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...on their de-boo film Extra Ordinary



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AND GIRL BAND



Joanne Betty Conlon

words Brian McMahon



The work of Joanne Betty Conlon reflects her love for old neglected buildings and objects combined with a desire to preserve and revitalise them. In 2017 Kevin Barry featured her photos of the early 1990s Limerick in his *Winter Papers* anthology. Her work has been shown at the Royal Ulster Academy, the RHA, the Format International Photography Festival in Derby and more besides. A longtime fan of her website www.joanneconlon.com, I caught up with Joanne at her studio in Cabra to find out more.

– What attracts you to older things?
I'm quite nostalgic and enjoy the fact that people used stuff before I got my hands on them. I'm a terror for second-hand shops and markets. Old cameras, Super 8 stuff, a reel-to-reel tape recorder, a TV slide projector, switches that make clunky noises – all these give me joy. Things were made to last, which is very different from the throwaway society of today.

I adore Dublin City and photograph it on my cycle to and from work or on my lunch break. My favourite route is through Dublin's Victorian Fruit and Vegetable Market. The hustle and bustle, the banter among traders the wriggling around of forklifts. It's supposedly closing soon to refurbish as a retail food market.* Some traders are fighting to stay. I've been photographing it as it slowly dwindles away.

I'm intrigued by buildings with meander-



ing walls, cockeyed windows and the variety of textures that rotting wood leaves behind. Bushy plants which grow wildly out of tiny cracks without an ounce of soil. Anything built with red brick will catch my eye. I imagine past occupants and how they might have lived. I'm in Dublin long enough to remember some of these buildings in use when local communities thrived. I'm documenting the city I love before it disappears, if only for my own memory which is dreadful.

– How did your photos of Limerick city taken almost 30 years ago end up in the 2017 *Winter Papers* anthology?
I took these photographs while I was studying printmaking at Limerick School of Art & Design. I developed the negatives in the darkroom and only made a couple of prints for practice. They were put away in a folder for over 20 years. About eight years ago, I went through my old archive and scanned my Limerick negatives for my website. Out of the blue, I got an email from Kevin Barry, a Limerick native who was still living there at the time the photos were taken. He asked me if he could use some of my images for his *Winter Papers* anthology. He wanted to write essays around them. I was utterly blown away, and I obviously said yes!

– You've embraced digital technology in your work. What do you think of Instagram?
I've been on Instagram since 2011 when I bought my iPhone 4. I thought the iPhone 4 camera was amazing. I'm grateful that they encouraged me to take more photographs. In the beginning, pictures could only be in a square format. Buildings are especially suitable for squares and I noticed them more. Instagram is full of creative people who are generally very supportive of each other's work. You learn what works and what doesn't. I love looking at art, and I've discovered lots of new artists whose work I can now enjoy. It's also great to find out about exhibitions and open submissions.

– Tell me about your Tea, Cake and Headscarves project?
I've only started drawing again in the last year or so. I've been acquiring slides from flea markets for years. I especially love slides with people. You get to dip into someone else's life. Family photographs are so important to me. I find it very sad to see these precious items discarded, I want to give them a home. I've begun to draw some of the images on my iPad. Yet again, digital technology has made it easier for me to get back into creative mode. I'm enjoying giving these images and people a new lease of life. I've lots more drawings to do. I find the whole process extremely therapeutic.

*The market closed in mid-August

Main: *J A Buckley was here*, 2019, Queen Street, Dublin
Top right: *Man chopping wood*, 1990, Irishtown Limerick
Left: *Want a cuppa*, 2019, Digital Drawing

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