

Monochromatic Minds | Pre-recorded talks

Charlotte Hollinshead talking about the late Nigel Kingsbury, who attended ActionSpace

07:22

Hello, I'm Jennifer from the Jennifer Lauren gallery and today I'm joined by Charlotte hollinshead, who's from actionspace and she used to work with Nigel Kingsbury before he passed away. So hi Charlotte.

Hello.

So, if we start, Can you tell us a little about Nigel's life?

07:49

Well, Nigel started working with action space in 2004. And when he first arrived, it was clear that he'd already got an incredibly established arts practice, he was already drawing women, and had a very distinctive unique style that I've not seen in anyone else that I'd worked with before. From the moment, he joined the studio we knew that we'd got someone incredibly special on our hands. And I think there was a sort of sense of relief for Nigel that he joined a space where he could see immediately that his work was valued and that he was immediately celebrated as an artist. And so, Nigel worked with us for 10 years, and before he died in 2016. And through that time, he kind of, you know, he came to us with an established practice but actually we were able to support him to really take it on to a much higher level. And he then became such a highly regarded and valued contemporary artist who sort of navigated between the outsider world and the contemporary art world. And before Nigel came to work with us, I got to find out a bit about his history through his dad, who died a few years before Nigel. Nigel I think had started working, developing his lady drawings in his 20s and his dad had said that he remembers Nigel starting to draw women when he was in hospital. Nigel had epilepsy and spent a lot of time in his younger days in hospital, and his dad said that he used to draw the nurses. So quite cheeky little drawings of nurses, and he would also sit and draw women from the television. So we do have one of Nigel's earliest sketch pads from the 1980s, and which has got lots of drawings from the television so he's got drawings that include Jane torvill from torvill and Dean, and also possibly (name). I can't remember them all now but some amazing drawings, all so what he used to do is record TV programs, freeze frame them on VHS recorder and then he'd sit and sketch them. So his dad was massively supportive of Nigel's art practice and kind of realised immediately that this was a real talent and skill that Nigel had and Nigel was also you know i mean he used to draw in his day centre, everywhere he went he used to draw. But yeah, I think, you know, without wanting to blow actionspace's trumpet. I'm going to blow its trumpet. You know when once he joined working with us. That was when he was really able to kind of become an artist, I suppose,

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and draw big

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go big yeah so everything that Nigel did before that was either in sketchbooks or sitting at a table. So I kind of offered him some big paper and to work up against the wall, and it was thrilling thing that because he immediately just responded to that, you know he's able to scale up really easily. It came very naturally to him. His marks really started to flow, his work shifted those massive ballgowns really kind of became incredibly, you know, wonderfully all encompassing folds of material that just went on forever. This sort of blurred between the body and the and the fabric. fabulous absolutely fabulous but I think it also just changed Nigel. instead of being confined to a table the standing up, you know, the whole physical experience of that he used to love doing a bit of sort of dancing and a bit of excitable jumping with his Drawing work, you know, our studio space was, well is, a very sociable studio space you know we have multiple artists working alongside each other. All valuing and cherishing each other's work and Nigel absolutely loved that. And he loved the fact that we celebrated what he did. So Tuesdays were a massive sort of celebration of everyone's work, Nigel just responded to it really physically he would stand up drawing with real passion and energy. Lots of sort of spontaneous dancing and excitable moments with a flick of his drawing pencil. Yeah, very exciting. I mean I think as we watched his drawings emerge, he wasn't able to verbally communicate easily. He was able to understand everything that we were saying to him but he couldn't articulate his words back to us. So, there was a lot of secrecy around Nigel's work, and he loved that he loved the fact that we didn't always know who he was drawing. Yeah, it was lots of humor around that lots of sort of cheeky lovely moments, you know his ladies would emerge. Sometimes, it was somebody that he was drawing in the room. And, you know, we'd eventually guess, and then other times, he was sort point to his head when it was somebody who was going to always remain a secret. Yeah, it was a real joy watching him drawing because his love for it his passion for it was so powerful. It was such a pleasure for him in creating these women and sharing his love them and the love, the drawing. And, you know, and it just made a really wonderful atmosphere and environment in our studio. So as his, his health kind of deteriorated over the years, which was heartbreaking so that real physicality in his work had to slowly sort of become, you know, it was became reined in because of his of limited mobility. Nigel ended up in a wheelchair the last couple of years of his life. And, you know, ended up sort of going back to smaller work, sort of working on a table he had a table easel so the work could be sort of propped up a bit. And, you know, the quality and the style and the work remained and actually his work still kept evolving.

