

Michel Hermelin -- Solid'art

Elaine: I am in Pontivy to talk to Sarah Massingham about the project, Solid'art, which actually takes place in Rohan, but I think is spreading its wings now. Sarah, how did this project start and how are you involved?

Sarah: Well, it started a couple, or three years ago, and it was the brain-child of Michel Hermelin. He grew up not being able to access art as a child, and that worried him. He wanted to be involved in art, from a young age, but his parents, his family didn't have the means in order to be able to do it. So, he said, one day, when I'm older, when I've got the money, I'm going to open an art school. And, he also with his work, he spent a lot of time in the United Kingdom, and he discovered, he visited many charity shops and liked this idea of a charity shop system. Things are recycled and then money -- obviously in England -- the money is used for particularly medical charities and so on. But, he liked the idea of putting these two thoughts together: the idea of an art school which was accessible to as many people as possible, and the idea of using a charity shop to fund this idea. And so, that was how the Solid'art came to be born in Rohan, where Michel lives. Michel was funding through the financing from the shop, the charity shop, which he opened. He was funding various different art teachers to come to Rohan to introduce art to different people. At the moment we have painting and drawing classes, which are very, very popular. There's a website, Solid'art website [<https://rohan-solidart.jimdo.com>] and that gives you all the details of the classes, but also if you just turn up, you will be warmly welcomed. But, if you turn up at the shop in Rohan, it's in the centre of Rohan in the old electrical shop in the centre, they can give you all of the times and the details of the opening.

Elaine: So, do the shops, being charity ones, do they have a special rent, that they would-- a lower rent ...

Sarah: I believe so, I believe there's be some negotiation with the local mayor. The shop is staffed by volunteers, who are amazing, there's an amazing team of English and French volunteers who give up their time to sort all of the donations, and that's no mean task.

Elaine: So, what about the funding? Is the, are the classes -- do you pay for your classes?

Sarah: The classes, primarily the funding comes from the finance from the shop. But people are asked to contribute. I mean, it's very, it's a very negligible amount. What, I say that, I have the luxury, I work, but it's three or four euros an hour for an art class, which isn't a huge amount. But, Michel does operate under the discretion that if he feels somebody is in difficulty, but really would benefit from the art therapy, if you like, the art classes then -- he can be negotiated with.

Elaine: Right. That's extremely generous of him, isn't it?

Sarah: It is.

Elaine: Projecting his own needs, in a way.

Sarah: Absolutely. He was very much disadvantaged, he felt, as a child, that he couldn't -- he desperately wanted to have more art in his life, but he couldn't. So now he wants to be able to give that back to people who are in similar situation.

Elaine: Brilliant. So how are you actually involved?

Sarah: I got involved because I saw the poster about pottery. That reminded me of lessons when I was in secondary school and the 'tastrophe (?) art things that I made that my mother scooped up and said were wonderful ...

Elaine: As mothers do ...

Sarah: ... as mothers do and loved them to bits and kept them until I think the last move. Anyway, yes it was the art classes, the pottery class that interested me and so I went along and I said that, I joined the pottery class, and also tried to give my time to the association when I can, but, I work full-times. Community service, your civic service, sort of getting involved and integrating into the local community, everybody pulls together -- I mean a couple of weeks ago we had the massive destockage -- it looked like an enormous jumble sale, but it was all free, so there was no worrying about the cash or anything like that. And the number of people that were there to help was just amazing, because they're all inspired by Michel who wanted to give his time, wanted to give his interest in art to other people.

Elaine: It does seem to me, from my visit the other week to Rohan, that it is very integrated community.

Sarah: Yeah, very much ...

Elaine: ... and that you've got that strength. It keeps the town vibrant.

Sarah: Yeah. Yes, it does. I mean it's -- the shops are occupying two premises, which were empty, and there's a third premises that we use for the workshops. And, again that was privately owned, not owned by the commune, but it's a building that was empty, so thanks to Michel's Sold'art association, three empty premises are now lively and used.

Elaine: Which makes all the difference in the town -- there's nothing more sad, really, than when you see that most of the shops are closed.

Sarah: Absolutely. Another of Michel's projects is the photographs along the canal and around the centre of the town. Old photographs showing the commerce, the businesses as they used to be, and those are all around the centre. He's put those up each year to animate the area for people.

Elaine: That's excellent. Well, thank you very much, Sarah ...

Sarah: ... no problem; my pleasure ...

Elaine: ... for your time. I'm sure you've enjoyed a little bit of break from ...

References:

<https://rohan-solidart.jimdo.com>

<https://www.ouest-france.fr/bretagne/pontivy-56300/rohan-solid-art-demenage-sa-boutique-pour-plus-grand-5248540>