

9<sup>th</sup> May 2009

## Covering Letter

Dear LUTSF

The fulfilling of my Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Award, which I have titled **Derby Dance** comprised of two sets of visits to Deda Dance Centre. These occurred on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> and December 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008. My second set of visits was on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 25 and finally April 1<sup>st</sup> 2009.

My aim of completing a good collection of drawings directly observed of dancers with learning difficulties has been essentially achieved. I regret the two delays the Officer in charge made me endure. Ten months after formally requesting help to complete my award she had only been allowed four visits and banned me after the first one, because I sent in two examples of my paintings unsigned. Stephen Munn, the Director promptly over turned this decision, but because of her relentless disinterest and coldness I felt very unwelcome and started to believe I was doing something wrong.

It was only my patient persistence and great desire to fulfil my award that resulted in a positive outcome.

When I was eventually allowed to begin visits I was so relieved that upon contacting Key Travel for some railway tickets I accepted surprising charges from them which was £10 for the first ticket followed by a £7 charge for each of my three following tickets. Consequently for my first four tickets costing £32 each I was charged £31. Should this method have continued half my award would have been used in administration charges. However following your advice I bought the remaining tickets directly from the station and have now returned the tickets to Mr Boure as requested by you. Naturally any future winner who has repeat travel plans could avoid these upsetting charges.

I intend to send a copy of my report to Leicester City Council supporting my proposal that they employ me as an artist to draw the athletes of the Special Olympics taking place in Leicester in July 2009. Also I intend to apply to Dean Clough Galleries, Halifax to exhibit the paintings and drawings I have completed with your help together with the work from my original visits to Derby.

Yours sincerely,

Tim Clarke

## The Report of Tim Clarke

### Derby Dance

How might dance inform my work as a painter I asked myself that could satisfy imaginatively, emotionally offering dynamism and intrigue? My search for images to work from led me to a brochure for Derby Dance Centre in 2005. Flicking through I was amazed by one photograph that outshone all others. It showed three dancers quite close, relating in the most unusual and fascinating way, who were described as having learning difficulties.

Inspired by the then recent film *Million Dollar Baby* that had a poster in the gym scenes saying 'a winner is simply someone who will do what a loser will not'. My own diffidence making these words remarkably significant I wrote to the centre asking if I might attend their classes and draw them. Their choreographer gave a very encouraging reply so off I went weekly for three months.

Once I had accumulated a body of drawings I started to evolve them into paintings that initially took many attempts. Just after these experiences I found details of The Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Award and qualifying I sent off my application and was delighted to be one of the winners. The source of my satisfaction was the pleasure I gained from knowing a judging panel had shown belief in me. When I discovered where the destinations of other winners were I smiled wonderfully seeing my Derby was their Kartong, Venice, San Francisco and Toronto. Having already met the dancers I intended to draw, I believed who ever my companion award winners were to meet and study, their dance at best could only equal the profundity of the Derby learning difficulty dancers.

Learning from my previous experience where I occasionally asked for dancers to slow down or even stop, giving me more time to draw I decided I would make no such requests adopting an attitude of acceptance and non interference, because those previous requests had been counter productive and inhibited spontaneous expression from them and me.

On arrival I knew that I would be meeting new dancers, the group who amazed and inspired me before having disbanded. Undeterred I was certain the three new dancers would provide an ocean of intrigue. My main aim was to make rapid drawings of them in unusual connections, but essentially I drew non-stop for the whole hour of each class. The teacher organised a series of dance promoting activities following a regular line dance warm up. These included finding ways to touch a cardboard tube about a metre long and not touching each other, or on bonfire night imagining themselves to be fireworks. On other occasions the dancers were encouraged into movements using the device of a feather floating between pairs that they might catch with their body or using musical instruments, played by each dancer to inspire movement. At all other times a selection of CD music was played. One of my favourites was watching dance performed to Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake.

After five weeks I shared my drawings with the tutor before what turned out to be his final class. I was indebted to his experience by informing me that those described as having learning difficulties *read* body language much more readily than ordinary people do because they are naturally living it all the time. This aliveness within is so pronounced, he stated that a normal person would have to rigorously practice dance for five years to reach to same level that a learning difficulty person possess naturally.

It is their greatness as movers that attract me to them where hesitation, repetition or bashful self-awareness is absent. As people their characters are always cheerful, friendly, socially skilful, polite, and funny demonstrating an enthusiasm for life that is to be envied.

Following the first teacher's departure, his assistant together with a new teacher took over the class jointly. Their warm up began with finger movement gradually including each limb and back. One of these warm ups astonished me by revealing the subtleness of one dancer who had no problem with the splits or while sitting legs apart touching the floor between with her trunk and extending her arms floor flat.

An emphasis on drama sometimes followed these warm-ups where the dancers were asked to imagine themselves as a new person. On this occasion only two dancers were present and chose to be *Dead Bride* and *Dead Gary*. Coloured gauze was offered to aid the characterisation. One interesting development occurred with the bride wearing bloody red and white gauze was an essential loss of movement, because she was *dead*. The following week a similar theme was proposed and the dancers were asked to adopt new personalities, an idea that was instantly declined with 'No, we like who we are'.

