings that have fallen into unusable states;

places has been really, really nice. And that exhibition starts on June 18th. So, I have ... I've currently got .. I've got four paintings on the go⁷, drying on the floor of the studio - which is why I'm hiding in the mill today, doing prints.

Christine

Uh-huh. Is that quite a rush then? To get everything done? Is there pressure at these times?

Kate

Yes - but sometimes I need a bit of pressure. I think. I need a deadline - erm ... yes.

Christine

And do you frame the work yourself? Or do you ...

Kate

There's a local company - he does all my framing for me. So I will have a batch ready and then I will go to my local printer and we will proof the colours⁸ to do the prints and then they go to the local framer and he will frame them all and he will deliver them to the gallery for me. But it's nice - the gallery owner is an old friend, so I have a lovely working relationship with them - I only work with nice people!

(9:21)

Christine (Laughing) Very Nice. And do you exhibit the original paintings or the prints?

Kate

Oh - I exhibit the original paintings and we sell the prints at the exhibition. But the original paintings are always bigger than the prints so I don't need many, and its quite a small gallery, as well - so there'll be ten or eleven original paintings, at the exhibition. It is a lot of work so I don't paint quickly. And when I say I've got four on the go, I tend to work on them - I work on them all at once, because your drying time with one and you can work on with another and if something isn't going well on one painting, then you can put it to one side and then come back to it later.

Christine

That makes sense - and I suppose if you are building up in layers, you have to wait for one layer to dry before you can do the next.

What would you say you enjoy most about your life as an artist?

⁷ on the go - more usually, a person "on the go" is moving deliberately to get somewhere; when a project is "on the go", it means in progress, being worked on;

⁸ proof the colours - similar usage of the word "proof" to "proof reading" text - checking and verifying the correctness of what is presented; in this context, Kate has to be satisfied the reproduction of her paintings are accurate representations.

Kate

I love the fact that I'm allowed to go out on to the moors with a flask⁹ and a notebook and nobody else and call it work, and have days out, going to, you know, the most beautiful places.

Christine

And what would you say you enjoy least? Are there aspects of your work that you don't enjoy that you just have to do?

Kate

There aren't now because I'm very lucky: my husband - he now works with me to develop the business; so all the bits of the business that I was less keen on, or not terribly good at: invoicing, accounts, website stuff - that's absolutely his bag¹⁰ and really not mine, so I have more time to paint and he does all the technical things that, erm .. yeah - that I used to resent.

Christine Do you think art is important in life? I'm wondering if you get asked that question?

Kate

In some ways it feels quite hard to justify because people are like - I have one sister who is a head-mistress¹¹ and I have one sister who is a midwife and my dad was a teacher. So in a way, my profession feels really decadent. I don't feel like I'm doing ... you know I'm just creating beautiful things - but, on the other hand, I think maybe I am making people realise how beautiful where they live, is. I'm sparking memories - I don't know - I think it's very important to invoke some kind of happy and emotional response in people is very important. That's what art and music is [does] - I think it's one of the most important things. I feel guilty because I think I love my job a little bit and it doesn't have any difficult aspects and my sisters have such sensible jobs.

Christine (*Laughing*) I'm so pleased to hear you say that. What about Community Art? Have you ever been involved in Community Art at all?

Kate

I suppose as far as community projects go - I did something back in 2016, called, it was the "Lost Houses" project. And it was painting Calderdale's lost houses and as part of that - the people that that drew in, I found really interesting, because it wasn't people who were interested in art, it was the people that were really pleased to find that their history had value, and that people were recognising it. So, ...

Christine Perhaps you could explain what the "Lost Houses" project was?

(13:00)

Kate

⁹ a flask is a container which keeps drinks either hot or cold

¹⁰ his bag - something he can do easily; it is not difficult for him

¹¹ head-mistress - principal of a school

Well - West Yorkshire, Calderdale in particular, has a lot of - had a lot of wealth, didn't it? Between, well, kind of, the industrial ...the industrial revolution made a lot of people very wealthy for quite a short period of time. So big textile magnates¹² might build themselves mansions or castles, and then - either their fortunes would fade and the houses would go with them, or they got so rich and so important, that they would wish to distance themselves from the area in which they made their money.

So, Calderdale seemed to have quite a few of these amazing ruins that people didn't really know about - so they're not architecturally valuable, but they are really interesting. The plan was for this exhibition was to paint the grand houses as they were - so full of light and life and really bring them back to life. And people hadn't known about them, at all - they might have seen a very old black-and-white photograph - and I was painting them in full colour, in places that they knew and then telling them a little bit about the history, or the people or the stories.

And the people that came to the exhibition often had memories of the houses or they might have had a mother or a grandmother who was a maid in one of the grand houses or a parent who worked in one of the mills, so they were part in one of the fortunes - so the people that helped the grand mill owner to make the fortune, in the first-place. So that was a community project, in a way - because it brought in people who weren't interested in the art but were interested in the history and they had stories to tell. They wanted to tell their stories and that was lovely.

