

Monochromatic Minds | Meet the Artists | Live Artist Talks Part Three
Recorded on Tuesday 21 July 2020

I'm Jennifer from the Jennifer Lauren Gallery, and we're here for the final part of my live artist talks with artists from monochromatic minds. And this exhibition was a pop-up exhibition in London. Earlier this year, that was the largest ever exhibition of artists working in black and white, that are self taught disabled and outsider artists, from all around the world, there were 61 artists in the show. And today we're going to hear from three artists, alongside Vivienne Roberts who's going to be talking about Madge Gill, who obviously is not alive anymore. There's also some pre recorded talks I've done with other artists so if you've been tuning into these, there's some pre recorded talks on my website with other artists that didn't want to do them live.

So today I'm joined by Aradne, Judith McNicol, Zinnia Nishikawa and Vivienne Roberts. And if you'd like to ask the artists any questions, please pop them in the chat box, and I'll ask the artists, as we go along. And this is being recorded, if you want to switch your video off, you're more than welcome to switch off. So without further ado, we're going to start with Mary who goes by the artist name of Aradne, so Mary do you want to unmute yourself.

13:26

Hello Jennie. I wanted to thank you actually for inviting me to the talks they have been quite interesting you know.

13:41

Good. If we start with the question, can you tell us a little bit about your upbringing and your life, and when you came over to England.

13:51

Yes, sure. Okay, well, I was born in South Africa in the 1950s. My parents had gone out there in the late 40s. My father had a job in Johannesburg. So we lived on the outskirts of Johannesburg and obviously in the 50s it was nothing like it is today. It was very isolated so we lived on a fruit farm. So, my life was quite isolated. But I actually enjoyed the fact that it was like, you know, it was impossible really to have friends close by so basically it was my life was around, enjoying the farm you know walking around very freely you know my parents were very liberal about that in some ways quite naive because it was quite a dangerous place, in many ways, you know, but I'm quite grateful actually because if anything you know i could sort of enjoy the atmosphere of South Africa, you know, lots of darkness about it but at the same time it's such a beautiful place so you know I feel really blessed. But I had my childhood there actually. We didn't have TV or anything like that you know so it was purely about just enjoying what was your surroundings, you know, there are a lot of animals, you know, on the farm we

had animals, peacocks, chickens and cows and canaries it was, it was brilliant, you know, and so basically, that was my life really just being a part of nature in a sense you know just enjoying the kind of wildlife out there, but also the dangerous aspects, you know, because my parents I think were quite naive about the dangers, and when I look back I think I was quite lucky to be here today because seriously because so many things happen but, you know, parents today would be really mortified, but I'm actually grateful they gave me that kind of experience without realizing it you know because I think, and also being alone. You know I say that in a positive way I think it's good to be alone because I think, you know, as you get older, too, you can appreciate being on your own. So all those things contributed to me, I think, who I am now you know so it's good. So we came back in 1963. I remember it being a very cold winter. Yeah, I wasn't used to that, you know.

17:29

So these drawings, we can see on the screen you call them, not drawings embroidery, you call them thread drawings. So, when did you start making these?

17:42

Well, in 2009, I went in for a competition which was sponsored by the Henry foil trust. And it was a competition that had a theme of freedom. And for the actual entry I decided to do some figures on Calico. It was, I'd kind of, I won't go into the details of what I did, but basically there were figures, which, when I first started doing the figures they were done on Calico in black stitching. Yeah. But as time went by after that I developed a new way of doing them which was more embroidered and used different material rather than the Calico because I couldn't get a sculptural effects which is what I wanted you know what I wanted the figures to be slightly 3D. I'd like things that are slightly sculptural. Yeah, so that's what happened.

18:48

And then before you were doing these thread drawings, what was your art like?

18:50

Well, I would say I've spent my whole life making things. I think I went to, you know, I was more into textiles, but I actually did go to college and did fashion. But I think it was the wrong course because when I did actually apply to college I didn't do a foundation yet was quite unusual. The college I decided to go to for some reason, said well you can go straight into fashion and being at that age I was sort of interested in fashion, but on reflection I think if I'd done a foundation year I might have done something like sculpture or something. Yeah. But, you know, the good thing about the course it did have textiles as part of it. Although my degree was in fashion, which I actually ended up hating you know I went into industry and hated the whole thing, the way people work was really cutthroat and although I was lucky enough to have a job I just couldn't stand it and I eventually left. I kind of set up on my own a bit and do

knit wear for a time. But that sort of faded and then I just spent the rest of the time trying lots of different things I did millinery, which I was quite successful I made you know I made a lot of hats for women for Ascot. You know I got into that, again, it was sculptural and I think when I think about it, I think that's what I've always liked you know something that's slightly 3D. So, all these things I think have helped you know with the work that I do now, in their own way. Yeah, definitely.

