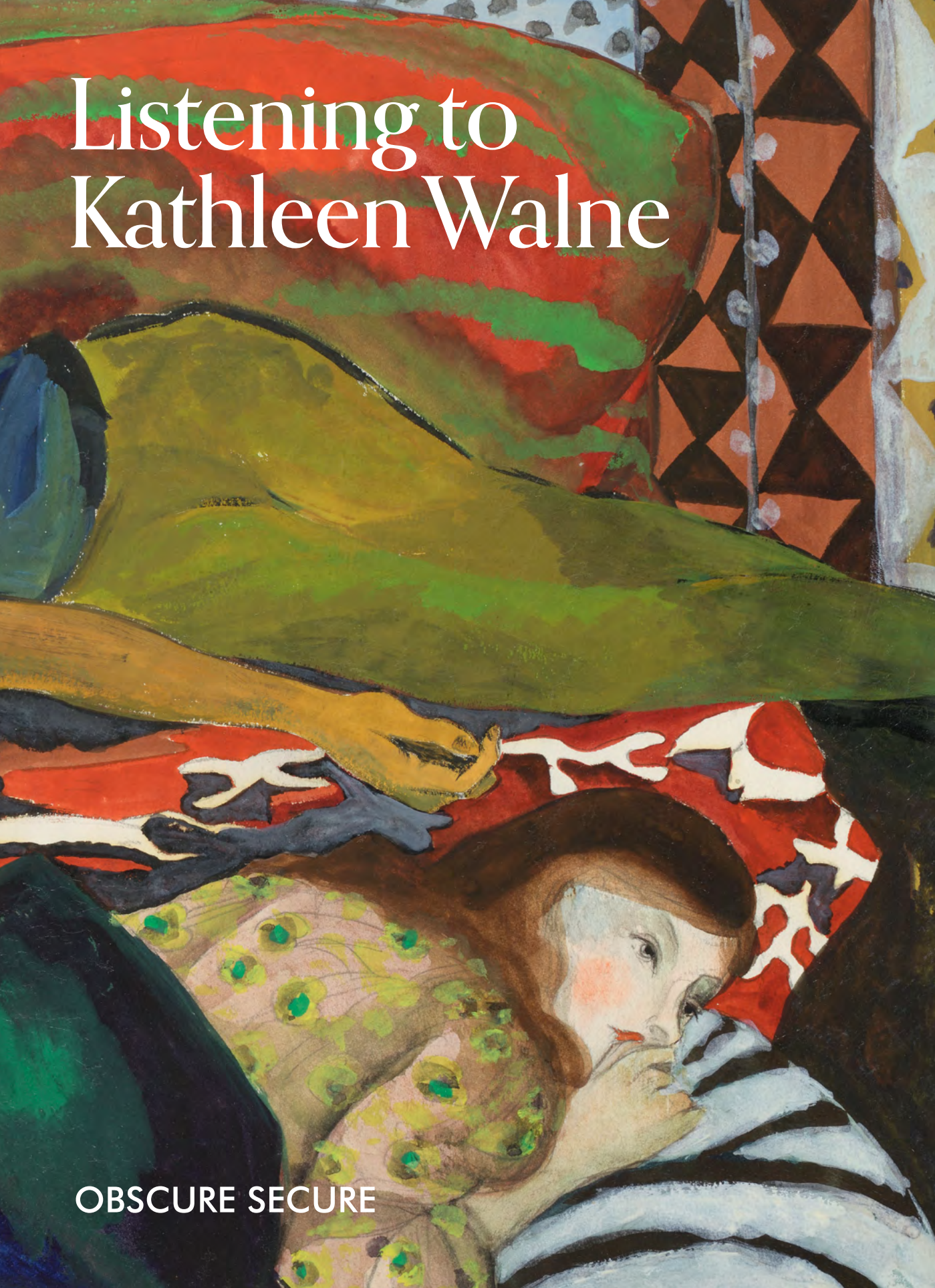
Listening to Kathleen Walne



OBSCURE SECURE

OBSCURE SECURE IS A COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE THAT BEGAN IN 2014 TO EXPLORE THE VISIBILITY OF TWENTIETH CENTURY WOMEN ARTISTS IN PUBLIC COLLECTIONS. OUR CURRENT PROJECT FOCUSES ON THE WORK OF ARTIST KATHLEEN WALNE (1915-2011) FROM A POSITION OF CARE AS FELLOW PAINTERS.

DEDICATED TO FRIEND AND MENTOR MARTHA FLEMING.

Cover: Kathleen Walne, *Alan and Mairny*, gouache and watercolour, c1970, 40 x 60 cm

PREFACE

This publication is a culmination of our collaborative work to date on Kathleen Walne. We are very excited to include four essays from invited contributors, a selection of work and archival material of Kathleen Walne's and written responses from visitors to our residency at Towner Eastbourne in July 2022. We hope this publication serves to frame both our own collaborative practice and Kathleen Walne's work and life within the context of the visibility of women artists and the challenges for public collections around representation. We are grateful to Arts Council England National Lottery Project Grants and Towner Eastbourne for supporting our work.

Obscure Secure
(Hayley Field and Jacqueline Utley)
August 2022

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Drawing on Painting

HAYLEY FIELD AND JACQUELINE UTLEY

As we have slowly circled Kathleen, captivated by her work, we have heard stories about her that paint a picture of a generous, sociable, creative life – a life of art, parenting, working and caring. The clarity and authenticity expressed through her paintings demonstrate her talent and her singular voice. Below are some thoughts and findings from looking at Kathleen Walne's work and archive material over a six-year period from a position of care as fellow painters.

Why Kathleen Walne?

We first saw Kathleen's work at Christchurch Mansion in Ipswich during some research for our first Obscure Secure project in 2014. It was a watercolour painting on display in an upstairs corridor, its palette made of warm autumnal colours. The painting was of a girl sitting by a fire, the brush marks were fluent and gestural, its frame was golden. Although painted in the 1930s it was one of the few works that we saw in the collection that didn't feel like it was rooted in a particular time period.

A series of circumstances had led us to see the painting by Kathleen. A group of women based in Ipswich had created The Ipswich Women's History Trail in 2012, celebrating the lives of local inspirational women and Kathleen was one of them. The group made contact with Kathleen's family, who kindly loaned her work to the museum, sharing her legacy with her hometown. We owe thanks to that group and to Curator Emma Roodhouse, whose enthusiasm first led us to explore the women's art in the collection at Christchurch Mansion and to see that work by Kathleen.

We have tried to imagine what led Kathleen to develop such a fresh and vibrant visual language. Her upbringing seems quite unusual: her father was an inventor, and although growing up she didn't have toys or money, she enjoyed a lot of freedom to explore the local landscape with her siblings. At school she was identified as gifted and secured a scholarship to Ipswich Art School, where she was treated to inspirational trips to London shows (noted in her memoir). Later, still a teenager, she went to work for Lucy Wertheim in her London gallery as an assistant.

Kathleen Walne, *The Carpet Slippers*, watercolour, 1933, 53 x 36 cm

There she lived and painted in the basement. Lucy bought Kathleen's work, including it in exhibitions and placing it in public collections. Surely meeting her contemporaries and being surrounded by their work must have been a rich and stimulating experience for Kathleen.

> My years there were very happy ones; I helped hang pictures; I talked to prospective customers; I painted and made tea for private 'view' and I ran errands.
>
> *(Excerpt from Kathleen's memoir, 2009)*

We have looked closely at Kathleen's paintings and drawings held with her family and in public collections to gain more understanding of her process, how and when she worked. Throughout her life Kathleen never had a formal studio space; she clearly often drew inspiration from her surroundings – painting and drawing still lifes, interior scenes, family and friends – always with a great sense of invention. Kathleen used whatever materials she could afford – working with gouache, watercolours, poster paint, ink and pastels on a basic paper.

