

My Story: Study with Georg Baselitz

It was during a Glasgow Art School trip to Amsterdam in 1984 that I first encountered the paintings of Georg Baselitz, shown in a major exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum.

I remember walking up some wide stairs to the exhibition and seeing the bottom part of a large painting. By the time I saw the full work, I was overwhelmed and very excited. I did not know this kind of painting or the importance of Georg Baselitz. His paintings were large, mainly the single figure and painted upside down, that didn't seem so relevant to me at the time. Important was that the figures had a *presence*.

I spent my last money on the catalogue. At home when I discovered Baselitz address I wrote him a postcard saying how much I'd enjoyed the exhibition and was very surprised indeed to receive a reply!

Baselitz secretary wrote back to me, in English, saying that Mr Baselitz is pleased that I'd enjoyed his exhibition in Amsterdam and also wished me success as a painter. A card from Baselitz of the work that I said I particularly liked was included with his very best wishes.

Approaching my graduation at the Glasgow School of Art I knew that I still needed further study but I had not concluded under whose influence and where it should be. When I found out that Georg Baselitz was a professor at the Hochschule der Künste in Berlin I knew this was the answer. I immediately asked my Glasgow tutors for advice, but there was no help or interest except from one who encouraged and supported me throughout. This was an early lesson that I had to do things for myself.

I discovered that Baselitz lived in a castle near Hildesheim in the Hanover area. My sister Norma lived and worked in Frankfurt at the time, and speaks perfect German. I asked her to contact Baselitz at his castle and suggested she ask specifically for his secretary, which she did. 'No' she was told on the telephone 'he is on holiday'. Norma replied that her sister would be very disappointed, she was keen to have an appointment to show Herr Baselitz her work for further study. "I am he" said the man who'd answered the phone, "I

will be in Berlin at the art school next week. She can bring her portfolio and I will look at it”.

The news “Margaret has an interview with Georg Baselitz” buzzed around the Glasgow School of Art!

I began the difficult process of applying for scholarships and was often rejected immediately because of my age, 36. Each evening between sessions writing my final dissertation I went through a grant list for further study. Among others, I contacted whisky and beer companies but believe I received more refusals than applications I’d sent out!

A major application was to the German Academic Exchange Service (the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst) and they specified that a condition of my application would be to provide a letter from Georg Baselitz saying he wanted me as a student.

Norma and I made our plans to meet in Berlin where she would support me with the language.

At the Hochschule der Kuenste, Herr Professor Baselitz was an imposing figure with close cropped hair, a scar above his eyebrow; he smoked a cigar and was dressed like a landed gentleman. His assistant, the artist Christa Dichgans, and a group of his students were also in attendance.

Baselitz looked at the work in my portfolio, asked questions and decided it was very academic reflecting a great emphasis on life drawing at the Glasgow School of Art. He suggested it would be good for me to study with him in Berlin and he dictated a letter to his assistant to that effect.

With great elation I stopped off on my way home at the London office of the German Academic Exchange Service and handed in my letter. Despite their former condition, they still refused to send my application on to the head office in Bonn.

By then I was so used to refusals I did not waste time in protest but struck them off my list and went on to the next.

I had achieved the most important part, acceptance for study with Georg Baselitz and I had to concentrate on the funding to enable it.

I won a nation-wide British prize from American Express, writing about 'how travel would enhance my study'. Coincidentally The Sunday Times magazine at the time had a huge front page photo of Baselitz and large article. So I used copies to include with my applications. I also obtained an award for talented Scots from the Scottish International Education Trust. On graduating I won a prize from the Glasgow School of Art. Along with other smaller grants I eventually had enough to take up my study in Berlin!

As a one parent family the care of my two teenage children was crucial and I have been forever grateful that my family agreed they could stay with them during my study time in Berlin.

With preparations in place, I at last arrived in Berlin and the next phase. I was alone, didn't know anyone in the city, had little of the language and had no permanent address. For the first two weeks I stayed in a hostel. However I soon found accommodation and the Art School semester began. Christa Dichganz told me that Der Meister was coming to Berlin, I should have work ready to show him and he would visit me in my accommodation.

The flat I lived in had once been had a shop at the front with accommodation at the back. Baselitz arrived with several serious looking students, who ranged themselves along the ledge of the large shop window and turned out to be my jury as Baselitz asked me questions about my work which was then open for discussion.

I had not previously realised that I was a private student of Baselitz and had no rights to a space in the Hochschule der Künste. However Christa Dichgans invited me to come along and meet some of Baselitz other students. With the hope I might make some colleague friends my delight was short-lived; as I arrived at the studios there was a group of mainly women students sitting at one side of a table and a chair at the other side for me. It was another interview. Luckily I had brought photos of my Glasgow School of Art work and after some muttering among themselves my inquisitors decided I could have a space in the studio.



Work I produced following my study with Georg Baselitz and shown in a group show entitled Art in Exile in the Mackintosh Museum Glasgow School of Art.

Another aspect of my study was competition for the attention of Baselitz. When he visited he tended to walk around the studios in the style of a hospital consultant with a group of students in tow and discussions were encouraged.

Baselitz first and most important advice to me was to 'draw, draw, draw; fifty, sixty drawings a day, to clarify ideas'. To this day I still draw incessantly. The study period with

Baselitz was very valuable; he was extremely knowledgeable about art history and his teaching also involved student discussions.

However it was after my study time at the Hochschule der Künste that my experiences of Berlin, divided in East and West by a Wall became the overriding influence on my artwork.

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