

Exhibition Notes for 'Captured'

an Exhibition of Court Art

by Mike O'Donnell

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www.courtsketcher.com

Welcome to the 'Captured' exhibition. This comprises some 50 pieces from the Criminal Courts where I work as a court artist.

Subject Matter

The subject matter is made up of lawyers, judges and some individuals those who have presented in the dock at the Criminal Courts of justice. While most of my work is based in the Central Criminal Court, you will find studies from the Court of Criminal Appeal, the Special Criminal Court, the Circuit Criminal Court and a work from a General Court Martial at McKee Barracks.

Inspiration

I cannot locate the inspiration for the work that I do. The Kerry writer Con Houlihan said that influence is like a shower which encourages the growth of what's already there. However I can identify people and events that have undoubtedly stimulated my interest in working in the courts.

The innovative spirit which drives me continuously derives from my late father Paddy who was more than an amateur artist and my great uncle, Fr. Leonard E. Boyle who was more than just the Prefect of the Vatican Library. Both always challenged conventional wisdom, never being afraid to seek out new approaches. Their inspiration lives through the support I receive from my family.

The legal aspect of my work is attributable to my wonderful mentor and fellow Kerryman, Mr. Justice Hugh O'Flaherty who has supported me in many ways for the last 15 years.

In August 2009 I attended a lecture by Mr. John McGuiggan SC in Tralee where he spoke about Sir John Lavery's 'High Treason: The Appeal of Roger Casement'. This presentation was of particular interest as I spend many hours each week on Banna Beach where I am conscious I run across Casement's footprints. As a result I am very conscious of his historical legacy. The lecture provided me with an interest in court art specifically and the lack of court art in the Irish tradition. At viewing of Lavery's work at Kings Inns at Easter time 2009 arranged by Mr. Jonathan Armstrong of the Kings Inns Library for me and Judge O'Flaherty was pivotal.

Some months later I was knocked from my bike and after I counted my four limbs as I lay on the ground I decided I would have do what I believed I was designed to do. Days later I heard that the Criminal Courts of Justice building, in line with international obligations, prevented visual access to

those in custody. Within weeks I was drawing at the Eamonn Lillis trial who was on trial for the alleged murder of Celine Cawley. This heralded the publication of my first piece of court art.

How I approach my work

I prepare assiduously for my work. Much like a protagonist might prepare for engaging in argument, I prepare by trying to maintain as high a degree of physical fitness as possible so that I am best able to acquire the mental and physical equilibrium necessary for my work. This is why I run continuously on Banna Strand at home in Kerry. I attune myself to the various nuances of people's faces and physical features, dress and how they comport themselves. I have an interest in people's eyes in particular and latterly people's feet. Eyes it is said are mirrors of the soul. It might be worth looking at my 'Exhibition of Eyes' on www.courtsketcher.com. For me, one's feet, shoes, walking style, behaviour of one's legs are indicators of one's origin, position and destination – although I have not explored this for the purposes of an exhibition.

The Work

Drawing in the courts, at any trial, is a great privilege and is most enjoyable for me. My work is a collection of portraits in motion as my subjects never sit still – this challenges but amuses me. Ironically it is often the accused who are the stillest! However the accused sometimes smiles with an odd one playing peek-a-boo, which requires me to attempt to acquire his or her visual essence from an occasional glance. I have never had an accused being impolite to me and it appears some enjoy being drawn. Sometimes my subjects – not only the accused – partially cover their faces. I am not convinced this acts as a suitable shield as I have a theory that one's body is a visual whole and not a collection of visually distinct parts e.g. pointy ears, pointy nose, pointy fingers etc. As can be seen I have a preference for pencil. I have no profounder reason for using it other than that it is clean, challenging and doesn't dirty my suit.

Purpose of the Work

Ultimately I draw in the courts because I enjoy it. I began to do as a young boy many years ago in the courthouse in Tralee. The reason I drew there was that my subjects were not likely to demand that I run outside to kick ball with them – they were ensconced where they were! Since I started doing so in earnest at the Eamonn Lillis trial, I have had much of my work published. Perhaps it can satisfy a human curiosity. I like to think it provides people with a view of justice being done. My preference is for drawing court scenes as I like the variety, the visual dynamic involved among the cast of characters. A particular court scene I draw can never be replicated and this fascinates me. If I convey the interaction of lawyers at work and the atmosphere of the scene I am well pleased.

Thanks

There are many people who have wittingly and unwittingly conspired to bring about this exhibition. I work with many people in the courts. Officials from the court service – especially Gerry Curran of the Court Service Media Relations, John Quirke of the Special Criminal Court, Bernard Neary of the Court of Criminal Appeal - have been incredibly generous and kind to me. My journalist friends offer great fun and support. Many lawyers have taken an interest in my work since the beginning. Officers from the Prison Service have been very kind to me at all times – especially Pdraig Dunne. Every judge I have encountered has been very kind and accommodating to me as have their able tipstaffs. Photo-

editors have given me a valuable chance to show my work in all the national newspapers and on television. I wish to thank my family for their support from the beginning.

I wish to give thanks to Margaret E. Ward who has been a wonderful support through the organisation of this exhibition. I am also indebted to Mr. Brendan Grehan S.C. for encouraging me from the beginning. To the Minister for Arts, Heritage and Culture, Mr. Jimmy Deenihan, T.D., I extend a Kerry thank you for his interest in my work. I wish to thanks Mr. John O'Donnell, S.C. who has poeticised for the event. I am also very grateful to Mr. Harry McQuaid of the Bar Council for so kindly hosting this event without any fuss.

I want to give special thanks for the Honourable Mr. Justice Carney for officially opening the 'Captured' exhibition. It is a great honour to work at his pleasure in the Central Criminal Court; without his kindness, none of this work would happen.

Finally, I wish to thanks you for spending some time looking at my work.

Dedication

I dedicate this exhibition to my mother and to the memory of my late father.

Sale of Works

All works are for sale.

Each piece of work costs €390 as you see it the exhibition i.e. including frame, except where indicated.

Five signed prints of each work are available on request. Each is unframed and costs €125 including package and posting.

Commissions are accepted including court based portraits and seated portraits.

Comments

If you have any comments or suggestions please feel free contact me on mikodonnell@gmail.com or at 086 2207222