

AG07: Agallamh le Iain Urchadan: Ealain

Interview with John Urquhart: Art

Presenter: Sarah Cruickshank



SARAH:

Cuide rium an-dràsta, tha Iain Urchadan às na Hearadh, a tha a' dol a dh'innse dhuinn mun ùidh a th' aige anns na h-ealain. Fàilte, Iain. Nise, inns dhuinn, cuin a thòisich d' ùidh anns na h-ealain?

IAIN:

Tha mi a' smaoinichadh gun do thòisich m' ùidh-sa anns na h-ealain gu math tràth na mo bheatha nuair a bha mi na mo ghrioban beag anns na Hearadh. Bhiodh bràthair mo mhàthar, Dòmhnall Beag Bhòirseim, bhiodh e a' dol sìos chun na tràghad, 's bhiodh e a' faighinn fiodh a sin a thigeadh a-steach air a' mhuir agus bhiodh e ga thoirt suas chun na bàthach a bh' againn air cùl an taighe agus a sin, bhiodh ùird agus sgeilbean agus locairean agus sàbhaichean agus a leithid aige, agus bhiodh esan a' cruthachadh rudan le na pìosan fiodha a thàinig a-steach air a' mhuir, agus bha iad uabhasach feumail, ach bha (iad) ealanta aig an aon àm, agus bha e uabhasach math air a bhith a' peantadh rudan cuideachd, ge b' e rudan air an suidheadh tu no preasaichean no dorsan no geataichean no rudan mar sin, agus bhithinn-sa air mo bheò-ghlacadh agus bhithinn-sa a' suidhe ann a shin agus bhithinn ga choimhead, agus bhiodh e fhèin an uairsin, tha, bhiodh e a' cruthachadh chladheamhan dhòmhsa airson a bhith a' dol a-mach na mo ghaisgeach. Agus dhèanadh e sin le sgian agus bhithinn dìreach a' suidhe agus m' anail a' fàs uabhasach domhain 's mi ga choimhead agus e a' dèanamh seo biorach 's deiseil, 's an uairsin, dh'fhaodamaid an cleachdadh.

Cha robh esan ach ceithir bliadhna deug na bu shine na mise, 's bha e uabhasach math dhomh, agus mar sin, tha mi a' smaoinichadh, tha Dòmhnall Bhòirseim a' chiad rud, a' chiad fhear a thug buaidh orm.

SARAH:

With me now is John Urquhart from Harris, who is going to tell us about his interest in art. Welcome, John. Now, tell us, how did you become interested in art?

IAIN (JOHN):

I think my interest in art began at a very early stage in my life, when I was a little boy in Harris. My mother's brother, Dòmhnall Beag Bhòirseim, used to go down to the beach, and he would find wood there that had been washed up by the sea and he would take it up to the byre we had behind the house and there, he had hammers and chisels and planes and saws and so on, and he would create things with these bits of wood that had washed in on the tide, and they were very practical, but they were artistic at the same time, and he was awfully good at painting things too, whether they be things you would sit on or cabinets or doors or gates or things like that, and I would be fascinated and I would sit there and watch him and he would then, he would create swords for me so I could go outside as a hero. And he would do that using a knife and I would just be sitting there breathing more and more deeply as I watched him while he sharpened them and got them ready, and then we could use them.

He was only fourteen years older than me, and he was very good to me, and so I think that Dòmhnall Bhòirseim was the first thing, the first person to influence me.

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IAIN:

Ach an rud eile, thòisich an teaghlach a' ceannachd ... tha ... comics dhomh, agus bhiodh e a' còrdadh rium uabhasach math a bhith a' coimhead na dealbhanan èibhinn agus na dealbhanan magaidh a bha seo, agus bha mi dìreach beò-ghlacte anns na sgeulachdan, a' suidhe fon an Tilley air an oidhche, ag èisteachd rithe mar gum b' e a' feadarsaich rium gu socair, socair, socair agus mise ann an saoghal eile nuair a bhiodh an gèile mòr a' dol a-muigh, taobh a-muigh an taighe.