> I meet an artist who has been shown my work and he informs me my paintings will never last owing to the inferior watercolours I used. So far, I have proved him wrong, all those that were done in the 30s are still very bright. However, he was right as to the quality or lack of it; most of the paints came from Woolworth's… anything to save money.
>
> *(Excerpt from Kathleen's memoir, 2009)*

Following the period of living and working in Lucy's gallery, Kathleen's creative life was interrupted by marriage and the Second World War. Kathleen primarily became a mother, carer and also worked as an auxiliary nurse. We have seen very few works by Kathleen made between 1940 and 1972, suggesting Kathleen only occasionally painted during this period.

I may have already sent you this one? It was the last painting I did, before giving it up for the next 30 years; so ending my real burst of creativity!

(Kathleen Walne, postcard to Freddie c.1980s, referring to Portrait of Donald, watercolour, 1940)

Kathleen was friends with Lucy Wertheim (1882-1971) throughout her life and together they continued to enjoy talking about the artists they knew. Their friendship led Kathleen to care for Lucy towards the end of her life, moving from London to Brighton to be with her in 1968. From the mid-1980s the works by Kathleen that Lucy Wertheim had gifted to public collections were included in solo and group exhibitions at Salford Museum and Art Gallery, Towner Eastbourne, Wakefield Art Gallery and Dudley Museum and Art Gallery.

…I missed the art galleries, the National, the Tate and Royal Academy and all the theatres. However, having explored the many delights Brighton had to offer, I realised what a lovely relaxed place it was.

(Excerpt from Kathleen's memoir, 2009, referring to her move from her Chelsea council flat to Brighton)

In her later life Kathleen continued to draw inspiration from what was around her, painting people, family and still lifes. She became a keen photographer and sometimes took snapshots of images from the television which she would use to feed her work. A recent conversation with a close friend of hers enlightened us to the source of a series of paintings called 'Hats' that she made during the late 1980s (when Kathleen was in her early 70s). Kathleen would go into Brighton Art School and paint the millinery students. Her enthusiasm for fashion is clear and particularly plays out in this work. It is easy to imagine that living in Brighton at that time would have influenced her.

Kathleen worked at the kitchen table or in her garden, and she exhibited locally in the Brighton Lanes, in shop windows and friends' homes. She made Christmas cards every year that she sent to friends and family. She maintained a personal archive and made sure her story was captured and shared both through *Mixed Palette* by David Buckman (a book about Kathleen and her husband Frank's painting lives) and in her own unpublished memoir written for her grandchildren. Kathleen continued painting into her nineties.

Kathleen Walne, *Hats*, gouache and watercolour, 1988, 40 x 50 cm © The Estate of Kathleen Walne

Sharing our process

One of the questions we are always asking ourselves is 'would Kathleen approve?' Over several years prior to working in residence at Towner Eastbourne in July 2022, we spent time with Kathleen's daughters Hilary and Mairny, and Towner Eastbourne Curator Karen Taylor, who have been extraordinarily generous with us. We also spoke to her sister Jessie, writer David Buckman and Salford City Art Gallery's Peter Ogilvie. We created simple catalogues of Kathleen's work and archive for our own reference.

For the residency we created an installation which incorporated a display of Kathleen's archive material, a hang of her work alongside our own, a working wall, a reference library and a series of questions. During the week we were open to the public, we had many conversations with visitors – some of whom were old friends of Kathleen's, or knew of her, some who had seen her work in the Wertheim exhibitions (which were upstairs in the building) and were enthusiastic to see more, and some who came upon us as visitors to Towner. The residency gave us a platform to raise the issues of visibility of women artists in collections, with our focus on Kathleen. We found that many visitors were enthusiastic to share ideas around representation in public collections, how work was acquired in the past and how collections should become more inclusive and non-hierarchical.

During this ongoing process of research and reflection we have been making our own work – the internal and external conversations that result from our collaborative practice have fed its direction.

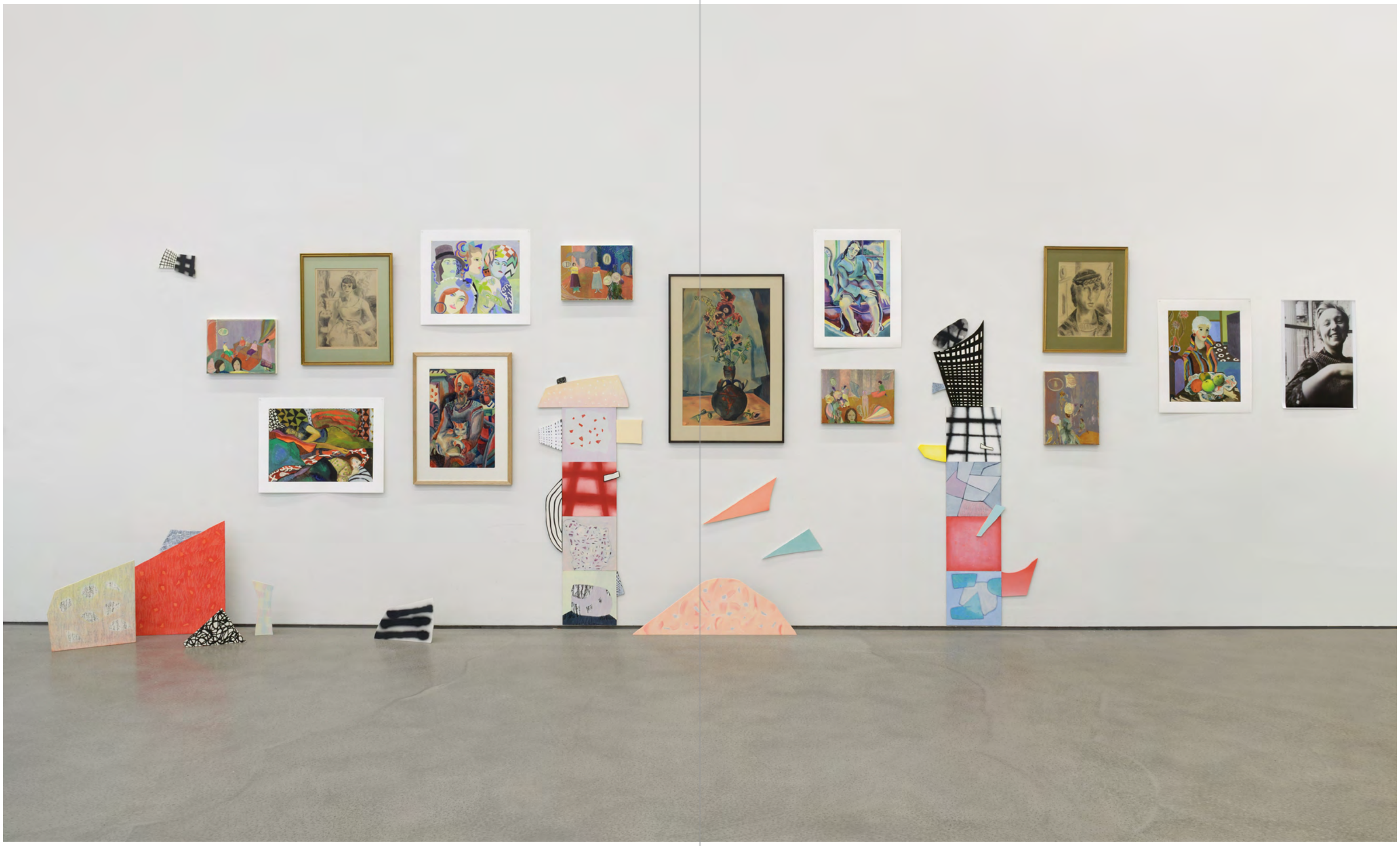
Kathleen's 'hats' series from the late 80s connected me to my love of fashion in my youth and how exciting it was in the UK during that period. The focus on pattern and textiles in her work is a real inspiration - using it to make space into pattern. This has influenced the direction of my own work - initially through drawing and collage and then in my oil paintings.