20:40

can you explain how you make these pieces like the one on the screen now?

20:47

Okay, well I don't actually draw anything it's literally I start sewing on a sewing machine, a domestic sewing machine. So then, they're never drawn out because I can't, you know, to actually go to stitch a drawing would be hard for me - I can't do it because the machine goes quite fast. But when I started developing these, I decided to stitch them on a very fine fabric so it's on it's actually stitched on nylon with a net backing because you need the threads to sort of grip onto something sort of like a tooth so the net acts as a kind of tooth for the thread. The good thing about thin material is you, the thinner it is the more threads you can you can actually embroider into it. So the figures that are actually embroidered on this very fine fabric. And I make them up, I sort of individually stitch each figure, and then cut them out and reassemble them, and then apply them to a soluble fabric background which I get rid of, you know, I put it in water and it creates what you see in the way of the background with the threads. So, you know, it's good. I can stitch the figures first and work out how I want them to look and then add the background afterwards. So that's basically it really.

22:19

And this piece that you had in the show that was more 3D with the figures standing up, what was the idea behind this.

22:28

I got interested in Phantom islands. I did one for a show called the environments which was another one, and I got interested in the whole idea of these islands that have disappeared. But were on maps in the 1800s for instance you know, so this one was about an island called tech dunne I think it is. I read about this island. It was probably mythological, it was situated off Ireand. in this particular story. It was an island where souls go after death. So I just felt this one, you know, I've done these figures and I felt they suited this whole theme so I use these figures and called it the colony of Lost Souls because I just felt that was the way for it to go my, the other one I did was another Phantom Island, which was bought by Brazil. Again, you know, it was on maps in the 18th century, you know, it was actually so they've obviously disappeared

with all the like a lot of islands that do disappear is now. So that was that's how I got to do these, you know that.

24:02

This is a photo of your work to the left, that's currently hanging in Finland. So can you tell us what the shows about?

24:11

Yes. Well, basically, it's art from the margins you know sort of marginal art. I'm not conventional artist, using unconventional materials, really. I always think of it as people who just love making things and have found a way of working of medium that maybe no one else has done. And that's the way I see it, but I'm really, you know, I'm really happy to be in this exhibition, because some of the work looks amazing I mean I haven't had a chance to see it, but I'm hoping to go over. As soon as I can, to actually see the exhibition itself, but I'm really happy about being part of that, and I particularly like the way they put my work with this other artists there you know

25:05

yeah it looks great. And a few years ago you had a solo show in Chichester at the merston gallery. Yeah, that was your first solo show.

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It was, I was absolutely terrified but it was so successful I couldn't believe it. So, that was fantastic. You know, I couldn't believe how successful it was going to be you know. Well, you know, I'd never done anything like this before really and didn't know how people would react, but it was fabulous. It really was and, yeah, sold out, really.

25:58

Pretty much, yes It did

26:00

it was such a boost to my morale you know I think if you're very unsure about your work you know that couldn't have been a nicer Opening, and made me want to carry on you know.

26:13

So Mary my final question. Why do you like to call yourself aradne?

26:21

to be honest, when I started it was the fact that I felt quite shy. If you are unsure about myself as an artist you know and I kind of hid behind a name. It was an opportunity to hide behind a

name, you know, and in some ways I'm glad I did because I actually think that names can have an importance in your life you know. I don't think Mary is same. I think Ariadne says a lot more and it does sum up the kind of the sort of the way I work you know, which is web like and it was actually a misspelling of Ariadne and Ariadne, which are both Greek. Ariadne is the spider that spins webs and Ariadne is the goddess I think. The myth goes that somebody stood with a thread and the mind at all there's some, I can't remember the whole story but the both of them have a connection to thread. And that was the reason I thought of that name but it was also to kind of hide myself behind because I felt very unsure about myself, you know, it came as a big surprise, I could be successful really especially with textiles, because often textiles don't have the same kind of successes as artists you know as if you like paintings. So, that was good.

28:09

Great. Well thanks for that Mary. Yeah, mute yourself, and Judith if you'd like to unmute yourself.

Can you hear me.

28:24

Yes, just to remind everyone they can put questions in the chat box if you wanted me to ask anyone any questions. Judith Can you tell us a little bit about your life?