Bha sin uabhasach math, agus tha mi a' creidsinn gun do lean sin air adhart gu m' ùidh anns na h-ealain on a thòisich mi fhèin a' feuchainn ri dealbhanan èibhinn agus dealbhanan magaidh a dhèanamh, agus bhiodh cuid dhen a' chlann anns an sgoil ag ràdh rium, "O, uill, tha thu math air a sin." 'S bha seo a' còrdadh rium, a chionn cha robh mi math air cus, feumaidh mi ràdh, 's cha robh mi uabhasach math anns an sgoil, agus mar sin, a chionn gu robh mi glè mhath air dealbhan a dhèanamh, lean mi orm a' dèanamh barrachd agus barrachd agus barrachd dhiubh.

Agus bha tè a bha a' fuireach an ath-dhoras rium, Ceitidh Mòrag, agus shuidheadh ise airson ùine mhòr fhada, agus dhèanainn-sa dhe a h-aghaidh agus sgàil riochdan agus rudan mar sin, agus, o, bha i math, agus chòrd e rium glan.

IAIN (JOHN):

But one other thing, the family started to buy comics for me, and I really enjoyed looking at the funny pictures and these mocking pictures, and I was absolutely fascinated by the stories, sitting below the Tilley of an evening, listening to it whistling softly, softly, softly to me while I was in another world with a gale blowing outside, outside the house.

That was really good, and I believe that led on into my interest in art because I began to try to produce funny pictures and satirical pictures, and some of the children at school told me, "Oh, well, you're very good at that." "And I liked that, because I wasn't good at much, I must say, and I didn't do very well in school, and so, because I was fairly good at drawing pictures, I carried on drawing more and more of them.

And there was a woman who lived next door to us, Katie Morag, and she would sit for hours on end, and I would draw her portrait and silhouette and so on, and, oh, she was good, and I really enjoyed that.

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IAIN:

Agus an rud a tha doirbh a chreidsinn, a' coimhead orm an-diugh, bha mi air mo bheò-ghlacadh gu ìre cho mòr nuair a bha mi na mo bhalach agus na mo dheugaire agus a-steach dha na ficheadan agus gu dìochuimhnichinn mo bhìadh a ghabhail air sgàth agus gu robh e a' còrdadh rium cho math agus bha mi a' call suim air ùine no càil sam bith mar sin, agus uaireannan, dh'fhaodainn a dhol eadar àm bracaist agus àm leapach agus mi air dìochuimhneachadh dà bhìadh a ghabhail eatarra air sgàth agus gu robh seo dìreach a' faighinn grèim cho làidir orm.

Agus an uairsin ghluais mi suas, agus nuair a bha mi ochd bliadhn' deug, fhuair mi an cothrom a dhol a Cholaiste an Ealaine ann an Glaschu, agus cha b' urrainn dhomh a chreidsinn gun d' fhuair mise a-steach ann a shin. Bha mi cho moiteil 's a' ghabhadh a bhith.

SARAH:

Agus dè a bhuidh a bh' aig na daoine ann an Colaiste an Ealaine ann an Glaschu ort cuideachd?

IAIN:

Bha buaidh fìor mhòr aig na daoine ann an Colaiste an Ealaine ormsa, agus bha daoine còmhla rium aig an àm sin a chaidh air adhart gus a bhith nan luchd-ealain ann an ealain-sùla a tha dìreach air leth comasach.

IAIN (JOHN):

And the thing that's hard to believe, to look at me now, is that I became caught up in this to such a degree when I was a boy and as a teenager and into my twenties that I would forget to take my meals because I was enjoying myself so much that I completely lost track of time or anything like that, and sometimes, I could go from breakfast till bedtime and forget to take two meals in between times because this would get such a strong hold over me.

And then I moved up, and when I was eighteen years old, I got the opportunity to go to the Glasgow School of Art, and I couldn't believe that I had been able to get in. I was as proud as could be.

SARAH:

And what effect did the people at Glasgow School of Art have on you?

