

SHEILA FAWKES

Moseley Road Secondary Art School 1957-1960

Artist, Teacher, Musician and Mother of three

"The School opened all the doors for me to be myself. I felt free as an individual. To be given that opportunity at 12 years of age was incredible."

Sheila Fawkes 2019



A driven and flamboyant artist who uses a wide range of media to express the complex problems of 'Living in a language not your own'. Luce Irigaray (French Philosopher).

Her work practice employs a variety of media and disciplines including painting, sculpture, textiles, performance-art, costume, drawing, writing, and music.

In 1960, Sheila automatically progressed to Birmingham College of Art to study for the degree level Diploma in Art and Design. The male culture of Pop Art and Abstract Expressionism gave little scope for female interpretation. Sheila found this illuminating but difficult, and left college disheartened.

After the birth of her first child, Sheila designed patterns and garments for boutiques and manufacturing companies. Studying a creative embroidery course at Bournville School of Art she started to combine her fine art and textile practice to realise her own form of expression.

In 1975 Sheila was appointed Head of Textiles at Midlands Art Centre. Teaching Creative Textiles, exhibiting her own work and curating other exhibitions, tutoring in schools and colleges, and encouraging a creative approach to textiles.

Sheila designed theatre costume and sets for the Birmingham Touring Opera, Kokuma, Britain's first Afro Caribbean dance company, the MAC's Young People's Opera and John Blundell's innovative puppet company.

Following redundancy from the MAC, Sheila became an Arts development worker for Birmingham City Council, supporting adults with learning disabilities and later mental health problems. She was also Artist in Residence at various Schools.

In 2000 Sheila returned to study at Birmingham Central University for an MA in Performance Art. Reading philosophy, women's studies, performance, costume and theatre design she was awarded a Distinction. The final show questioned the dominance of the patriarchal society and took the form of a cabaret with audience participation. This developed themes Sheila continues to explore today in paintings and drawings, revisiting motifs that fascinate her.

Sheila's work is about trying to make sense of a feminine existence in a male dominated world. To develop an individual feminine language, challenging the systemic inequalities that women still face.

A new creative dimension is performing as a jazz vocalist at major festivals as Sheila and The Guys. Her latest band, Cafe Orchestra, explore the Great American songbook with gypsy jazz accents.