Her fresh, confident and unmistakable style becomes more complex and prolonged in my hands. Where she draws and paints - pattern, textiles, figures and objects - filling a wonderfully complex but serene space, I now draw with my paintings - finding freshness through re-configuration, contrast, relationships and dynamism of composition.

(Hayley Field)

A Thank you note to Kathleen Walne: Dear Kathleen, After an initial response of falling in love with your work and feeling an immediate admiration and connection to your intuitive use of pattern and colour, the process of looking closely/slowly at your work, talking to your lovely family and examining archive material over time has provided an intimate understanding of the wider issues around the lack of visibility of women artists. You have very much become a guiding presence in my studio practice - I have rediscovered creative freedom, Thank you Kathleen for your generosity.

(Jacqueline Utley)



Obscure Secure Residency at Towner Eastbourne, Kathleen Walne, Hayley Field, Jacqueline Utley, July 2022 © The Estate of Kathleen Walne. Photo: Douglas Atfield

From Our Own Correspondent

REBECCA FORTNUM

How can you talk to the dead? Open a conversation with someone no longer here? Those of you who have lost someone will know that it's actually quite easy. It is natural to talk (sometimes, even aloud) to those absent without leave. You don't stop wanting, or indeed needing, to converse just because they can't hear you.

It's quite a while since women realised that, if they wanted to feature, they'd need to write their own art histories. It's been slightly less time since female artists forged these narratives outside the confines of traditional art history. In 1983 the British artist Rose Garrard's work *Models Triptych*, a series of wall-based sculptures centred on self-portraits by Artemisia Gentileschi, Judith Leyster and Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, demonstrated a form of art historical appropriation that was less about exerting power over the past and more about establishing what she termed 'our forgotten history' blended with personal concerns. Although her disappointment when viewing it on display at the Tate's *New Art* exhibition in 1983 ('I was disheartened to find that only six of the eighty-four artists selected were women') has been repeatedly experienced by others throughout the intervening years, nevertheless a method emerged for contemporary women artists casting into the past for forerunners. In 2022 Cecilia Alemani's extraordinary, and rather brilliant, curation, *The Milk of Dreams* at the Venice Biennale continues this modus operandi on a grand scale, borrowing surrealist Leonora Carrington's novel title and including her and other early twentieth-century women in 'time capsules' amongst work by living artists that correspond with them. Alemani believes in the work's current relevance saying, 'many of the stories told in these capsules have not yet been absorbed into the official canon and have been for too long considered minor and obscure'.

In the last few years, as those engaging in this strategy have increased, its nature has developed; not only do such activities retrieve lost histories, but a pervasive longing for a conversation, even what has sometimes been termed 'collaboration', with

past artists, has become a central characteristic. Art historian Sue Tate observed of the 2008 Berlin Biennale, 'a fascinating pattern of work by contemporary women artists, responding to, or in dialogue with, women artists or designers of previous generations; …opening up the possibility of a different future.' This desire to communicate with past works is a curious one, an unethical act of ventriloquy perhaps, but equally one that demands deep listening and sensitive attention, often to the slightest of traces. Indeed, working on the margins of mainstream art history not only necessitates a re-evaluation of certain works, it also requires reflection on how values become concretised and passed on, or are intermingled with lives and events. These practices challenge notions of connoisseurship or art's worth, and navigate the intriguing but problematic waters between an artist's life and their work, exploring how value is both accrued and sustained. Thus, the working processes of the Obscure Secure artists are set within a particular frame of politicised contemporary practices, at the forefront of feminist creative research.

Of course, artists must always deal with their forebears in some manner. In the 1970s Harold Bloom gained some purchase by suggesting that each generation of poets must grapple with an 'anxiety of influence' to forcibly 'clear imaginative space for themselves'. But when the past is patchy at best, and unwritten at worst, the project must take on a different kind of method. For example, Melissa Gordon's attention to the overlooked expressionist painter Janet Sobel; Nairy Baghramian's staging of work with, and by, designer Janette Laverrière; Nadia Hebson's incorporation of drawing by Winifred Knights into her own exhibition; Frances Stark's echoing of Sylvia Sleigh's imagery; Amy Sillman's positioning of Prunella Clough's painting within her curation – all perform quite different operations but demonstrate that these contemporary practitioners share an approach beyond deference towards the earlier artists they co-opt. Taking my cue from Virginia Woolf, I might be tempted to call it friendship. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf muses on the relations between two fictional characters, Chloe and Olivia, created by the equally fictive author, 'Mary Carmichael'. She speculates,

> Now if Chloe likes Olivia and they share a laboratory, which of itself will make their friendship more varied and lasting because it will be less personal. […] For if Chloe likes Olivia and Mary Carmichael knows how to express it, she will light a torch in that vast chamber where nobody has yet been.

In the intervening (almost) 100 years since Woolf published, female friendship has indeed become illuminated by artists and writers, but publicly acknowledging the importance of 'professional' friendship, fed through the activity of work, is still a crucial task for women who are often positioned in competition, rather than as collegial. In giving a voice to unheard women it is no wonder that these contemporary artists should then want to stop and listen thoughtfully to what they have to say.

But why this talk of conversation and collaboration with those ostensibly incapable of reply? Although any encounter with art of the past is always 'live' for the beholder, in many of these practices there is also a wish to conjure the artist alongside her work, to evoke her life, her body, her mark, her world view. Artist Nadia Hebson reflects on the need to remove the usual processes of editing and categorising when reviewing the artist Winifred Knight's contribution:

> Knights' practice encompasses her paintings, drawings, clothing, correspondence, and design – an expanded legacy – but few have been able to view all this as part of a greater, interconnected oeuvre, concentrating instead on the perceived lack of completed paintings.

In recognising value in what artist Felicity Allen would term the 'dis-oeuvre', that is the totality of the creative production emerging from a life, we see a particularly feminist strategy at work, one that challenges classifications and solipsism and proposes learning from others in the round. Of course, there is a joy in the recognition of a fellow sensibility, a sharing of concerns or aesthetics, yet fruitful challenge is also detected in running up against difference which prompts change and shifts in perspective. In the same way that our friends both reinforce and alter us, so do these profound encounters with the works and lives of other artists. When the philosopher Johnny Golding explores the complexities of friendship (for her, with a horse), she defines it as 'an entangled encounter of embodied exchange', which describes rather perfectly what happens in these artistic, often material, responses; we live in them and through them and with them.

When in 2019 the painter Celia Paul begins to write letters to the painter Gwen John (who died eighty years earlier), it is clear that John is not a remote historical figure for Paul, but a dynamic influence on her life and work. Her yearning for a reply is palpable when she begins,

> I know this letter is an artifice. I know you are dead and that I am alive and that no usual communication is possible between us but, as my mother used to say, 'time is a strange substance'; and who knows really, with our time-bound comprehension of the world, whether there might not be some channel by which we can speak to each other, if we only knew how.

John repays Paul's craving by appearing to walk past her on a street in Bloomsbury, a corresponding figure across generations and geographies. Perhaps a true understanding between friends is such that they can be permitted to finish each other's sentences?

Rebecca Fortnum is Professor of Fine Art and Head of School of Fine Art at the Glasgow School of Art. She is currently Senior Research Fellow at the Henry Moore Institute and Editor of the Journal of Contemporary Painting.

