

Festival Breakfast Club – Breakfast with Joan Busby

We started the day off with the second of the Edinburgh Art Festival Breakfast clubs this morning held at Open Eye Gallery. Mezzo soprano Joan Busby entertained us with her wonderful singing and Christine Gough played the virginal which artist John Busby gifted to his wife.

He had hidden away in his studio, secretly painting the sounding board for the instrument there with birds, making it one of the most original gifts imaginable. Busby painted both birds and landscapes during his career, and the exhibition at Open Eye shows both with the largest and most prominent being Twelve Winded Sky. It is typical of his work as it is a bird's eye view of a landscape. Mrs Busby explained that the painting had been commissioned by the Bradford Education Board and had hung in a school in Doncaster for many years. She marvelled that the Education Committee at that time had money to spend to put art in schools. There is a catalogue of paintings bought by Edinburgh Council in 1970 as part of the exhibition.



Joan Busby PHOTO ©2019 The Edinburgh Reporter

The couple met in Edinburgh when John Busby was a member of staff at the Edinburgh College of Art and Joan was studying pharmacology. They were both in the Edinburgh University singers, at that time led by Herrick Bunney who was organist at St Giles Cathedral for 50 years. She was accompanied by Christine Gough who played the virginal this morning – an instrument which sounds a bit like a harpsichord. They were married in Middlesborough and the University singers travelled there to sing at their wedding.

They both enjoyed watching cricket, playing tennis and enjoyed a similar sense of humour. She said : “I didn’t quite understand at that time quite how central to his life bird-watching was. I knew he was a committed and serious artist but one day he stood her up for a dance at the Art College. On that occasion that he was marooned on the Isle of May due to the weather, and the boat could not pick him up. I found myself on my honeymoon in Norway crawling through a ditch all to search for a particular bird. In time John became well

appreciated as a skilful illustrator of bird books where the birds seem to leap off the page. His birds are always in the process of doing something.”

Other paintings in the exhibition are those of an oasis in the desert where he captured the intensity of colours. John Busby had a sabbatical term in Jordan. Mrs Busby explained : “In those times it was a great experience for John. He came back and distilled some of the things he had seen into these ‘distillations of landscape’. He wrote of the saturating light deepening quickly at sunset to form vibrant strata of colour. He also felt very small in the emptiness of the desert and these things inspired him in the desert.”



Joan Busby entertained the audience with her singing and was accompanied on virginal by Christine Gough

PHOTO ©2019 The Edinburgh Reporter

There are previously unseen paintings all held by the artist's estate showing his passion for panoramas and bird's eye views.

The exhibition explores the relationship between form and

content, the shape colour and compositional energy of these works expressing a much deeper level of contemplation.

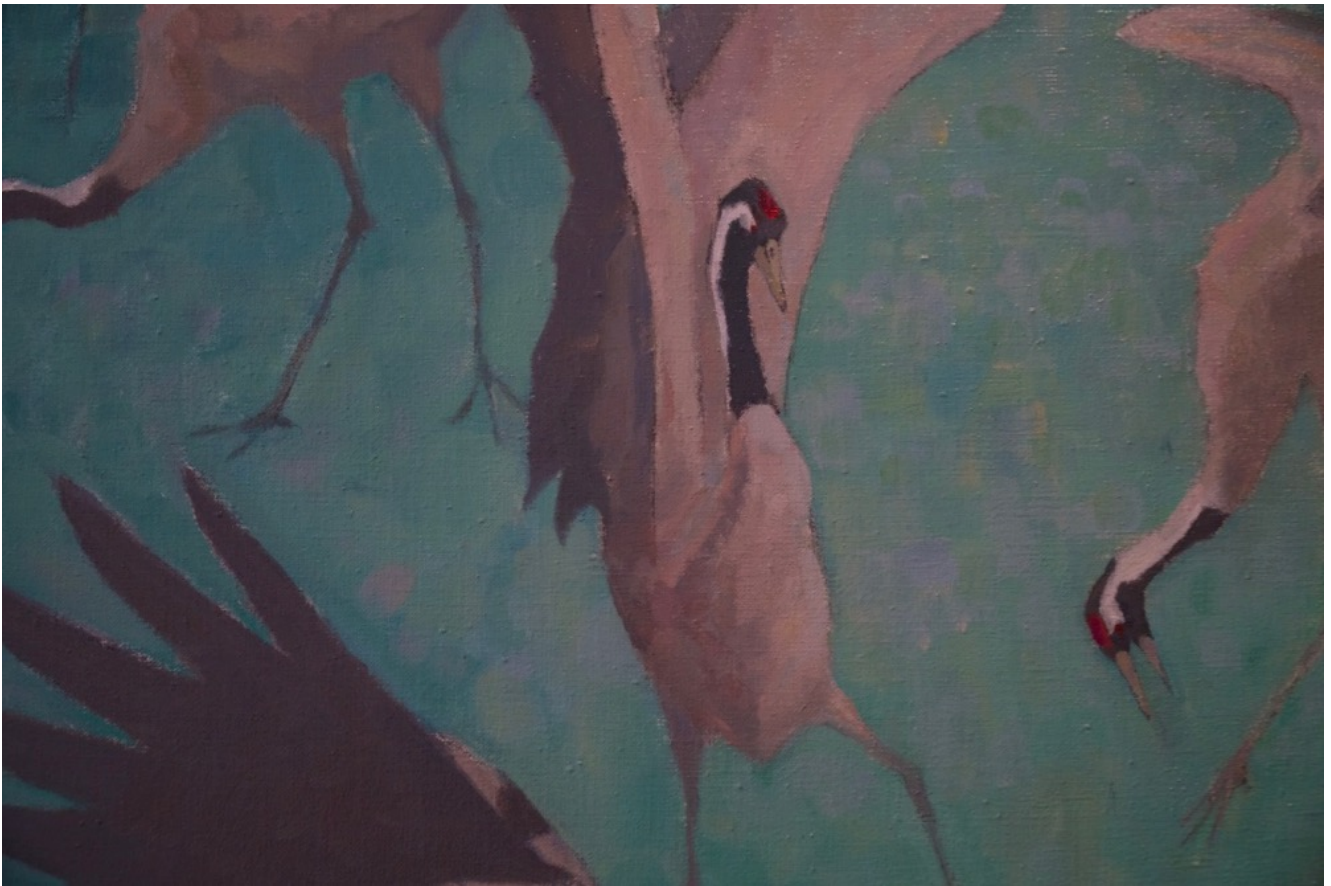














Small informational label for the crane painting.



Small informational label for the abstract painting.



Artist, writer, teacher and naturalist John Philip Busby was born in Bradford in 1928 and attended Ilkley Grammar School. After National Service, he studied at Leeds College of Art and then at Edinburgh College of Art (ECA) where he was awarded post-graduate and major travel scholarships. On return from France and Italy he was invited to join the staff of ECA, where he taught drawing and painting from 1956 until 1988.

In 1959 he was commissioned to paint the mural Christ in Glory in the Scottish Episcopal Church, St Columbas-by-the-Castle situated on Johnston Terrace, Edinburgh.

Here we speak to Joan Busby about that commission :

A delightful start to another Festival day with beautiful singing from mezzo soprano Joan Busby and some stories of her late husband the artist John Busby [@openeyegallerye](#) She told us about the mural in St Columba's by the Castle too [@secsynod pic.twitter.com/iDLG4rlBS6](#)

– *Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter)* [August 15, 2019](#)

There is one more breakfast club on 22 August 2019 at Arusha Gallery on Dundas Street. Call 0131 557 1412 to book your place.