14:19

Yeah, definitely. Why do you think he was so fond of drawing women like we very rarely saw men in his work did we

14:30

I can't think of any man, I can think of a helicopter, and a car vehicle. And in one of his early books he drew and horse along with a woman, a horse and a woman together. And no, it was all women, and actually, I just remembered now, it's funny because I haven't talked about Nigel for a while so some of this is kind of coming from the deep recesses of my mind. Nigel, the last session that he was with us. I think that he'd been, he was asked to answer a series of questions. I think for the Jerwood drawing prize, and that he got into in 2015. He was asked a series of questions. And one of them was, Why do you like to draw women so much. And we asked Nigel this in the studio and he just fell about laughing. Really because I think it was just so was like obvious you know he was expressing, you know he was a man who had not been able to have relationships in his life, intimate relationships, I think, with women. And this was his way of kind of expressing all of his feelings that he was, who you know those, they were restricted to him in life. So, all his love for all the people that he met in his life that he loved, they all came out in his work. And yes, I just think he, he just found that absolutely hilarious that question because he just thought was really obvious. But yeah, so there we go I'm just going to relay how he responded.

16:19

I can just imagine. So I had the pleasure of sitting and being drawn for Nigel and this image to the right is me, which is now on the wall in front of me in my living room. And it was so beautiful watching him work because he took so much time didn't he making the marks and really thinking about where it would be placed on the page.

16:44

Yeah, I mean, every Mark was lovingly considered every single mark, and he would spend a lot of time looking. And, you know, if something wasn't right he will rub it out. And in his later years when he was not able to rub something out himself, he would get someone else to do it for him, which was always a really nervous thing to do. Anybody who had to do some rubbing out for Nigel because he would specifically direct exactly what needed to be rubbed out, where it was quite nerve wracking. But yeah, I mean he would he would work back into things. And, I mean, his work went through phases of drawing like with any artists so he went through a phase of Doing really kind of punk eyes with really kind of deep worked into lines that came across the face. He went through his phase of doing these massive ballgowns he went through a phase of doing sort of women lying on chaise longue. And, you know, he went through a phase of adding color, and then that stopped everything was very carefully considered but he was really up for trying stuff out

17:53

amazing that he drew these ball gowns because I mean, I'm in a ball gown there, and I was not wearing one!

18:00

Hey, I think you were Jennifer.

He has this sort of set idea in his head of what I think made up a beautiful woman is a very kind of classic Hollywood-esque image of kind of woman wearing you know, a beautiful glamorous dress and being idolized. And I think that we had talked several times about either women sitting for him wearing a ball gown, or using prop or actually having a chase long in the studio, but he didn't want any of that he didn't want that enforced he wanted to look at someone's face, and entirely imagine it for himself how he felt he wanted them to be depicted. I mean, in the last few years of his life he drew his support worker Becky, who had beautiful long straight hair, and he drew her multiple times with high volume hair, big big hair, you know, cant get much bigger than how big Becky's hair was drawn. And It was just brilliant that seeing how he took the real person and completely reimagined them into a highly Hollywood idealized figure. And, yeah, very classic.

19:20

Definitely. I think what I loved, and this exhibition being a really great example so this was a solo show of Nigel's work at the Julian Hartnell gallery that we did with Vivienne Roberts. And what I loved was when he came to the opening so although you know he's mainly nonverbal he was like greeting everyone at the door. And then as soon as they walked through the door he would take them over and point to the red dots and be like, yep, sold that one, and sold that one and it was so wonderful watching him do that because he obviously had this massive sense of pride. And like you said although he couldn't really verbalize it he knew that it had sold and he knew it was going somewhere new and he wanted to like share that excitement with other people.