Top: Jacqueline Utley, *Hidden Daughters*, oil on linen, 2022, 30 x 40 cm
Bottom: Hayley Field, *Landscape II* (modular painting), oil on board, 2022, 610 x 110 x 56 cm

Hayley Field, *Totem III* (modular painting), oil on board, 2022, 195 x 160 x 45 cm

Jacqueline Utley, *Flowers Fly Land Walk*, oil on linen, 2022, 30 x 40 cm

Happening on High Street: Kathleen Walne at Ipswich School of Art

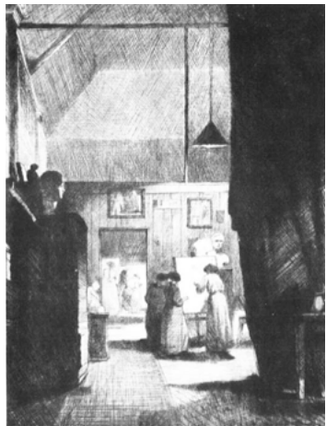
EMMA ROODHOUSE

A row of ramshackle houses holding each other up, the inhabitants' washing is flapping outside on a line, women are chatting, children playing and a male figure is trudging home from work, perhaps from Ipswich docks. The colourless scene was expertly etched in 1914 by the Ipswich-based artist Leonard Squirrell (1893-1979) and it is a scene that young Kathleen Walne would grow up surrounded by in the north-east of the town from 1915 until 1933. Squirrell and Walne's paths might well have crossed when she attended Ipswich School of Art[1] from 1929, where he taught etching from 1930 onwards. Walne was only 14 years old when she started at the School of Art, with one day of lessons a week and this quickly led to her being awarded a scholarship to attend the design school. The art that she would go on to produce would break away from the traditional and technically focused training taught at the School. Walne's depictions of life would be consumed with colour and experimentation when observing people, family and her ordinary surroundings.

A School of Art had been established in Ipswich since 1859, but the building Walne studied in would

Leonard Squirrell, *Old Houses*, etching on paper, 1914, 17 x 23 cm © Estate of Leonard R Squirrell RWS RE. Photo: Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service: Ipswich Borough Council Collection

1 This is now the Ipswich Art Gallery.



Leonard Squirrell, *Ipswich School of Art*, Drypoint, 1913

be the School of Science and Art, opened on 27 July 1881 on the High Street, as part of Ipswich Museum's new building. The words Art and Science were sculpted into the new frontage of the Museum, along with depictions of Isaac Newton and William Hogarth and the tools of science and arts. The design students were situated in the upstairs of the Museum where the rooms had high ceilings and large windows to let in as much natural light as possible. (The current Ipswich Museums staff have offices in these very rooms, which of course become very cold in winter.) Downstairs there was a wing set aside on the right of the building that contained the painting department, and it too had an emphasis on light with skylights installed in the roof.

Walne was fortunate that the policy of nurturing young talent from local schools had been founded by Birmingham-born artist George Rushton (1869-1948), when he became the second principal of the School of Art (appointed 1906 – retired 1928). Rushton had put a great emphasis on making sure school children who showed promise could access the Art School. He had discovered a 15 year old Leonard Squirrell who, like the young Walne, would be offered a place at the School.

When Walne started, the new principal was Archibald Ward (1884-1965) (appointed 1 January 1929 – retired 1948). A graduate of the Royal College of Art, Ward wanted his students to have a grounding in all the technical standards for drawing, design, illustration etc. Ward was not supportive of experimentation and had a strict work ethic, including no tea breaks for staff. Despite this strict approach there was an increased demand for more space as student numbers began to rise.

Walne started on the design course but managed to get transferred to the painting school where she could be closer to Frank Ward, already a student there, who she would go on to marry in 1938. The teaching staff during this time included Alan Waddington Bellis (1883-1960) and Philip 'Pif' Fortin (1901-1985), both graduates of the Royal College of Art. Bellis had skills in architecture, model-making, watercolour, etching and metalwork and perhaps taught Walne on the design course. Edith Mary Wood (1891-1982), who taught calligraphy and embroidery, was one of the few women teachers on the course. It was 'Pif' who Walne would recall most strongly from her days at the School, because of his dismissive attitude towards her drawing when he would scribble on it, 'until one day I said: "You're not going to do this any more. You tell me where I've gone wrong. But you are not going to mess up my drawing."'[2]

Unfortunately for Ipswich, Walne went to London to search for other opportunities to display her work and progress her career, although she did manage to have work in the annual Ipswich Art Club shows in 1933 and 1944.[3] Whilst the Ipswich Borough Council collection would go on to acquire artworks by Squirrell, Rushton, Bellis and many more associated with Ipswich School of Art, the recognition of Walne's artistic contribution to Suffolk art wouldn't take place until after her death in 2011 when she was listed on the Ipswich Women's History Trail; and in 2013 a single watercolour was kindly loaned by her daughter for display at Christchurch Mansion, Ipswich.

Emma Roodhouse, Art Collections & Learning Curator, Colchester and Ipswich Museums Service.

2 D.Buckman Mixed Palette: Painting Lives of Frank Ward and Kathleen Walne, Sansom & Co (6 Nov. 1997) P.23

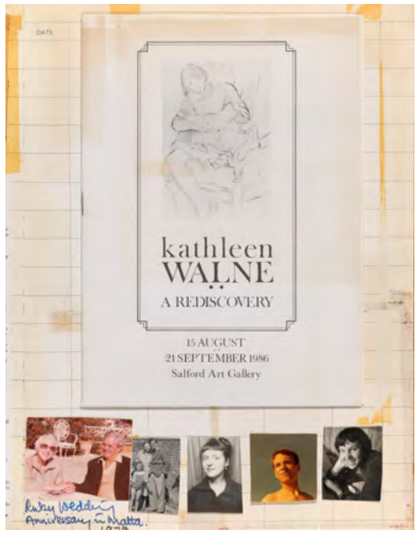
3 Miss Kathleen Walne, exhibited at the Ipswich Art Club in 1933 from 78 Reading Road, Ipswich, two watercolours *Blakenham* and *Seaside Fun*. As Mrs F. C. Ward, she exhibited at the Ipswich Art Club in 1944, *A Portrait*.

Kathleen Walne (furthest right) with her Ipswich School of Art friends (next to Frank, husband-to-be) on Minsmere beach, Suffolk, 1934

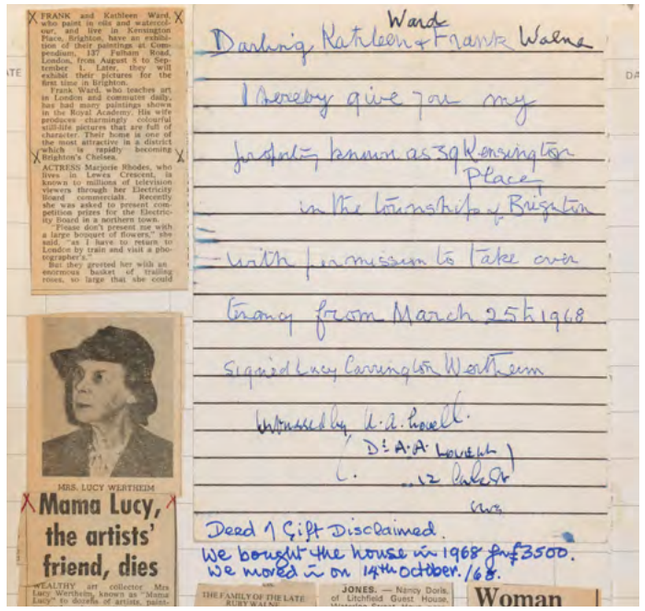
Kathleen Walne, c1950s-1960s

Kathleen Walne (centre) with Frances Mahon and husband Frank at their Compendium 2 exhibition in Fulham 1972