Decisiveness was a character feature of the dancers, one for instance saying she did not want to dance to the music then playing while on another occasion having listened to the instructions responded with 'let's do it, let's do it' before any subsequent information could be offered. When a tutor asked for a volunteer, always one dancer in particular would step half a pace forward.

Other ideas stimulating movement involved the use of a long piece of cloth. Dancers held down the ends while another went underneath the taught material making a series of body impressions. The same material was later used for one dancer to wrap up another. A further fascinating pairing was that of puppets where one dancer completely controlled the movement of the other.

So the two periods of my visits evolved. I constantly drew on A2 paper in pencil naturally as quickly as possible with some improvisation. To indicate the speeds of movement perhaps imagine a camera capturing the same images. An exposure of a quarter of a second would surely result in blurring. My drawings took several seconds, outdoing I hope a camera, by the directness and humanness of my lines, such that my pencil hand danced at best as they danced. Too much care was simply impossible whilst too little was meaningless.

At the conclusion of the sessions of my second visits a few moments were spent with all present regarding my work of that day. The dancers themselves essentially were not particularly interested although one always and decisively wanted to know she had been drawn. On one occasion I showed an accurate drawing of a dancer's face, which to my astonishment, was completely beyond their power of recognition. One teacher was very encouraging at these times by continually responding positively to my drawings.

From the start I had drawn both teachers and dancers alike, yet revised this response when I came to regard my drawings with a view to painting and discovered I did not realise who was who. I found this very complementary to the learning difficulty dancers who in my drawings were indistinguishable from the experienced professional teachers. Consequently I became very fussy, refusing to draw the teachers and labelling each drawing with the first letter of each dancer's name. This was because I wanted to ensure that all who appeared in my paintings were those with learning difficulty characteristics. When towards the end of my visits a new dancer appeared I initially refused to draw her, but charmed by her character I altered my opinion and included her in my drawing. On the final look at my work she made the simple and acute observation 'it must be very difficult because we're always moving'. In fact it was profoundly difficult.

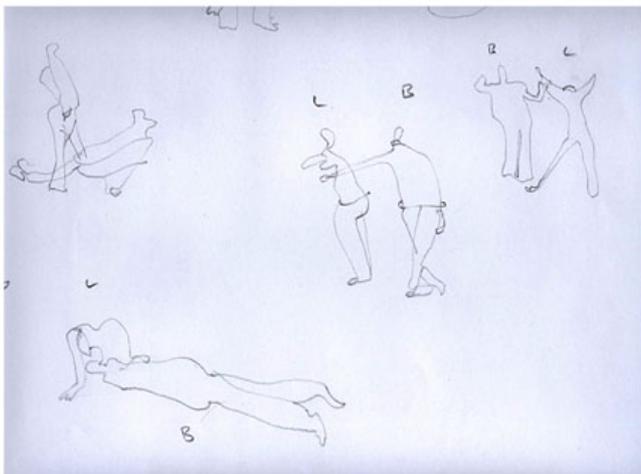
One of my aims as mentioned was to produce paintings from these drawings, six of which I include in my report. Most interesting to me was the unusual connections the dancers made with each other. Accepting that all art aims to show us life more than it is perceived in everyday appearance and that all art exaggerates to achieve this aim I am profoundly grateful to these dancers for providing me with such rich material to work from. I have taken the dancers from their dance studio and placed them in ordinary settings to enhance and layer the ordinary suggested as extraordinary.

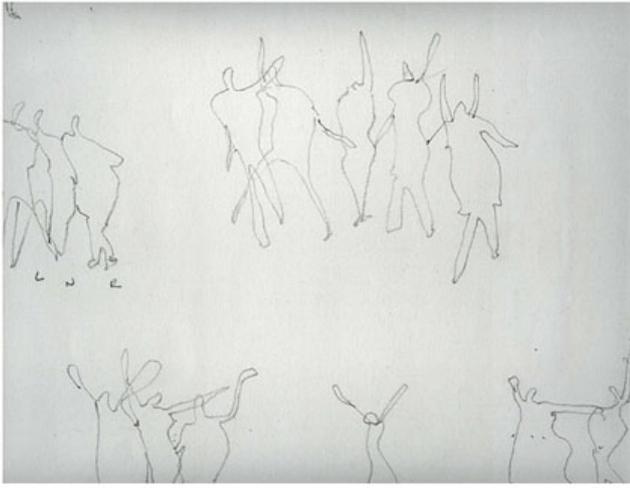
I am profoundly grateful to those who judged me a recipient of this award. The belief in me that they demonstrated has made a lasting quality in the perception I have of my own ability. Winning the award and fulfilling it has been a privilege.

I would like to suggest that the realization that I have been working with those addressed as having learning difficulties is impossible to discern from my visual work. For me they challenged the idea of normal, of our learning experience and what it means to be human. For me they are great teachers of life. I hope such ideas have strayed into my work without words just as their dance is wordless yet staggeringly communicative in the highest sense.

The images are examples of my drawings, all of which are details from my thirty A2 pages of drawings, most of which are completed on both sides. These scans represent one quarter of a page and are selected because they are nearly all used in my paintings which all are shown whole.

Tim Clarke





*A New Welcome*

Acrylic on paper, 50cm x 40cm, 2009