20:02

Yeah, that was really big. I mean, like I said, When Nigel first came to work with us at the action space studio. It just felt like he'd come home he'd been waiting years to come into a place where his work was really valued was really important that never left, you know, and I think that the sheer pleasure of working in a space where you're valued as an artist is unquantifiable. he loved the fact his work was valued and I'm so pleased that in the last few years of his life, Nigel, you know his, his professional career really took off. And he really got to experience that and see how much everybody loved his work. When he had the solo show through outside in. In, 2012, he was in the outside in, national, yes. So, and then through that he had a solo show, he absolutely loved that whole experience, he completely loved it. He loved the whole experience in the studio selecting the work. And then the exhibition coming together. He was so proud. I mean I wish his dad had been alive to See that moment because his dad knew that Nigel was a special artist and completely supported him in the early days in our early exhibitions he'd always bring Nigel to all the private views, and they'd sit and gossip

and chat together. He'd tell lots of hilarious stories about Nigel's epilepsy, that he had in funny places when he was little and they both sit and laugh and crack each other up with these stories absolutely wonderful. And so I always loved the fact that there was lots of celebration around Nigel's situation, there was not trying to, you know, hide it, or ignore it, or it was totally part of an acknowledgement of part Nigel's disability and his various health conditions. And then the humor that came with aspects of that were all celebrated his dad, it was fantastic. And so yeah, Nigel loved his work being valued and the exhibition that Vivienne curated at Julian Hartnoll was brilliant. And that was a real highlight moment for Nigel, and I do remember I mean he used to do this all the opening events he'd, you know, he'd be definitely looking for new source material in terms of some nice ladies who'd come in, and then he'd beaver straight over to them and get them to come and look at the work that had been sold or the work that was there. And I think that the Jerwood drawing prize. That was the last exhibition actually that photograph Yeah. Nigel's in a wheelchair then as his health was really failing. But even there at the opening event, it was a really packed room, and there was only a few of us who knew Nigel and his work and everyone was busy chatting. So to get a bit of attention, he actually moved his wheelchair over to a lady who was standing with a glass of wine and purposefully banged into her. But she apologised because she thought she'd walked into him but it was all cunning move on Nigel's part. So he intentionally banged into her, and then got her to have a look at his drawing absolutely brilliant. Right up towards the end, even with really deteriorating health, he was still incredibly funny.

24:05

And it was a very rare nude drawing that made it in, didn't it, this one on the screen.

24:10

Yes, Nigel's never told us who that was. He was always incredibly sort of thoughtful and delicate about drawing women with no clothes on. So the two women are in the picture there that's Siobhan with the glasses who works in ActionSpace. And then Rebecca Cameron, who's, I suppose a facilitator who worked with us in the studio with Nigel. Nigel has drawn both Siobhan and Rebecca. Many times, but he was always very careful to choose women that he was doing that he knew he would never overstep the mark there. And, you know, he's very respectful of the dream women that he was drawing, but it was obvious who it was, but then the nude lady in this picture for the Jerwood drawing prize, Nigel never told us who that was. So he pointed to his head, and that was one of his secrets. So his more risqué drawings were definitely unknown ladies. That was his own private enjoyment. You know, and again this the lady who's in this picture here that Nigel's standing in front of this was, this is now in the Pallant House collection, and was in the outside in national exhibition. And so she's one of the larger ladies kind of in a more unusual figure actually for Nigel to draw, and she's quite a large lady. And then she's got an interesting composition with the one arm, that was an interesting one again we don't know who that is. There are lots of love hearts.

25:56

yeah he did that didn't he and wrote Nigel loves or loves Nigel on them.

26:00

Yes, it was sort of his signature entirely. You know, it became part of the whole love heart thing. And they were love letters. giant love letters to all the different women in his life.

26:20

Amazing. So is there anything else you'd like to finish on sharing about Nigel today.

26:28

Oh I don't know really i mean he was amazing. well I think we still really miss him It's been four years since he passed away, and he, you know, he broke some interesting ground as a contemporary disabled artist, and he had a lot of success through the outsider art world but was also starting to get some recognition as a contemporary artist in his own right and sort of outside of the boundaries that can come from being labeled as an outsider or disabled artist. so he was starting to sort of break that mold. a slight shame that we weren't able to sort of see how far we could take it in those terms, but Nigel loved every minute of it. He had a great artistic journey. And I mean actionspace has Nigel's work. A good lot of work that we're keeping in trust. We are hoping to, at some point, be able to archive it properly and cabinet as a collection that could be accessed. And so that work could be loaned out. We're not selling any more work. The plan is to sort of just look after and keep it all as a body together. And so yeah Nigel's work lives on. And we're really happy that it's in lots of people's homes and different collectors collections. That's really cool. And, but yeah, we miss him. He's cool. Look at him.

28:03

He's so cool in this picture. it is such an amazing photo. I love that he still has his sports t shirt on underneath his suit as well.

28:12

Yes indeed, you have to mix and match don't You.

28:20

Well thank you for chatting with me today about Nigel.

No problem.