28:59

my life. Well I was born in London in, 1948 so just after the war, really. Yeah, and was brought up by very intellectual parents who were either absent from our early lives, but they let us be hugely creative and as mad as we wanted at home. We were often on the streets wanting to play. And they were off changing the world. they had a very strong sense of social justice, and they were fighting and campaigning and working for the greater good of society. So, that was also instilled in us, growing up. Yeah. And so I was, I guess searching for Who was I really and where did I belong. And as a child I really wanted to be an explorer, trying to understand where I belonged to understand the world and the universe and I developed a passion for geology, astronomy archaeology and being creative, like I was always painting and making things. But the passions I had were all to do with worlds that had no people in them, or they were dead like in archaeological sites. So for me it was always much safer, not to be in society with human beings in it. You know, if it was rocks were much safer emotionally than anything else. And so fast forward a few years, I was teaching geology, at a university, and after some years I became quite ill with M.E., and became bedridden. And it was while I was bedridden. And during the night when it was so peaceful and no interruptions. That tranquility, that I got my pen, my rotary mapping pen and started just drawing, letting the pen just go wherever it wanted to go and a new freedom came to me, instead of having to map what was

actually there in the world. I was able to just discover something else. And what I discovered was that I'd spent all my life, focusing on the outside world, trying to find where I belonged.

this is one of the very first drawings that I did. this showed to me that the area that I neglected was my inner self. And what was going on inside, not what was going on outside in the world. Yeah. And what this symbolizes, I think I call it the heavy city. And this heavy city represents the outside world of being completely soulless, that's what I felt, empty meaningless, heavy and soulless. And there's me underneath, being crushed and I felt now I understood why I was getting ill. As it was time in my life, because here are my senses, that it was my spirit that I ignored and had been crushed. And the two parts of life that are still in that drawing is these weird fish coming up from underneath the water. And I think this is like the unconscious, saying, what about me, you know, this wildness you have to explore. And the other part is that galleon in the center of the picture. Getting out towards the sea.

And right on the top of the crow's nest is a figure who was called herelder, she's the Herelder woman, the pioneer, like a pilgrim, and she's trying to guide me out to freedom. So because I didn't know that at the time but looking back, I realized that that's what it was about

33:31

just zooming in, there she is.

33:51

So she is actually leading me on a spiritual journey. This is what I discovered when I wrote a piece and lots of my drawings over the years, and yeah actually in some novels I wrote as well when I was ill. So she's been a really important figure in my life.

34:15

So this is one of the drawings from the exhibition that you called drawinks, do you want to explain why you call them drawinks?

34:23

yes, I can't think why not. This is a simple form of describing ink drawings, why would they not be called drawinks.

So, this drawing is called the true nature of dark matter. And it's subtitle is despair and hope. And what happened was that about that time of 2005. There was a lot of debate in society and in public domain, about the nature of dark matter in the universe. And I was still ill at this time. And I thought, they don't know what they're talking about these scientists. Well, the true nature of dark matter is, is the sorrow and grief, and torment, that we are each carrying within us. where does that go surely THAT IS WHAT CAUSED forms of Dark Matter around us and within us. And so, this is the only picture that I've ever done where I sort of I had a sort of vision beforehand, of a web covering the universe. So all these little tiny cells, representing the

torment that each individual is trying to bear. And usually the line I draw joins onto every other line. I guess one long line that just has a life of its own. and it connects all the areas of despair. And right through the centre is this channel going into my head. And these are the little embryos of hope, which arise spontaneously, and they're not actually connected to anything.

So I think seems there seems to be a theme and a lot of my work is about how do we manage to bear both the distress and the hope.

36:53

And this is quite a large piece isn't it Judith?

36:55

oh it's about three foot by four feet, something like that.

37:03

Someone's asked how long is this piece took you to do.

37:11

It took me 10 months

Wow!

37:13

I think I'd left the university by then of course, and my farewell present was a huge drawing board, a draftsman technical drawing board so I was able to fill the whole of the drawing board with a sheet of paper. So it was a great, actually. Yeah. 10 months.

37:35

What pen Have you used here?

37:39

I've used my rotary pens but the thicker lines, I think would have been my felt tip pen, which is a uni ball type pen.

37:57

in 1999, you set up artesian, which was a charity while you're in Scotland, do you want to tell us about this charity?

38:09

Oh, yep. Can I talk about this picture first?

38:19

I would just say that one of the other themes in the drawings, is about having a voice, and how, when you're really traumatized or distressed it. Many people like myself, tend to shut down and try and hide behind a mask so this figure on the left is the figure who is hiding behind a mask. And so the characters behind the mask are all trying to find a way to have expression to have a life, instead of being trapped inside that being.

