

Artlink exhibition – A Year Out

✘ Edinburgh-based arts and disability organisation, Artlink, is pleased to present an exhibition of drawings and paintings by Jenny Richardson – A YEAR OUT at the Royal Infirmary Edinburgh.

The series of paintings on display was made by Jenny in her sixties, drawn from memories of a year away from her family in a hospital for polio affected children in Edinburgh. Jenny was then four years old.

We all have different ways in which we document our experiences. Some of us will draw, others write, and many of us will take pictures and now more often than not we will share these on Facebook or Twitter. In essence, the arts are a tool of communication, both in terms of what we can make sense of and what we can't. The arts can give us a new perspective on our experiences and provide new opportunities for understanding.

Over many years, Artlink have worked with patients and staff to encourage their involvement in cultural and arts activity throughout NHS Lothian. We realise that this work not only creates positive involvement, we also know that it supports better communication and contributes positively to recovery.

Jenny was inspired to revisit this time in her life after seeing an installation in the Irish Museum of Modern Art by Illya and Emilia Kabakov, titled "Children's Hospital". The bleak antiquated ward in the installation threw Jenny back to her own time in hospital, and slowly memories emerged and came to the surface as she began to work through this series of paintings.

The first paintings recall Jenny's early childhood in Tripoli,

where she moved from Scotland when her army doctor father was posted there in 1949. Her memories of the glorious technicolour, sounds and smells of her new home in North Africa are captured vividly – the turquoise sea, the joy of the Mediterranean garden and its creatures, and the allure of the coast, all full of wonder to a small child.

It was here that Jenny contracted polio, and with no special treatment available in Tripoli, it was decided she should return to Scotland to have treatment in the Princess Margaret Rose Hospital in Edinburgh. Suddenly she was alone in a cold hospital, far away from her family, where she would spend the next year receiving treatment to help her walk again.

The subsequent paintings recall the isolation Jenny felt as a small child, orphaned in the long cold hospital ward, strapped to a board for months, with only the patient in the nearest bed for company. She remembers the daily struggle of being forced to eat porridge, occasional visits from her granny from Perth, and then slowly the rehabilitation exercises in the swimming pool and learning to walk again with her calipers.

The complete series of drawings and paintings beautifully capture Jenny's personal vision of this experience, and in revisiting these memories Jenny has come to realise she now has more energy and general wellbeing.

Jenny Richardson has worked all her life as a painter. She studied drawing and painting at Edinburgh College of Art and since then has lived and worked in Scotland and Ireland, having made her home on the Beara Peninsula.

Submitted by [Vanessa Cameron](#)

