

“I was the kid playing in the button tin...”

Textiles teacher Kirsty Grant is the featured artist in this month's CHASE. AMY FORDE, marketing and communications assistant at Rotherham Open Arts Renaissance (ROAR), went along to her favourite haunt, Fitzwilliam & Hughes, to have a chat with her.



KIRSTY is a new member of ROAR and has been creating some fascinating textile art.

I tried to discover where this love of textiles came from and Kirsty immediately delved into her heritage. Admitting she has always been creative, Kirsty affectionately talks of her grandmother, who was a seamstress.

She told me: “I used to be the kid playing in the button tin.”

Kirsty evoked childhood memories exploring her Gran's cupboard, packed full of boxes of fabrics, yarns and ribbons.

Although originally from Glasgow, an accent she still keeps, Kirsty's connection to Rotherham is strong. Moving to England in her early teens, she spent most of her school years here in Rotherham, going on to study Art and Design BTEC at college and later Textile Design at Birmingham City University.

She explained that she recently had to leave South Yorkshire, but on returning admits “it just felt like home again.”

Kirsty now teaches her craft around the borough, to students aged 16 and over and adults with learning disabilities, and has a humble outlook on her role: “I think for me teaching is about getting involved with like-minded people — I help them, but creative people, no matter their age, can help me.”

This refreshing approach is something which is threaded into her artwork.

As she explained: “You don't learn everything in art, you just keep going, you just keep growing.”

This sentiment is telling of her current position; through talking, I felt that Kirsty was at the start of a journey, full of enthusiasm and buzzing for the future.

Kirsty elaborated on this as we discussed her art in a bit more depth.

Having recently gone through therapy, she began using art as an outlet for her feelings. The piece she is most proud of is where she has embroidered all her diary entries, all her negative thoughts and feelings, into fabric.

She explained: “When I look at that piece, which could be seen as a negative piece, I am happy because I think that's not my life any more.”

Through this process, Kirsty learnt much about herself and, more importantly, began to recognise how important art was to her survival.

She also realised through the very process of doing and not over-thinking her work, that she felt most positive about it.

“I don't always have a plan, I just do,” she said, adding: “I do what makes me feel happy and I do what I feel like doing at the time.”

In this sense, her relationship with textiles is very deep, although having a passion for all art forms, she describes textiles as “a comfort zone”, something which feels very familiar.

As she put it: “I can appreciate art but I see in textiles.”

Much of her work now she sees as a way to be mindful — the tangible nature of working with materials, fabrics and patterns she has specifically chosen or kept back for a special piece, explaining: “If I've got these things around me which are familiar and then I am creating with them as well, it's like I am creating a little bubble.”

Kirsty is a relatively new member of ROAR. Having known about the organisation for a while, she finally felt ready to get involved and become a member.

Like many, caught in the chaos of all that real life brings, she likes having someone there to hold her hand and nudge her along. “It gives you that confidence to keep going,” she says.

In the future, she says she would like to get more involved in the organisation and with fellow artists here in Rotherham.

She admits that she is more eager to get involved here than anywhere else: “I feel like it's more meaningful in Rotherham.”

“I love the idea of getting involved with things that are not established and putting my own spin on things.”

And I concluded: “You heard it Rotherham. Watch this space.”

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