And the mouth is closed. On the right hand side is the self, that can actually start speaking up and expressing feelings and from the eyes comes all that grief. Well, so it's about looking at the two parts of the self really discover. Like the drawing is telling me, this is what it's like. This is where I am in life at the moment. So it's a kind of a map of where I am, how it is for me in that moment.

39:53

It's very powerful when you start to look at all the details.

39:59

Yes. Because a lot of emotion, I think. And if you look right at the very bottom you can see herelda. She's actually on a pilgrimage. With an animal, a dog I think.

40:21

Brilliant. So do you want to tell us about Artesian now.

40:27

Yep. I was living in Edinburgh at the time. This was the end of the 90s. And I was part of an art project being run by art therapists and psychologists, and they put on exhibitions, and I was in some of their exhibitions, and then they planned a new exhibition called new discoveries. I thought, hold on. Who's this exhibition about is it about the therapists, or about the artists, and I raised this with the organizer. I felt that all the artists in the exhibition, were there to be studied as sort of objects of medical arrangement. As if we were all patients of some asylum. And some of the titles of my pictures were lost, and the organizer renamed all my pictures without ever re-contacting me and they were all complete nonsense. So I got really angry. I had a bit of a Row, and I left and I felt so terrible.

But, you know, I felt really lost. And I went to bed for two or three days and then in those two three days by my anger became channeled into something else, saying what about the voice of the artists, what about us. And what about hearing our stories and empowering ourselves to run our own projects. And so that's what I did. I got in touch with quite a few other artists and having been a geologist, I came up with the name of artesian like an artesian well to represent the upwelling of creativity and passion, and artwork, and the voice coming up, so it's about the voice. And from then on, it's absolutely fantastic we had 70 artists in the group across the

world. Quite a few of the artists in monochromatic minds had been in artesian as well. Yeah. And we had our own gallery. And we had a series of magazines, which had an international reach. This was a sister magazine to raw vision. It's got heart and soul, we actually did seven editions of it. we also did a monochrome exhibition and a book, which we called black tide.

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yes I had this on the side in my exhibition.

43:34

this is liz Parkinson's drawing on the front. So we met through Artesian, and I met cathy ward through Artesia and lots of wonderful artists. And we had artist gatherings where we all met and played around and created little drawings in the moment. And so that was absolutely brilliant. And really important. Helped artists across the world really to feel they had a voice, and that they were being celebrated. And unfortunately we ran out of money of course. I wasn't willing to spend time that I could be doing drawings. I wasn't willing to give up the time and effort to do fundraising and it all sort of imploded in the end. Yeah, it was brilliant while it lasted

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and the gallery was in Edinburgh wasn't it?

44:36

Yes it was. One of the other members had inherited some money when her mother died, and she put it towards a rent of renting a lovely little gallery in the centre of Edinburgh, when it was terrific became a sort of hub.

44:58

Christopher's asked what type of paper, do you draw on?

45:02

I usually use bristol board because it's lovely and smooth, and it's quite rigid.

45:11

So your newest piece in the exhibition was this one that you finished just before the exhibition didn't need you. Can you tell us about it?

45:22

This one I did earlier this year. And you can see herelda out there right at the bottom.

45:38

Oh yeah.

45:41

what I've discovered on this in a spiritual journey of mine is that I find a stronger connection to spirit of some kind. And on top of all my ancestors. In the right hand corner is a benign spiritual presence. And I think this is something that's helping me manage the darkness and the distress.

The figure in the centre is really the most distressed figure there, and she's sort of trying to reach out and she's actually sending a little child. I don't know if you can see sort of just beneath the divine figure on the top right hand corner. There's a little child. what she's doing this woman in the centre, is sending that child to be blessed, so that it can recover. go down the picture, and out through herelda out on that boat, just to safety and the future. so until I finished that I realized there's actually a narrative in this picture which I've never had before. Hmm.

47:17

I didn't know any of that. So thanks very interesting. And this one's a lot smaller than that first one, isn't it, these are A4 right?

47:32

Yes, it's partly time what time constraints I have. Because actually, I could go on finishing and extending that drawing forever. There's actually no limit to the drawings, except the edge of the paper.

Oh yes, and because I had to finish it in time.

47:53

And is there any final thoughts that you'd like to share with us before we move on to the next artist.

48:09

Well, I think a lot of artists, perhaps look towards their work, to heal and to find answers. And my sense is what are we all getting from the artwork, I'm getting a map of this is how it is. And that's enough. Because when we do the next picture. We've changed a little bit. I think healing might come from a different source, a different pathway.

48:46

Definitely.

48:48

Amazing. And I just thought I'd say thank you, Judith gave some money towards the book for the exhibition so just want to say thank you for that.