IAIN (JOHN):

The people in the School of Art had a massive effect on me, and there were people with meat that time who went onto become successful artists in the field of visual arts.

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IAIN:

Feumaidh mi ràdh, bha a' chiad bhliadhna air leth sònraichte, a chionn, bha sinn a' faighinn a h-uile diofar chuspair a thaobh ealain-sùla fheuchainn, agus mar sin, bhiodh peantadh a' dol, dealbhadaireachd le peansail, bhiodh sinn a' dèanamh obair snaidheadaireachd, obair crèadh, agus an uairsin, an dèidh bliadhna dhen a sin, bha roghainn againn ri dhèanamh dè gu sònraichte a bha sinn ag iarraidh a leantail, agus, dhòmhsa, gu h-iongantach, b' e na h-oileanaich a bha còmhla rium ann an Colaiste an Ealaine a bu mhotha a thug buaidh orm, gu deimhinne, deimhinne, a chionn, leis an fhìrinn, bha mise a' faireachdainn nach robh mi airidh air a bhith còmhla riutha. Bha cuid dhe na daoine air a' clas agam agus anns na clasaichean os mo chionn cho math agus cho comasach agus nach robh mi dìreach airidh air na brògan aca a ghlanadh.

Agus bha fear Coinneach MacAoidh air a' chlas agam, agus bha e cho comasach ri duine a chunnaic mi a-riamh, agus bhiodh e a' dèanamh obair crèadh, agus bha comas a' dòrtadh a-mach às. Cha bu chòir dhòmhsa a bhith air an aon chlas ris. Bha e cho math. Ach bhiodh esan a' dèanamh obair crèadh, agus obair de chinn, agus dh'aithnicheadh tu anns a' bhad cò a bh' ann. Agus thòisich e a' dèanamh na pìosan ealain a bha seo, 's dòcha dà throigh, trì troighean a dh'àirde nuair a bha e anns a' cholaiste, agus bha e coltach ri rud a dhèanadh Michelangelo. Bha iad cho math. Agus tha mi a' smaoinichadh gur e Coinneach a rinn an ìomhaigh de Dhòmhnall Dewar a th' ann am Buchanan Street ann an Glaschu, agus tha sin gu math ainmeil a-nise.

IAIN (JOHN):

I must say the first year was incredibly important, because we were able to try different disciplines within the visual arts, and so, there was a lot of painting, sketching with pencils, we were also able to do sculpture and work in clay, and then, after that year, we had to make a choice about what exactly we wanted to pursue, and for me, incredibly, my fellow students in the School of Art had the greatest influence on me, definitely, definitely, because, to be honest, I felt that I wasn't worthy of being with them. Some of the people in my class and in the classes above me were so good and so talented that I just didn't deserve to polish their shoes.

There was one Kenny MacKay in my class, and he was one of the most talented people I've ever seen, and he worked in clay and he literally oozed talent. I shouldn't have been in the same class. He was so good. And he worked in clay, and making busts, and you could instantly recognise who it was. And he began to make these pieces of art, perhaps two feet, three feet tall when he was in college, and they were like something Michelangelo would make. They were so good. And I think it was Kenny who made the statue of Donald Dewar that's on Buchanan Street in Glasgow, and that's now quite famous.

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IAIN:

Agus bha fear eile ann a bha còmhla rium aig an àm, fìor dheagh charaid, Andy Scott, agus tha esan air na "River Kelpies" agus rudan mar sin a dhèanamh a chithear ann an Glaschu, 's "Na h-Eich Mhòra" agus gnothaichean mar sin cuideachd. Bha daoine timcheall orm, agus bha mise a' smaoineachadh gur e urram a bh' ann dhòmhsa a bhith faisg orra.

SARAH:

Agus dè a rinn thu às dèidh a' chiad bhliadhna?