Kathleen Walne painting in her Brighton garden, 1990s



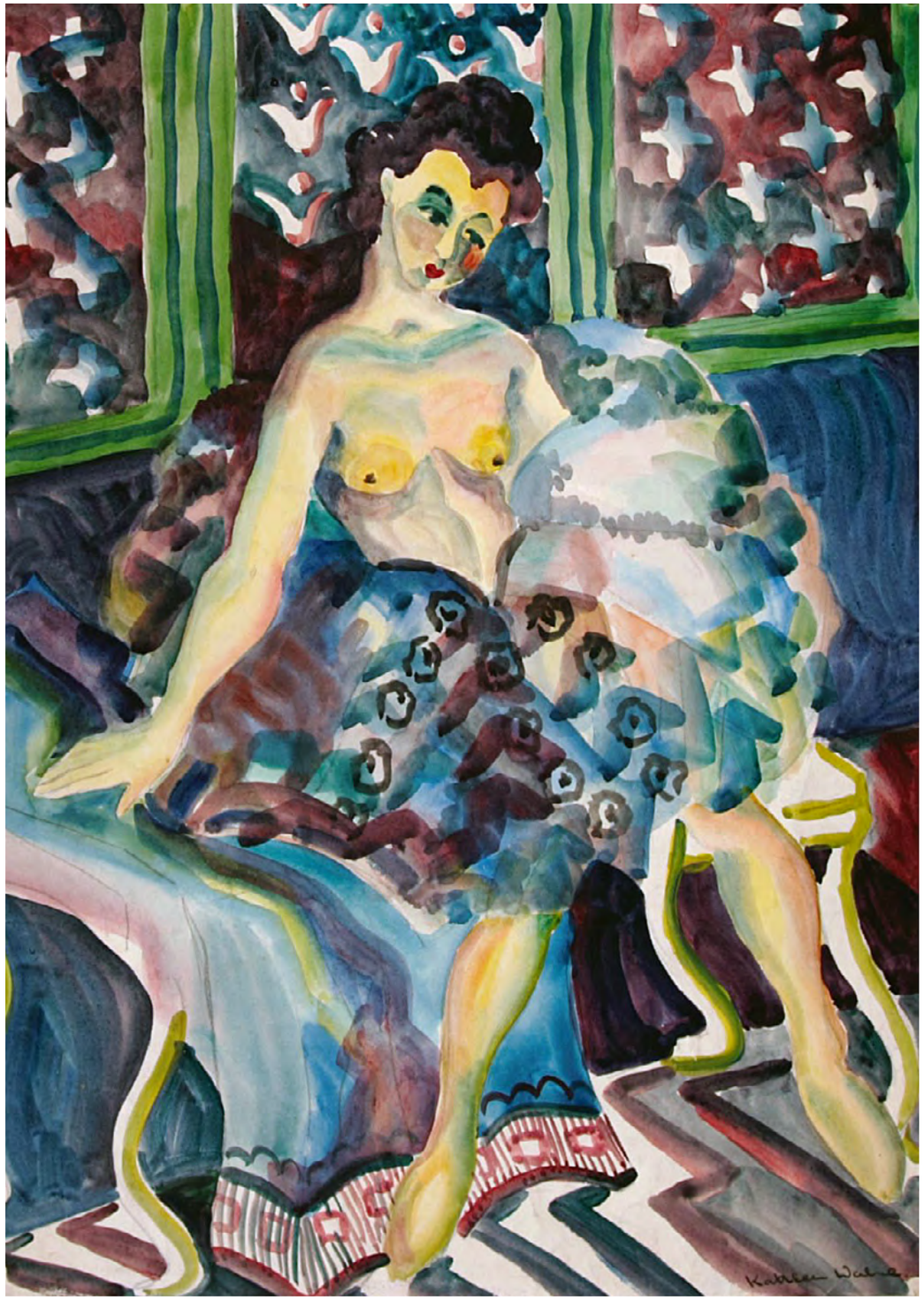
Kathleen Walne's archive: page from *Visitors Book* (originally for Compendium 2 exhibition) with catalogue for Kathleen's 1986 solo exhibition at Salford Art Gallery, including family photographs at the bottom of the page



Kathleen Walne's archive: page from *Visitors Book* (originally for Compendium 2 exhibition) with newspaper clipping about Lucy Wertheim's death and note from Lucy to Kathleen originally gifting her 39 Kensington Place, which Kathleen refused and bought from Lucy

Kathleen Walne painting at her Brighton kitchen table, 1990s

Obscure Secure at Towner Eastbourne, display of Kathleen Walne archive material: printed material from exhibitions at Salford Art Gallery, Wertheim Gallery, Compendium 2 and Towner Collection



Kathleen Walne, *Ballet Dancer*, 1935, gouache on paper, 50.5 x 36.5 cm,
© The Estate of Kathleen Walne, Collection of Waikato Museum Te Whare Taonga o Waikato

Top: Kathleen Walne, *Unknown Girl*, 1930s, pencil, 41 x 32 cm
Bottom: Kathleen Walne, *Ballerinas*, 1936, charcoal, 24 x 19 cm
© The Estate of Kathleen Walne

Kathleen Walne, *Woman Sitting on a Bed*, watercolour, 1930s, 54 x 36 cm

Kathleen Walne, *Ruby*, c1980, gouache and watercolour, 40 x 50 cm

Energy Begets Energy

JENNIFER HIGGIE

In 1938, the British artist Kathleen Walne painted a self-portrait. She is young, only 22 or 23, and she crackles with personality. She is smiling slightly; looking into the distance, her eyes are merry and inquisitive. The painting is a study in expressive chiaroscuro; the artist emerges from the gloom, her hair is golden, her sea-green shirt delineated in black lines. A curious, geometric ray of light illuminates her. As a self-portrait, it's a bold statement: Walne presents herself as strong and modern, the speed of her brushstrokes symbolic, perhaps, of her creative energy and the power of her forward thinking.

Born in Ipswich, Walne's nickname was Pipe, as she was tall and thin. One of seven children, she experienced hardship; often, there was little to eat, and severe tonsillitis debilitated her. By the age of 14, however, with the help of a teacher who recognised her gifts, she had enrolled in Ipswich Art School. Before long, she won a scholarship to the design school to study book illustration, but she transferred to the painting department, where she met a fellow student, Frank Ward. They married the year she painted her self-portrait.

By 1933, the couple had relocated to London. Ward, who was studying at the Royal College of Art, was tireless in his efforts to rouse interest in Walne's work. He struck gold with the legendary gallerist Lucy Wertheim, who had opened a gallery in Burlington Gardens in 1930. (She was to have a space in various locations until 1971.) Wertheim was not only enthusiastic about Walne's paintings but gave her a much-needed job as a gallery assistant. In 1935 Walne had her first solo show. She was only 20 but her vivid signature style was established: exuberant, sensitive studies of people, landscapes and still lifes which swirl with colour and patterns. Her preferred medium was watercolour – a portable, quick-drying medium that is useful if you don't have much space or money. There's little delineation in her pictures between the subject and the ground – everything in her world, it would seem, was connected:

energy begat energy. In her memoir, Wertheim remembered that: 'The all too rare purchaser complained that his 'Kathleen Walne' made the rest of his pictures appear drab.' The young artist was prolific; various works of hers from the 1930s made their way into collections including the Salford Art Gallery, the Towner Art Gallery and the Auckland City Art Gallery in New Zealand.