49:02

Well, my pleasure. I think it is the most wonderful enterprise. And you are one of the few people in the world, with the vision, passion and energy, you know to devote to outsider and self taught artists.

49:21

Great. Well, Judith, if you could mute yourself, then thank you very much. and then Zinnia if you'd like to unmute yourself.

Zinnia, Where are you joining us from today?

Florida.

49:51

Lovely. Probably much nicer there than it is over here in the UK.

Okay, so you're in Florida. So would you like to tell us a little bit about your life and your upbringing.

50:31

I was born in China under the ruling of Mao. So, I witnessed a lot of bad things. So when the country opened up to the world. We learnt totally different from what we were taught earlier schools. So, yeah, that made me interested in going to see the world. I left the country, in 1987, to come to America. Since then, I've lived in many places including New York, Hong Kong, and a short period of time in Russia, California, where I lived for 19 years before, North Carolina, and Florida.

Wow. Yeah. Amazing. And so what took you to America in the first place.

52:11

I came as a student.

52:16

So when you talk about your art you say that you discovered your drawing abilities by chance. So, what year was this? And can you tell us exactly what happened.

52:28

It was around 1994, so I discovered that ability during a random session. normally I would only doodle draw eyes. Not bad, because I didn't know anything about drawing or doing any kind of art. That day, I'm in my head. My hand is starting to go on its own and do something totally unexpected. I was looking at oh this is cool do I just do that. Yeah, It was fascinating to watch,

I mean to experience it for the first time. So, I continued to do that. I had a free time for the next couple of months before I stopped completely for over 10 years.

53:37

Why did you stop.

53:40

Because my life change, and I actually forgot about it.

53:48

Unfortunately my all my earliest drawings or were lost after moving so many times.

54:00

And you've got no background in art Have you. when you started doodling, you know you haven't done art in the past have you?

54:07

I do like what most people would do if you're bored in the classroom or talking on the phone. Yeah, mindless drawing but usually I would for a lot of times, write sometimes one to 10 numbers. That was it.

54:32

So this piece on the screen now this was one that was in the exhibition so do you want to tell us a little bit about it?

54:39

Ah, the hard part was to talk about my art. I don't know how I do it. I mean, I don't know what they mean, I don't. When I start my work it is very random. I don't know where you are at all. There seems to be unrelated elements, and then. Yeah, I think it's like a playing puzzle game, you don't really know why that piece is there. As the whole thing progresses. It all connects so that is my art. But I don't really know. As it happens, I don't know why that line is there on the margin. But as I continue, it just comes together.

55:54

I guess that's the same with this, this is another one in the exhibition as well. You said to me that you believe your subconscious mind is the force behind the drawings.

56:07

Yeah, that's what I believe. I have to debate because I'm not an expert on this. why I think it's from my some conscious mind. Um, prior to my discovery of my drawing ability. I had been

practicing a type of meditation for several years. . So, I think it could be possible that frequency, or energy wave. During the meditation somehow triggered my art. I am not in a trance when I draw. My mind is completely here I'm awake. For example, I can chat and have a conversation at the same time or listen to a podcast. Yeah, I can stop and start whenever. I stop to get a drink of water, whatever. So it doesn't require a certain state of mind. I'm always here I'm aware. Yeah. Many of my early drawings Carry personal messages from me, which I think it was from my subconscious mind of the reason why I remember, I started this. In, 1994 was because that year something major happened. And prior to that incident. I received a message from my drawing and faith later on when that happened, I was so shocked to see it. It is scary. Things like that happened recently. Over the years of hard, hard times in my life. It helped me to go through the challenges. Sometimes I see the warnings, and I would prepare to handle certain situations accordingly. Also, I feel that it has therapeutic power.

59:01

Yeah, I think a lot of people would agree with that. So you mentioned that you listen to podcasts, Do you listen to any other music or anything when you draw as well?

59:17

my husband likes to have music on, so music doesn't bother me, but It doesn't make any difference to me, whether or not it is on. Occasionally I would sing my own melody with unknown language. Yeah, I do that.

59:43

Someone's asked if you draw in pencil is that correct.

59:49

Most of the time. Yeah pencils are my favorite, especially this grey colour. These are my notebooks I spent most of the time drawing on my notebooks. Yeah.

60:18

Do you take these around with you or do you keep them in the house and just draw in them in the house.

60:38

Sometimes I use coloured pencil on my on my drawings. But because these are portable, I could just take them even when we are on a road trip, so I would sometimes in a hotel. So yeah, that's what I do with them. Most of my spare time is to draw on my notebook.

61:12

This one's quite different isn't it with this face kind of coming through in comparison to the rest we've just seen.