IAIN:

'S e an rud a thagh mise, rud a tha a-nise a' dèanamh ciall mhòr dhomh, bha mise a' cruthachadh ealain a bha feumail, agus chanadh iad ris a sin ann am Beurla, "functional art", so bhithinn-sa a' dèanamh shuidheachain agus phreasan agus àirneis, rudan mar sin, a bhiodh dealbhach, brèagha - bha min dòchas - ach aig an aon àm, a bha feumail, agus nuair a smaoinicheas mi air, 's e seo a bha Dòmhnall Beag Bhòirseim, bràthair mo mhàthar, a' dèanamh nuair a bha mi òg, 's ann an dòigh, bha e ga mo dheasachadh airson an rud a thigeadh an dèidh sin, agus chuir mi seachad trì bliadhnaichean an uairsin a' dèanamh sin gu sònraichte, agus bha aon neach ealain gu sònraichte a bha san obair seo a bu toil leam eagallach. 'S e an t-ainm a bh' air-san Tim Stead, Sasannach a bha a' fuireach ann an crìochan na dùthcha, agus, dhòmhsa, cha robh a shamhail anns an t-saoghail, idir, idir, idir. Cha robh duine sam bith. 'S chaidh mi gu factaraidh mhòr ann am Milan, Cassina, far an robh iad a' dèanamh tòrr àirneis a bha a' faighinn cliù air feadh an t-saoghail, agus dhòmhsa, math 's ged a bha Cassina, bha fhathast Tim Stead na b' fheàrr.

SARAH:

Agus dè a thachair às dèidh siud an uairsin?

IAIN (JOHN):

Another of my good friends there at the time was Andy Scott, and he made the "River Kelpies" and things like that which can be seen in Glasgow, and "The Heavy Horses" and other things like that. I was surrounded by people, who I thought it was a privilege to be near.

SARAH:

And what did you do after your first year?

IAIN (JOHN):

The discipline I chose, which now makes sense to me, was to create art that had a use, and in English, that's known as "functional art", so I would make chairs and cabinets and furniture, things like that, which were decorative, beautiful - I hope -but at the same time, were also useful, and when I think about it, that's what Dòmhnall Beag Bhòirseim, my mother's brother, used to make when I was young, and in a way, he was preparing me for what was to come later, and I spent three years working on that specifically, and there was one particular artist working in this field who I really admired. His name was Tim Stead, an Englishman who lived in the Borders, and to me, no-one in the world could compare to him, at all, at all, at all. No-one. And I visited a large factory in Milan, Cassina, where they made a lot of furniture which was renowned worldwide, and to my mind, good though Cassina was, Tim Stead was even better.

SARAH:

And what happened after that?

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IAIN:

Uill nuair a bha mi deiseil air a' cheathramh bliadhna, chuir mi a' folio obrach agam gu Tim Stead, agus dh'fhaighnich mi dha am biodh e deònach mise a ghabhail fo sgèith agus teagasg dhomh ciamar a dhèanainn barrachd dhen an seòrsa obair a bha esan a' dèanamh, a chionn na rudan a bha e a' dèanamh le fiodh, chan e loidhnichean cruaidh, mì-nàdarra ann an dòigh a bh' anna idir. Bhiodh e a' cleachdadh cumadh na fiodha, agus bhiodh e a' cur cruthan air a bha caran nàdarra a' coimhead, agus bha iad brèagha. Uaireannan, chuireadh e druim air suidheachan a bha coltach ri cnàmhan èisg. Bha e uabhasach inntinneach mar a chuireadh e rudan ri chèile. Bha mi a' faireachdainn gu robh iad cha mhòr beò ann an dòigh, 's chuir mi seo air falbh thuige agus bha mi mìosan a' feitheamh, 's mi a' ràdh, "Uill, amadain, chan eil Tim Stead a dol ga do ghabhail. Carson a tha thu a' smaoineachadh gun gabhadh an duine as fheàrr anns an t-saoghal thusa fo sgèith?"

