

An afternoon with Adrian Wiszniewski

'I LIKE PAINTINGS' – AN AFTERNOON WITH ADRIAN WISZNIEWSKI

If you think modern artists are too full of themselves, your opinion might have been changed by the entertaining talk given by Adrian Wiszniewski at the National Gallery of Scotland last week. A funnier, more self-deprecating, down-to-earth man you could not hope to meet.

Adrian was in conversation with Senior Curator Patrick Elliott to celebrate a new exhibition of his work and the launch of a monograph by his friend Alex Kidson. He is known for his huge and colourful figure paintings, which combine everyday life with images of fantasy and myth.

✘ Born into a large, and largely non-artistic, family in Castlemilk, he recalls being fascinated by pictures of paintings and sculptures in the only books in the house, a set of encyclopaedias – (the only colour plates were of the Royal Family – 'I had a close acquaintance with Prince Charles from an early age.') His mother, when asked what he should draw next, replied:

'Draw me a five pound note and see if we can spend it.'

After an initial foray into architecture, he applied to the Glasgow School of Art Painting & Drawing course, and was accepted straight into second year. He remembers that time as one of great freedom and tremendous creative energy – students had carte blanche to do what they liked, and learned from one another. In third year, he studied mixed media and conceptual art, working with fellow students Steven Campbell, Ken Currie and Peter Howson. He and Campbell staged their own show, 'borrowing' the refreshments from the rather more affluent fashion department.

The 1980s dawned; the arts were taking off in Glasgow. Adrian felt he had nothing to lose by trying a career in painting ('a great job because you can sit in front of the telly all day, 'thinking' ') He had no money, and had to abandon the use of oil paints because he couldn't afford them. His first painting after leaving college, 'My Jewish Brother', was rejected by the Scottish Society of Artists. It is now one of his most celebrated works.

There followed a decade of rapid success, with exhibitions at the Compass Gallery, Third Eye Centre, Tate and MOMA. Most of Adrian's work from that time has ended up in the public domain, an outcome that pleases him greatly. He acknowledges the influence of 'hard core' conceptual artists like Bruce Nauman and Bruce McLean, admiring the wit in their work.

✘ By the 90s, with a young family to support and again short of money, Adrian began to work with distemper because it was cheap. He also recommends compressed charcoal, 'it lasts forever', and has experimented with paint pads as a change from brushes. He draws and re-draws his subjects, but then 'just paints', often not knowing how a work will turn out until it is finished. Simple as he makes it sound, his work is full of complex imagery and symbolism – the purely decorative is not for him. He paints such huge pictures 'because you've got to hog the space.' Every exhibition entry costs money; it's cheaper to submit one work and make a big impression.

Bored with developments in the late 90s art world, Adrian took a residency at Liverpool's Walker Gallery – here he relished the opportunity to develop his own work without the pressure of selling, and later designed everything from rugs and wallpaper to a tower in Hamilton and even a Dundee car park. Damien Hirst was now in his ascendance, but for Adrian the corporate values of the Cool Britannia scene were unacceptable; he wanted to remain engaged with the real world. Always looking for new ways to express his ideas, he also writes poetry, plays and books, and will 'have a go' at most

things. A recent interest is nature, particularly flowers.

After a very informative and enjoyable hour, Adrian was off to the Dovecot Studios for the first sight of a rug he has designed. In the evening, his new exhibition opened, and will run at the Open Eye Gallery until 23rd April. He is clearly a man of many talents, but also that rare thing in the art world, a man with both feet on the ground.

Open Eye Gallery, 34 Abercromby Place EH3 6QE

'Adrian Wiszniewski' by Alex Kidson, Sansom & Co, 2014, Bristol

Submitted by [Rosemary Kaye](#)