61:22

When you look at the different drawings and when I use different media. They are totally different styles so this, this is like a typical pencil drawing. Yeah. This is ball pen or ink pen. I see if my mind seems to now to adjust it accordingly based on what I use. And also on the canvas, this is pencil.

62:37

So one final question, you say that you don't know how your hand is going to be guided. So how do you know when you think a piece of work is finished, and which way up, it should go.

62:50

Usually, when, when my page looks complete and my hand, puts my pencil down. That's when I know, but more often than not, I just feel okay I'm done with this. So, when I'm not in the mood to continue anymore, so many of my drawings looks very obvious that it's unfinished. But I don't want to go back and pick it up. Yeah, I would just start another piece,

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and how do you know which way round to put the picture?

63:28

These ones are quite obvious. but say some of the other ones. You can turn it because I draw from all directions by turning the paper constantly. So, usually, most of my pictures don't have a certain orientation. Okay, it's up to the viewers to decide what they want to see.

64:09

Well thank you for chatting with me today zinnia. and now we're going to bring on vivienne Roberts, who's the curator and archivist from the College of psychic studies in London, and she's going to be talking about madge girl. So, Vivienne if you'd like to unmute yourself. So, Vivienne, you're a big fan of madge gill and you have a website on her.

64:43

Yes. She's a bit of an obsession.

64:46

So do you want to tell us about madge for anyone that doesn't really know anything about her?

64:52

Yeah madge was born in 1882, in Walthamstow, which is sort of East London, and she was actually born on the high street so if you go down there. Now you'd be able to see a blue plaque that marks the place that she was born. But the home that she was born in was a family called Leakey, and they were her foster carers, because madge's mother was sent to them, and had madge, and then left madge there and she went back to the family who lived in in the West End of London. So she's sort of kind of abandoned madge, which is sad, but madge was paid to stay there by her grandfather, and Uncle William Baxter eades. So madge was there for several years, until William couldn't afford to pay for her keep anymore. And at that point, she was actually taken to benardos children's home in barkingside. And it's a shame actually because none of the family wanted to sort of take her in. And if you look at the family set up, they were living in West End, and the grandfather was a caretaker of a synagogue there, but he was living with quite a lot of his children, I mean he had nine children. One of them died, quite young, so But on the whole, there was, you know, five or six living there who were grown up, and they had quite good jobs, they were stockbrokers and dentists and bank clerks, but they didn't take madge in, so sadly much was taken to the children's home and she stayed there for a few years. And then became part of the Canada trip where the children were sent out to Canada - underprivileged children for a better life. And so she was sent there. She was careful out there, she didn't have as hard a time as many of the other children, but she hated it. And as soon as she could get back she did. She arrived back around, 1900. Around that time. And she actually moved straight back in with the Leakey family. But at that time she made some contact with her real family. I don't know whether if so much it was the mother but particularly with an aunt. So there was a connection. But she was a lousy machinist for a while but then she eventually became a nurse at whipps cross hospital, which is in Leytonstone and around that same time, the grandfather died. so the family moved down to the west end and they all started to move around where madge was. so they were living in South Woodford, Upton Park. So kind of the family were in the same spot but I wouldn't say that she was close to them. But what's interesting is that through her aunt, She actually started a relationship with her cousin. And she actually married him in 1907, and by that time she already had a child with him. He was born just a few months earlier so Laurie was born, he was the first child, and she went on to have another two boys and one girl with Tom, but it was not a great marriage, from all accounts, it was okay to start with, but I think then things got quite stressful, and particularly after the First World War, but anyway she had Laurie, as I said, and then Reggie was born in 1910, and Reggie is the one that died of the Spanish flu. In 1918, and that really was a turning point for Madge, I think it affected her greatly. Her health suffered massively at that point, actually in that period, she was ill quite a lot. She had various miscarriages, and after that time she ended up in bed for two or three months at a time so you know things weren't that easy for her. anyway she had Reggie and after he died, she started to suffer more and more with her mental health. And it was a great worry to her husband and he actually tried to seek help for her. I think it sort of came to a head one day it was around, I think 1920 she actually talks

