

Arts & Leisure

Splash of colour.
Clare Iles, who is showing her work at the Minories gallery in Colchester.

Photo
Steve Burt
GOSWOLD



Inspiration. Some of the photos Clare's great-grandfather took during the First World War.

Her art is a colourful journey

Noel D'Arcy-Jones

THE unusual space Colchester artist Clare Iles has created for her latest exhibition feels a bit like you're crouching down to look through an old camera.

And there's a very good reason for that because Multicoloured Drawings/Culptures, the title of the show, is partly inspired by her great-grandfather's old Thornton Pickard camera.

"After my Nan died," she begins, "my father and I went to the house to go through her things.

"It was one of those very sad jobs most people have to do at some point in their lives, but as part of it we discovered these images of my great-grandfather took when he was stationed in the Middle East during the First World War."

After verifying them with the Imperial War Museum in London, Clare decided to take her great-grandfather's camera, which was stored with his pictures, along with his grandfather's tripod, back to the places her ancestor had visited during the war.

"We worked out he had been to Jerusalem, Egypt and the Lebanon border," she reveals, "but I started in East Jerusalem.

"This was 2010 and after a while I found myself in a tent talking with an old Palestinian man called Hassan.

"He was originally a shoemaker, but I was hoping he would recognise some of the places in these tiny old pictures and then take me there.

"A young Palestinian man had died a few days earlier and so the tent had become a memorial to him, filled with wrapped-up banners, boundary stones and photographs.

"People were telling me their stories and stories of the British occupying Jerusalem, and there's me listening to them with my grandfather's tripod and my great-grandfather's camera on top next to me. Whilst I sat in the tent I was thinking about how these moments and objects occupied the space and how they became symbols of our own individual stories."

As a sculptor, the items

immediately got her thinking about her own work and a past trip to Berlin with its vibrant colours, which, in turn, led to the work now on show.

"In 2005, I went on a journey to India," she continues, "to find nomads and gypsies living and travelling around the country.

"I became interested in how colour is used to express the identity of different families and nomadic groups.

"The textiles the nomads live with and the clothes they wear express a way of life that is passed down through generations.

Born in Letch on Sea, Clare grew up in Frinton, but has been based in Colchester since 2001.

"I lived in London for a while," she says, "where, before I went to college, I worked as an under-18s assistant at Lloyds of London.

"I was 18 when I joined and stayed there, on and off, until I was 26.

"At school I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I went to St Benedicts, where I did quite a bit of music, and then at the Colchester Sixth Form College I kind of lost my way, which is why I joined Lloyds.

She left the organisation after she was made redundant and despite being initially worried about her prospects, she now realises it was the best thing that could have happened to her.

"It was a bit of a shock to the system," Clare admits, "especially still being in my 20s, but it gave me an opportunity to finally do what I wanted to do."

It was odd that art didn't feature in her plans since her father, Richard, ran his own art gallery in Colchester for more than 30 years.

"I went working in the gallery from time to time," she laughs. "I was surrounded by that world. It used to drag us around these old antique shops, which I remember moaning about. Now you can't get me out of those shops."

After evening classes in London, Clare went to Cambridge Art School, before taking a fine art degree at the Colchester School of Art, at Colchester Institute.

After a brief stint in Norwich, she returned to the town and got a job in a supermarket at night while working in her studio during the day.

"Eventually, my old teacher asked whether I wanted to go back to the Colchester School of Art to teach part time," she smiles, "and I've now been there nine years.

"That's been great because it has enabled me to continue my practice at the same time."

Following shows in Nottingham, Sheffield and Norwich, Clare says it's great to be back showing work in her home town.

"It's basically a celebration of all my work since my 2010 trip," she says, "which is that extra bit special because it's here at the Minories, where the Colchester School of Art is."

Clare Iles, Multicoloured Drawings/Culptures is at the Minories Art Gallery, High Street, Colchester, until February 22. Monday to Saturday, 10am to 5pm. Entry is free. For details, call 01206 713417 or visit colchester.ac.uk/art-minories

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