Christine

How very nice. Is there anything else that you would like people to know about your life as an artist.

Kate

I don't know - the one thing I would say about about me and my art is that I'm not from Yorkshire - I'm from Suffolk in East Anglia - and it's taken me a long time for me to learn to love the quite bleak moors around here - but, erm - just kind of going out and being amongst nature and learning the bird calls, and learning the trees, and learning the names of the moors, that's become incredibly important to me. This is not my environment. Suffolk is flat and agricultural and kind of very safe and up here it's wild and beautiful - but it's taken me a long time to discover the beauty of where I live. So, I want people to know the landscape and I hope that maybe my paintings would inspire them to go and find the places that I paint when ordinarily they wouldn't do that. But we do live in a very beautiful part of the world.

Christine We certainly do. What have been your influences on your art?

Kate

Well - there was grand-dad - as I've mentioned. And then, there was also my Dad - I loved my Dad - and from when I was very little he would read me stories but we would also go through

¹² a magnate is wealthy and influential business person

picture books - and erm ... picture books of, you know, "Great Masters"¹³ - and so I would have certain favourite paintings and get taken around art galleries, when I was little, and then, when I was older, we would go round together - you know, me as a teenager - and just look at the way people had painted things and composed paintings. So Dad was actually quite important to all of this.

And then in terms of artists, the decorative elements come from people like Gustave Klimt. A favourite painter, for a long time, is Eric Ravilious who painted - he died in the Second World War, he was a war painter. Before that he just painted very quiet landscapes - often down Sussex and Essex way - but just kind of beautiful, gentle, very English, rolling landscapes. There's a certain peacefulness about them that I don't think many artists manage to convey.

Christine Aha! I don't know that artist - I'll look him up.

Kate

You have to look him up, he's beautiful. A very sh ... you know a very short life, but very prolific.

Christine

Yes - I will. OK - well, thank you very much Kate - it's been lovely - and thank you for inviting me to see your print-making studio. Because I understand, just before we finish this, as well as this place, where you make your prints - you have another studio, where you do your painting.

Kate

Yes - I have a studio at home. We knocked down an old out-building outside the house and erm ... Now I have a studio attached to the house which is ... it's nice because I've got young children and they can potter in and out - and come and paint in the studio, which they were doing last night, after school. Yeah, - it's nice as a family, we do a lot of making things, a lot of painting things. And so its nice that that can happen at home.

Christine Lovely - thanks very much.

Music (18:25)

Mark: Language Support

This is the part of the podcast where I choose some of the words and phrases from the episode and talk about them. Today, I'm going to focus on two phrases that have a very similar meaning and two words that were related to that, in this episode.

¹³ Great Masters - the artists usually named as the best examples of their periods or styles, and who are still highly regarded by influential people in the "Art World"

First of all, Kate said "***I'm a rose-tinted spectacles kind of girl***" and then she went on to say: "***my glass is definitely half-full***".

So let's take the first one of those - to be .. "to **have rose-tinted spectacles**" - means to be optimistic; to see the good things, to see the positive things about any situation. Literally, rose-tinted spectacles are spectacles, or glasses that people wear for their eyes, and if they are rose-tinted that means that they are a pink colour and they make everything look rather bright and pink. So the idea is that, if you are looking through glasses like that, you tend to see the better things about what you're looking at.

And the meaning is very similar with her second phrase - we say in English that you can either be somebody who says ***my glass is half-full*** or you can say ***my glass is half-empty*** when you're talking about a glass of liquid of some kind. If you say it's half-full - you're looking at it optimistically, positively. If you say it is half-empty, then you are tending to look on the more negative side of things.

Now, Kate was saying that she's a positive kind of person and her art reflects that and she contrasted that - she said "***I'm not angsty***" and later on, she said "***I'm not edgy***". So what do these two words mean?

Well - ***angsty*** means to express anxiety or to display feelings of concern - it's often said that teenagers can be angsty - they're not quite sure how they fit in to life around them. So, artists who are ***angsty*** might be ones who, in their work, try to display those kind of feelings. And similarly, if an artist is said to be ***edgy*** that they're often a bit unconventional, a bit different, and they're, kind of, raising issues in the work that they do. And Kate is saying that's not the kind of artist that she is.

So I hope that's helpful - that's it for this episode.

You can find out more about our work as a charity and how to support us in different ways and you can find out all about the other episodes in this podcast and you will, in a few days, be able to get the transcript for this and all the other episodes.

And you can do this on our website, which is : www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

We'll be back with another episode very soon - until then, take care of yourselves and keep practising your English. Goodbye for now.

(Music) (22:42 - Ends)