about it being 1919, but looking at her medical records, it was 1920, and she had this urge to go into her garden, and she was singing Home sweet home at the top of her voice, and she went out into the garden and she looked up and she saw Christ on cross. And angels in the sky. And that was the moment for her she came back with this amazing energy that she started to create constantly. she would sing, she would play the piano, she would draw, she would knit, stitch, weave. You know, you just could not stop her. And I think, you know, the sons actually got quite used to it, they ended up starting to write some of their own stories and it was through inspiration that was going in that house at that time. Yeah, but it really affected the husband and he looked for help for her and they found the most fantastic person, it was Dr. Helen Boyle, and there was a hospital in hove, called the lady Chichester hospital for women and children. and it was very early on, for treating early nervous disorders. She was a pioneer in that. And I don't think if madge hadn't gone to that place I think there would have been a different story. But she went there and she recovered in three months. And she had a great time there you know by the look of the records. She carried on her newfound spiritual work while she was there. she was reading people's characters she was speaking in tongues. She actually tried to understand these drawings she sent them off to the society of Psychical Research and to speak to them about it because he was this lady talking in these strange, strange languages and he was writing these streams of consciousness, and these biblical texts, and she was drawing phonetically so they just sort of dismissed them really as being a bit inspirational and madge was discharged I think April 1922. So that was the kind of start of her new journey. she felt Well, she moved into her aunt's house, so she was living there with her children. And one of her other cousins, which was called Bert, he just set up an Astralogical society, which is astrology. So in that house already you could see that there was a real kind of interest in esotericism. So I think, also, I meant to mention that after nine in about 1921 match had a miscarriage, which was the girl that she'd always wanted. So, that happened you know just before she went into hospital. So that was another kind of double whammy with the son Reggie dying as well.

But from 1922 she turned a corner, and she talked about Reggie a lot, and she mentioned the daughter in her in her writing, but she actually carried on with her artwork. And I do think that was therapeutic for her. So she would carry on working in it, she would see lights, she would see, particularly gold, there'd be colors illuminating while she was drawing. And she would draw at night. I mean, at this point, also she only had one eye because in one of her many illnesses she'd actually lost an eye. And so she was just an amazing woman, I think.

73:56

Definitely. So this is one of her Calico pieces. Do you want to tell us a bit about her works, we've seen some postcards and now this Calico?

74:07

yeah the postcards, are you know what people often think of when, when they see her work and because there's so many out there there's thousands out there in the market. And, you know, they are so wonderful like little gems, they're actually smaller artworks in their own right and they're beautiful. And they're all of the different styles that she used, which was which was huge, the variation, and she could do the postcards 40-50 in an evening. And she also worked on larger card, and she actually said that she could create sort of 20 of those drawings in a week. But it was it was the calico's where you're kind of astounded when you look at them. And today, not many of the huge ones exist. So, I think, you know, newham Council have got one of the 34 feet ones – yes this one. which is an amazing piece of art and but there were a lot more of those. I think Sadly, many over time will maybe cut down or lost. But she would work with these mesmeric beautiful forms, lots of geometry, you can see there the checkered staircases, but then floating in these incredible background where these faces, these faces of women normally staring out and just anyone, enigmatic women who, who could be many things you know they could be the daughter she lost, they could be her, they could be the mother, they could be many things. And she didn't really go into much detail of her drawings about trying to describe them. We know she was guided by a spirit guide called myrninerest, and even that is sort of open to you know who was myrninerest. And so, originally when she first started to draw. She said that it was by a high priest, it was a man who was helping her and he was from ancient Babylon. And later on, you didn't hear so much about him, all that he actually was myrninerest and they labeled him myrninerest. Other people can look at myrninerest and think well it's my inner rest which means in my place in my solace. Or it could be my inner rest, which is sort of you know the deepest part of her, and I think people like Roger cardinal kind of like that definition where it was sort of coming from her deep within, so that that really are quite interesting. I mean she didn't mind about scale, she wasn't scared of any of it. She just said she couldn't leave off. And she would work sometimes I think something like 10 meters would take a couple of weeks of this Calico, which would be used in Indian inks and normal inks and colored inks, the cards would have splashes of paint sometimes she'd dip them in oil, and they would bleed the ink and it gave them much more mysterious look. And so she was just, you know, a force really.

77:33

It was amazing that she never saw these Calico pieces in full until she like put it out in her garden or they went into an exhibition because she could only see a small portion of their time yet it all flowed together, didn't it

77:46

yeah that's right i mean laurie, he set up a contraction where she could unroll it. she'd go to the local market and buy a roll of Calico, and he would set up this contraction where she would roll it out a bit at a time. Sometimes they were rolls of paper as well not just calico. But, yes, you're right. I think that often she wouldn't see them until they were hanging in the exhibition that she

entered into every year at the Whitechapel Gallery. Sometimes, people would be standing or her family would be standing on chairs, and they would roll them out for visitors. And then other times like the time I think of one of the photographs of the garden with it in. That was for the photographer, so he could get an entirety of one of her works. So yeah, they were huge. I mean I think she did three in one year for the exhibition at the whitechapel. And I think the following year she only did 1 and her son had a message to give to the organizers saying 'sorry, Mum didn't have as much inspiration this year.'