In 1939, Frank Ward was appointed art teacher at Wilson's School in Camberwell, where – apart from a break during the war – he taught until he retired in 1974. They had three children and lived for a time in Chelsea, where they moved in bohemian circles. They were especially close to Jacob Epstein and his family: his wife, Kathleen Garman, and his son, the painter Theo Garman. Frank and Kathleen's friendship with Lucy Wertheim – who the couple called 'Aunt Luce' – also endured; when she was diagnosed with cancer in the 1960s, they moved to Brighton to look after her. In 1986 Walne had a solo exhibition at Salford Museum and Art Gallery; she continued to exhibit and paint well into her 90s.

Like so many women artists of the past, Kathleen Walne isn't as well-known as she should be. I wasn't aware of her work until I was approached to write this essay, but its sheer vivacity entranced me. At its best, Walne's startlingly contemporary paintings give artists such as Sonia Delaunay or Francis Picabia a run for their money. Like them, she understood the creative potential of everyday scenes: that the curve of an eye or the pattern on a cushion can indicate a state of mind, that a flower is the marriage of great design and allegorical potential. In her swift, spare drawings and intricate paintings, Walne's sensual portrayals of young men and women – sitting, reclining, dreaming in space – evoke psychological spaces that veer between quiet pleasure and the riotous joy of a carnival. Bunches of anemones explode in tones of red, burnt yellows and blues; a woman – resplendent in a red-dotted jacket, her hair the colour of fire – sips tea; another, smiling, holds a ball of wool like a small blue planet. In some pictures, the everyday becomes fantastical: a mother, in a fairy-tale gown, sits with her child on a sofa, immersed in patterns of starbursts, noughts, crosses and flashes of sunlight. In a watercolour of ballet dancers from the 1930s, the very air shimmers with dynamism and delight.

Over seven decades or so, despite financial hardship and the demands of motherhood and running a household, Walne produced a remarkable body of work – and her pleasure in the possibilities of entwining paint, daily life and the imagination never waned. In the 1980s, she portrayed her melancholy mother reclining on a bed covered in vibrating purple, green, red and lemon patterns – an optimistic tonic of colour and line that might have the power to restore her lost youth and health. Her 1988 gouache and watercolour Hats depicts the heads of five women – their eyes darting in different directions – adorned in angular abstractions as individual as the personalities of the women themselves. Walne painted another self-portrait in the same year. She's 73, elegant in a smart, multi-coloured blouse, her white hair cropped short. The floor behind her throbs with circles and diamonds, a spiky plant strains skywards, a sunny bowl of apples and an orange sit before her. Her dark eyes blaze with life, a smile plays on her lips. She made it very clear: the world, for her, was a dazzling place. Inspiration was everywhere.

Jennifer Higgie, writer who lives in London, author of *Mirror & the Palette: 500 Years of Women's Self-Portraits*.

Kathleen Walne, *Self Portrait*, 1988, gouache and watercolour, 50 x 40 cm

Patron, Carer, Artist – an Enduring Friendship

KAREN TAYLOR

In 2015, Towner was approached by a generous couple who offered to gift six Kathleen Walne paintings to the Towner Collection. Towner already held several works by the artist through a significant bequest in 1971. Kathleen's paintings were part of a selection that represented the collecting sensibilities of the gallerist and patron Lucy Wertheim (1883-1971). Her work was in good company amongst pieces by artists Christopher Wood, Alfred Wallis, Frances Hodgkins and Helmut Kolle.

The donors, who had become friends with Kathleen through their purchases of her paintings between 1983 and 1990, had decided to part with the works so that they might display other pieces from their collection in their home. Living with a Kathleen Walne painting is a commitment; her palette is unreservedly intense, dense with arresting pattern and swathes of colour. Her subjects, often figures, gently cling to the surface of the paper; one could imagine a light breeze would encourage them to slip from view just as swiftly as Kathleen had allowed her brush to glide them into place.

The arrival of these striking paintings spoke of past friendship between two intriguing women and the notion that Lucy Wertheim's influence (some fifty years since her bequest) still resonated in the future collecting for the Towner Collection.

Kathleen and Lucy's stories are interwoven from the moment they met in 1934 at the Wertheim Gallery. Convinced by Kathleen's energetic spirit, Lucy offered her work and lodgings at the gallery in London's Burlington Gardens. The young artist was vivacious, spontaneous and unpredictable whilst Lucy herself was a generous, outspoken and impassioned woman. Embracing each other's eccentricities, the pair became lifelong friends and embarked on a friendship that ultimately acuminated in Kathleen and her husband Frank moving to Brighton to care for Lucy for the final years of her life.

The gallery became home, artist's studio and place of work for Kathleen, who assisted Lucy. Sleeping in the basement on a chaise longue – as she recalled that Lucy disliked beds – she distinctly remembered watching the feet of the passers-by as they criss-crossed past the pavement-level window. It was a vibrant, alluring

setting for a nineteen-year-old artist to be in, with artists, bohemians and socialites coming and going. Lucy recounted in her 1939 memoir Adventure in Art, that one of Kathleen's duties was to make tea for the guests who attended the afternoon private views, however she was 'seized with a desire to do a still life of objects on the kitchen dresser… mistook her paint rag for her dishcloth… One guest after another pushed her cup away exclaiming, "What vile stuff – it tastes more like turpentine than tea!".'

The apparent success of the gallery – if success can be gauged by admiration rather than sales – was partly due to the women who Lucy chose to support her endeavours: Eve Disher, Biddy McNay, Ala Story, Kathleen Walne and Nan Youngman. Astutely, Lucy surrounded herself with talented women with an abundance of different qualities, many as an 'antidote' for her own perceived failings.

Located opposite the back entrance to the Royal Academy in Burlington Gardens, the Wertheim Gallery was well placed to attract both artists and art buyers, but it was not Lucy's intention for the gallery to be a commercial one. Her vision was that she wanted only to show work she believed in and to build the reputation of living artists to enable them to sell their work during their lifetime. She initiated the Twenties Group, an exhibiting collective for artists in their twenties; Kathleen Walne became part of this group exhibiting in 1936 and 1937, alongside other emerging women painters such as Suzanne Cooper, Rachel Reckitt, José Christopherson and Sylvia Melland.

Collectively, the paintings of the Twenties Group artists revealed the emerging aesthetic of young artists in 1930s Britain. Unlike other galleries there would be no subscription or fee for exhibiting work. These fledgling artists would be measured on merit alone. The number of women in the Twenties Group was representative of the women emerging from the art schools; in the 1930s, women accounted for just under half the 110 members exhibiting between 1932 and 1937. However, this balance of gender was not reflected in public galleries or collections at the time – skewing the present-day impression of artistic production in the 1930s.

Lucy Wertheim's generosity and enthusiasm to share her artists' modern art resulted in her gifting over 500 works to regional, national and international galleries and museums to cement these artists in public collections. Without her tenacity, her loyalty to her artists and her foresight in gifting their works, there would remain little or no trace of many of these lesser-known artists she represented. Her intention at the time was to infiltrate the public galleries with modern paintings but the legacy is that these artists are remembered and acknowledged. Kathleen Walne's work can be found in public collections as a direct result of Lucy Wertheim's dedicated patronage.

One of the last works Lucy acquired for the Wertheim collection was a painting by Kathleen Walne, an incredibly detailed garden scene, more measured than her early works but still exuding Kathleen's irresistible urge to intensify colour. This work on paper directly links the artist and her patron to the remaining years of Lucy's life. Kathleen spoke of this four-year period caring for Lucy as a privilege – a time filled with laughter, with artists and art appreciators coming and going. In the evenings they would read extracts from Lucy's memoir *Adventure in Art* and relive these remarkable years together.

Karen Taylor, Collections & Exhibitions Curator, Towner Eastbourne.