'S an uairsin, thàinig am BBC thugam, 's thuirt iad rium gu robh iad ag iarraidh prògram a dhèanamh mu dheidhinn m' obair. 'S bha mise a' faireachdainn caran moiteil an uairsin. Agus chaidh am prògram a chlàradh anns a' Chafé Gandolfi ann an Glaschu, agus bha an àirneis aig Tim Stead mu thimcheall orm ann a shin anns a h-uile h-àite, agus cha b' urrainn dhòmhsa a bhith na bu thoilichte. Agus an ath Dhiluain, dh'fhòn am BBC thugam agus thuirt iad, "An tig thu a dh'obair dhuinne?" agus bha mi a' smaoineachadh gu robh seo caran neònach, gu robh iad ag iarraidh neach àirneis airson rèidio. Bha mi a' ràdh, "Chan eil an àirneis agam uabhasach math a-rèist mura faicear e," ach bha iad ag iarraidh gum bithinn na mo phreasantair, 's bha roghainn agam ri dhèanamh: am bu chòir dhomh feitheamh - bha mi air a bhith a' feitheamh beagan mhiosan air Tim Stead - no am bu chòir dhomh feuchainn ri tuarastal a dhèanamh, agus mar sin, ghabh mi obair a' BhBC.

IAIN (JOHN):

Well, when I finished my fourth year, I sent my work folio to Tim Stead, and I asked him if he'd be willing to take me under his wing and teach me how I could make more of the sort of work he was producing, because the things he made from wood, they didn't have hard, unnatural lines at all. He worked with the form of the wood, and he produced shapes that looked natural and they were beautiful. Sometimes, he would make a chair back that looked like fish bones. The way he put things together was absolutely fascinating. I felt as though they were almost alive in a way, and I sent this off to him and I waited for months, saying to myself, "Well, you fool, Tim Stead isn't going to take you on. Why would you think the best man in the world would take you under his wing?"

And then the BBC approached me, and said they wanted to make a programme about my work. And I felt quite proud of this. And the programme was recorded in Café, Gandolfi in Glasgow, and everywhere around me, I was surrounded by Tim Stead's furniture, and I couldn't have been happier. And the next Monday, the BBC phoned me and said, "Will you come to work for us?" and I thought that was a little odd, that they wanted a furniture-maker to do radio. I said, "My furniture can't be very good, then, if it won't be seen," but they wanted me to be a presenter, so I had a decision to make: should I wait - I had been waiting for a few months for Tim Stead - or should I try to earn some money, and so I accepted the job at the BBC.

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IAIN:

Agus an Latha Sàbaid ron Diluain nuair a bha mi a' tòiseachadh aig a' BhBC, dh'fhòn Tim Stead thugam, 's thuirt e, "Sheall mi air a' folio agad. Chòrd e rium. An tigeadh tu a dh'obair còmhla rium?" Ach bha mise air mo ghealladh a thoirt dhan a' BhBC gun deidhinn còmhla riuthasan, agus theab mo chridhe sgàineadh, oir bha agam ri cantainn ris, "Tha mi duilich. Tha mi air m' ainm a chur sìos airson obair eile mar-thà, agus feumaidh mi bhith, 'fhios agad, fìor ris an rud a dh'aidich mi." Agus mar sin, chaidh mo bheatha air cùrsa eile an uairsin.

SARAH:

O, mo chreach! Abair eadar-dhealachadh mhòr!

IAIN:

Bha siud doirbh.

SARAH:

Tha fhios gu robh.

Uill, mìle taing airson bruidhinn rinn, Iain.

IAIN:

'S e ur beatha.

IAIN (JOHN):

And on the Sunday before the Monday I was due to start work at the BBC, Tim Stead phoned me, and said, "I've looked at your folio. I liked it. Would you come to work with me?" But I had given my word to the BBC that I would go with them, and my heart nearly broke, because I had to say to him, "I'm sorry. I've already signed up to do another job, and I have to, you know, be true to my word. "And so my life took a different course then.

SARAH:

Oh, my goodness! What a huge difference!

IAIN (JOHN):

That was difficult.

SARAH:

It must have been.

Well, a thousand thanks for talking to us, John.

IAIN (JOHN):

You're welcome.