79:02

Well she said she'd never sell them because they weren't hers to sell.

79:09

That's right. She really believed in myrninerest, and she believed that they belonged to the spirit world. She didn't think that it was her right to sell them, and she wanted them to be seen, but she didn't care about being sold. she wasn't interested in the market, but she was very interested in them being seen because she thought somebody else would be able to interpret them. She thought they were the brains out there that knew about ancient languages and knew about the esoteric symbols, and they would be able to read her words and she believed that they would give clues to what happened in the Garden of Eden. That was what she thought. So, it must have been very brave of her to just to put these works out there. And I think she was offered to do commercial shows but she had no interest. And one of those actually where she did have to put a price on one of the works was... She was invited to participate in the wars, the Second World War, for the artists aid, Russia, which was an exhibition that was held at Hartford house which holds the Wallace collection and madge sent in one of her large drawn rolled papers. I think they only could show 15 feet a bit. And she put the thousand pounds on it which was the most expensive artwork in the entire exhibition and bearing in mind that that exhibition had Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Paul Nash, you know, she was there, right there, and the most expensive work. Obviously we can look into it, that the higher you put it. The likelihood it wouldn't sell. so yeah it was her way of keeping it I'm sure.

80:57

So this is a very rare man postcard isn't it?

81:01

Yeah, this is. We don't even know of very many with men in it. One of them is Christ. One of them is of an something else, and then got this one, which is actually on a postcard size. Looks like it's a sort of a military uniform, but I don't know. we don't know anything about it but I love this one because it is so unusual.. And some of the others that you have shown, which are kind of more masculine or ones which have lots of ectoplasm. That is the line drawings which are really quite ritualistic.

81:46

So whilst you've been working at the College of psychic studies, you've released a special light magazine with a special edition focused on that. And you seem to unearth a few interesting facts in your research, do you want to tell us a couple.

82:04

I was quite concerned that madge was always been talked about in outsider circles, and it's true she should be in there as she's a self taught artist. I was really concerned that Maybe her spiritual side was not being represented when people were talking about her and it's as if that she kind of dabbled in it. And so I set off on a journey to find out if there was more to madge, you know, Was she a spiritualist? And actually that came through that she was, and some of the things that we found. I found was that she had her first ever exhibition, for example, and that was in 1923. And that was in Belgium, and that was at a spiritualist Congress. That was the first time that Her work has been shown exhibited, we know that I think she exhibited in a local spiritualist church, but this was a much bigger exhibition, she was being seen with people like Marianne spore bush, who was also a spirit artist that had started around the same time as madge. And she was never looked on the screen and outside, she was much more, you know, she'd held massive exhibitions in beautiful places in New York, London, so she was a different kettle of fish to actually madge. what I loved about finding out this bit of information was that Arthur Conan Doyle was in the audience, I thought that was lovely. That he was there, he was there to lecture on spirit photography, and he would have been introduced to Madge's work, she wouldn't have been there but he was introduced her work. And one of the other I think that we found that the family were very connected. As I said that her cousin which is also her brother in law. He was a member of the Theosophical Society and madge was also a member, the son was a member, so that was kind of a nice tie in.

but the one of the things that was lovely to find was another name for she called herself khamastra in the 30s, late 30s. And at that point, she was offering to do people's astrological charts, and she would sell them I think for about five shillings. And so, I'd love to see an original one, as I've never found one. But we found the adverts of her saying that. I think that's a quite interesting thing because a lot of people talked about all she had home circle she was doing seances but we didn't really find much proof of that. Apart from the distant family have mentioned it a couple times. So I think it's possibly true, but I think it would have been very difficult for her to have made money that way because at that time. If you were accused for any reason of being a fraudulent medium, giving a seance and charging, then you're liable under the witchcraft act of breaking the law. And so, I think by her moving towards more of the astrological side, makes complete sense, and I think you're looking at her artworks you've actually involved in that you can see references to planets and many astrological signs in her work so I think that that was very important to. Definitely.

85:44

Well, we have come to the end of the time, so thank you very much Vivienne. And thank you to all the other artists for sharing so honestly with us about your work today. Thanks to everyone for tuning in and if you've been part of all three then thank you so much. And if you've missed any, the rest are on my website, and this one will go up on Thursday. Just to remind that there's pre recorded interviews on there to listen to as well. And there is still the book if anyone was interested in the book. So, I hope you've all enjoyed hearing more about these incredibly talented artists, and enjoy your evening, and thank you so much.