Kathleen Walne, *Girl in Caravan*, 1935, watercolour on paper, 56 x 38 cm

VISITOR RESPONSES TO OBSCURE SECURE'S QUESTIONS, MADE DURING OUR RESIDENCY AT TOWNER EASTBOURNE 12-17 JULY, 2022

QUESTION 1: HOW DO YOU THINK DECISIONS WERE MADE IN THE PAST OF WHAT IS COLLECTED IN OUR PUBLIC GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS?

Gallerist and collector Lucy Wertheim donated around fifty works to Towner Eastbourne in 1971, many of which are in the exhibitions upstairs in the gallery.

A lot of donations, which meant what was collected was down to the subjective tastes of the private collectors. The fashions of the time as well only mostly men's work which was valued.

There is a committee of artists and experts in art that decided which artists were worthy because their art was innovative and special and they influenced their area.

Above: *Obscure Secure at Towner Eastbourne*, Residency Studio installation, July 2022

Adding to the cannon of an artist. Local history/interest. The Lucy Wertheim Collection adds so much to the Towner which I know to be one of the best places to see mid 20th century British art. I believe she was from Manchester though.

Decisions have been made based on traditional patriarchal views. Mostly dominated by the privileged classes about what 'culture' is. Traditional institutions - academia and elitism!

Colonial white men - social/financial privilege.

I guess heads of departments look at what is popular - have connections/friends in the art world and buy accordingly. Maybe there is a 'buyer' now who specialises in art history and examines 'trends'.

Most of the decisions were made by institutions which were invariably run by men. They made decisions about what counted as art. What was good and what wasn't. The after effects of those decisions still shape our public galleries and museums.

No doubt by white middle aged men! (+ middle class) DITTO!

Decisions (I guess) were made by the 'great and the good' (often self-appointed). I feel that ordinary people should be involved in this decision making, but have no idea how!

I think decisions were made on how it inspired people. The emotions and understanding of how people can relate to the art.

Often work was left - gifted or bequeathed. Some came in via public donations, or town history. Some were purchased. Decisions? Made maybe by a small number of people. Good decisions? Public collections that saved important work.

In the past artists would have been selected based on patrons and royal favour. This would have likely been biased towards men.

QUESTION 2: HOW WOULD YOU CHANGE WHAT IS COLLECTED AND WHAT WE SEE?

For example, are there different ways of making decisions about what is held in public collections that better represent our communities? Whose work are you not seeing in this and other galleries, and in the media or on television?

I would say that who is doing the collecting is key as our education and life stories influence what we consider to be collectable in the context of contemporary art. Also the question 'what are collections for?' is imperative. Why are works collected, to what end? Value, posterity, legacy, access, endowment? What does having a collection afford?

I think galleries should include smaller artists, not

just big ones, people from all cultures and backgrounds. Again in the media and tv smaller artists need a platform where they can share their works. I think these represent our communities better.

From what I've seen in local (village) art clubs there are a lot of talented amateurs out there who would like to display their works to a wider audience. But who would buy tickets? Cultural dominance is an issue in all areas, the minority eclipsing the majority.

It would be lovely to see young people's work on display and to keep records to look back on to see how their work evolves. There are so many artists and not all have the opportunity to showcase their work. Reaching out to Art Clubs and giving people the chance to display their work would be good. The RA summer exhibition is a great showcase for lots of artists and I'd like to see more shows like this.

Female outsider/brut artists. You only hear about Alfred Wallis, no other British outsider artists. More regional art like the Towner with Eric Ravilious. There is an amazing woodcut print artist Helen Brown based in Brighton/Peacehaven she doesn't get the recognition she deserves. As well, (places) like Hepworth Gallery with Yorkshire artists. Need to show each region of UK has a strong identity with beautiful art specific to the area other than just concentration on London artists only, or that is the only place as an artist your work will be taken seriously.

People in our local community who came to live here from other parts of the world - I don't feel I have seen (them) represented in collections at local galleries.

Work by people who are not trained. 'Neuro diverse' and any people disabled by society or the art world, who are creating things.

Focus on local, old and new (are) important, but local work must have the excellence to appeal to everyone. Local artists have to make the grade. Curators should be given full reign, the vision of (the) individual or even idiosyncratic should be celebrated. Museums as part of leisure facilities controlled by councils don't work. I have seen this elsewhere.

Interpretation of art always feels to me like (an) intensely personal experience. In the modern age, it feels like I have even less control over what I see - something perceived as unique is quickly made ubiquitous - and perhaps loses its meaning…

I would love to see many more emerging young artists as well as women artists whose practice has been interrupted by the experience of motherhood. I would love to see more decisions made on collections by communities local to galleries, particularly women and young adult women, as well as women who are officially elders in their communities. Women artists who work with their bodies. As well as the garments made for live art performances…

I wonder… Personally I'd like to see work that has colour and marks without images. I remember years ago seeing a billboard with a Howard Hodgkin painting on it as part of an arts programme. In our built up drab streets with images selling stuff it was wonderful to see bursts of colour for no reason. Maybe a selection of art teachers - artists - local - maybe exhibitions in towns - a range of people need to be seen with a range of people choosing.

Local artists/works of local significance.

Not sure? Would like to see more 'craft' based work - where there is wonderful work that is maybe not delivered as art but is i.e. tapestry, pottery, enamels, lace making, woodwork, mosaic, weaving, collage, printmaking. Be good to see more work made by artists who work in craft-based media.

Above: *Obscure Secure at Towner Eastbourne*, display of Kathleen Walne archive material including work (right) from Towner Collection, July 2022

Not seeing work by older people from ethnic communities.

QUESTION 3: DO YOU KNOW OR REMEMBER SOMEONE WITH A CREATIVE OUTLET IN THEIR LIFE? WHAT DO THEY DO?

Do they cook, draw, knit, photograph, paint, sew, garden, decorate the home, make music etc? Who? How were they creative? Is there a record?

Who: Albert Uden (signed his work Don Albi). I was brought up in a busy household and Mr Uden lived with us. He fought in the 1st World War and at the age of 17 was shot and became an amputee. He didn't share any stories about his sufferings
How: But during his convalescence he moved to St Ives in Cornwall and learnt from a relative his artistic skills and loved being amongst the artists there.
Record: After he died I looked into his history re: the war years and was fascinated to learn of all his connections to art amongst his family too. I now have two lovely original paintings by his cousin Ernest Uden on my wall. It's so good to know how much art can help in healing.

Who: Helen Barbara. She is deaf, autistic.
How: Pottery, painting, drawing, embroidery, spinning, weaving.
Record: She has a huge body of work, has had 2 exhibitions, she would need someone to do something with her work!

Who: Adrianne. My neighbour and art teacher growing up. She lived next door to us.
How: She worked as a textile designer to pay the bills but she was an oil painter. She would have a tiny studio in the corner of her dining room. She would go to Kew Gardens to take photos/draw and then paint at home or the flowers in her garden or she would devise the art classes for us children of what she was working on vice versa.
Record: She hopefully has a copy of her paintings or the paintings themselves? But I have a record of other pieces of art that I made with her as a child. As I was an extension of her, her knowledge, her skill, her tutelage, her creative expression. A lot of people say the work would work well as textiles and it's because of her love of detail and colour is also my love too. She was my Art Master/Art Mistress.

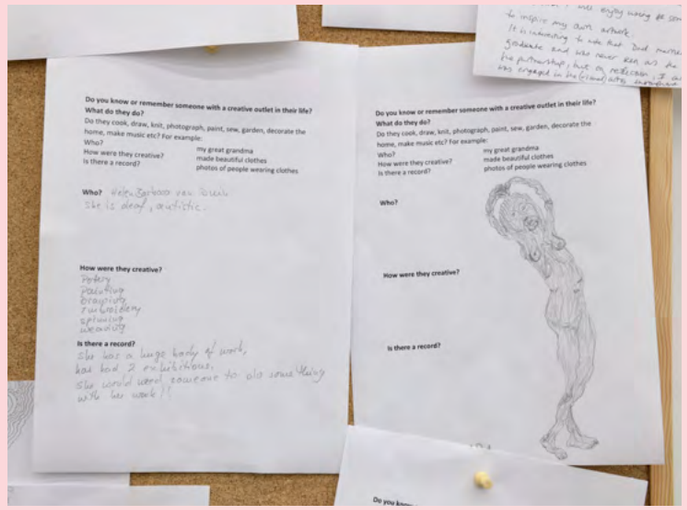
Who: My Mother.
How: Very, she was an embroideress.
Record: Yes - on my wall - in my attic and behind my spare bed - the waste of this collection - has restricted and constrained my own drawing practice - what do we do with all this 'domestic creativity' when we've gone - put it in a skip! Who wants it? So suddenly creativity becomes a transient practice for the maker only - a time filler and has no purpose - sorry to be negative.

Who: Jane, known as 'Bear' who used her musical talents to inspire the children she taught in Primary School.
How: Also a proficient knitter and clothes maker.
Record: Hopefully in the lives of those she taught and encouraged, as well as her family.

Who: Me!
How: I make wedding and event stationery as a full time job - and have done so for 14 years.

Who: My Mum.
How: Knitting/sewing/dressmaking/painting on glass. Gardening. Cooking - experimenting with different flavours.
Record: I have many of her pieces before she passed away. Photos of some of her dresses/knitwear/garden.

Who: My friend Sarah who I was at school with and was always good at art. Sarah was always creative in the way she dressed and looked colouring her hair when no one else did.
How: Sarah became a milliner. She trained with the Queen's milliner Frederick Fox and



Above: *Obscure Secure at Towner Eastbourne*, visitor responses to questions, July 2022

makes beautiful hats for people to wear to weddings and special occasions.
Record: Sarah's hats would look fabulous in a gallery. Sarah is now not only making hats but teaching people to make hats at Morley College. She has also written a book with her business partner Rachel so there is a record of their beautiful creations.

Who: My Mother was immensely creative.
How: As well as mothering 3 girls. She spent her evenings sewing, cooking and making. She made all of us dresses as well as cloth dolls with dresses made from the offcuts from our dresses. Often with matching hats and knickers. She knitted tiny cardigans and bobble hats and little handbags for the dolls too. She was an amazing cook and gardener too. In her later years she started oil painting. She also loved clothes and was always very stylish and innovative in the way she dressed.
Record: She disliked her own paintings and threw most of them away. I have one that I fished out of the bin when she wasn't looking. I treasure it. She was a very good painter, but I feel lacked role models/encouraging influences. She loved all art and would often take gallery day trips when she was a pensioner. The walls of her house were packed to the ceiling with art works.

Who: Aunt.
How: Photography.
Record: Instagram.

Who: My mum's a creative, and on my dad's side my great grandad John??
How: My mum taught me when I was little and she does wedding stationery and my paternal great grandfather was an oil painter.
Record: My great grandad did a dog oil painting.

Who: My Grandma (1929-2017). Her name was Jean Beddar.
How: She was a painter. For a job she painted for advertisements, billboards etc. She was never encouraged or had the resources to go to art school, so essentially taught herself and tried to do it while raising kids. I think, sadly, this unfulfilled, creativity/potential made her depressed and frustrated for large chunks of her life.
Record: Yes, we have lots of her paintings. My dad especially in his house.

Who: My mum paints fantastic, colourful paintings.
How: Acrylic paint on canvas and board.
Record: Many photos and paintings.

Who: Rosemary Rutherford (1912-72).
How: I am just starting research on this artist who was largely based in Essex and who would have been contemporary with Kathleen Walne. I just wondered if there was any mention of Rosemary in your research on Kathleen? Artist and war artist in WW2 and stained glass artist.

Above: Lucy's Women artists' research workshop (part of residency), 13 July 2022, research by workshop participants into women artists in Towner's Wertheim exhibitions

Record: Imperial War Museum, National Maritime Museum and Chelmsford Museum, Broomfield Church Essex. I am helping to research Project Rutherford for Broomfield Church, Essex where several of Rosemary Rutherford's artworks are held.

Who: My Dad was a very creative person. He had hemophilia and was in hospital much of his childhood, but he drew well and may well have been a candidate for art school. Sadly he failed his 11+ and ended up going to secretarial college - hardly surprising, given how much school he missed.
How: Dad had an 'out of the box' approach to most things in life, he would pick dandelion flowers to put in a salad, taught himself guitar, made his own darkroom inspired by seeing one his own father (a police inspector) used at work. He was a keen photographer all his life. I have a lovely photo of Dad dressed as Magritte.
Record: Dad's photos are archived on his computer and many are in albums. I will soon inherit these (via my Mum) and I will enjoy using some of his images to inspire my own art work. It is interesting to note that Dad married an art school graduate and was never seen as the 'arty' one in the partnership, but on reflection, I can see that he was engaged in the (visual) arts throughout his life.

Who: My Aunt (deceased).
How: She painted, she was born in Trinidad and painted pictures of local life. As a 13 year old she also painted an image of Jesus on the cross.

Record: My sister has one of her original paintings, but family also have photographs of some of her paintings, I would guess that some of her children have some of her original works.

Who: Our friend Peggy Coutu.
How: Made tapestry works of beautiful detail. Aso collected buttons and tapestry bags - had a very important collection.
Record: Sadly no - just photographs and some of the actual tapestries. The buttons and bags collection were sold at auction after she died a few years ago.

Who: My Dad. He died in 2019 and would have been 100 this year (Les Bradley 10/8/22)
How: He was an art teacher and when he retired took up photography initially to use the photos to inspire his painting but the photography took on a life of its own and he began to collage his photos, mainly of decaying docklands and industrial landscapes in Fleetwood Lancs. He did mainly photography collage from then on - occasional pastels.

Above: *Night Butterflies* card made by Kathleen Walne, brought in by a friend of Kathleen's during the residency

Record: Dad had a number of exhibitions and was sponsored by North West Arts. There were newspaper reviews etc. He exhibited into his 80's. My brother and I have lots of his work as does the school he taught at.

Who: My Mother and brother, wife.
How: Mother, gardener. Brother painter. First wife writer, second wife interior designer, painter.
Record: Yes.

Who: My Nana.
How: She cooks homely tasty puddings focusing on taste not looks.
Record: She wrote a family cookbook to remember her by.

Who: Charlie Vos/ Gemma Holdsworth.
How: Charlie - various art styles/music/fashion. Gemma - makes clothing, jewellery, paintings, life drawings.
Record: Instagram.

Who: An elderly lady, in her 80's. I got to know her and found she had once been very wealthy but had fallen on hard times. She lived in a very humble small bedsit in a large Victorian house.
How: Inside the bedsit it was beautiful, she had recreated a theatrical looking room. She'd made many things in her bedsit - large velvet curtains with hand mock braid. She made a living buying and selling antique necklaces, but they were very artistic, chunky, not traditional looking.
Record: Sadly not.

Who: My grandad. My mum.
How: He used to make puzzles. For years I remember him sitting at the table making giant puzzles and gluing them down and framing them. She used to make rag dolls for children, we used to have them hanging up as decorations. Old fabric made their dresses and wool for hair.
Record: Only in my memory.

Above: *Obscure Secure at Towner Eastbourne*, Residency Studio installation, July 2022

Kathleen Walne, *Charlie*, c1932, watercolour on paper, 56 x 38 cm
© The Estate of Kathleen Walne, Towner Eastbourne

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