



Amplifying Artistry Series 2, Episode 4
"Strange Horizons"
Transcript

00:00:00 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Welcome to Amplifying Artistry; the podcast that turns up the volume on creativity in North Lanarkshire.

Join us as we dive into the vibrant minds of local creatives right here in the heart of Scotland.

In this series, we'll be chatting with creative people who live or work in North Lanarkshire, exploring their unique stories and witnessing firsthand what happens when passion meets a revolutionary desire to create.

North Lanarkshire Council Arts Development

So whether you're listening during your daily commute, finding solace in these conversations at home, or simply seeking a moment of inspiration; in this podcast we hope that you'll identify with the people that you hear and the stories that we encounter.

By delving into the lives and experiences of North Lanarkshire's gifted artists and creators, we shed light on the transformative power of creativity. So, whether you're seeking a deeper understanding of yourself, a fresh perspective on your own potential, or simply a delightful escape into the world of creativity; Amplifying Artistry promises an enlightening journey that will leave you inspired, informed, and perhaps forever changed. So join us and coory in for the next wee while.

00:01:20 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Hello and welcome back to Amplifying Artistry. I'm your host, Scott Fleming, and on this episode we are going to be unearthing the forgotten talents of one of Motherwell's most underappreciated artists. We'll also be making some big noise with our community choirs who all got together recently to have a chat, a wee cup of tea and to sing with one another; rejoicing in that infectious, uplifting energy that can only come from that symphonic synergy. We'll hear more on that later, but first; I went down to Motherwell Heritage Centre to check out an exciting new addition to the space. 'Strange Horizons' is an exhibit currently running until the 6th of May celebrating the life and works of Millie Flood. Now that's not a name you might be instantly familiar with, but when you see some of her artwork I'm sure you'll find yourself questioning why that is.

I caught up with Rosie Shackleton, assistant curator for the Council, to shine some light on the unique talent that Flood possessed, and why she may not be a household name that's held in the same regard as some of her peers. Enjoy.

00:02:21 **Rosie Shackleton**

So my name is Rosie Shackleton, I'm the Assistant Curator for North Lanarkshire Council. So my job is split between supporting the industrial curator and the social history curator. So I'm working with collections a lot, supporting exhibitions and then curating smaller exhibitions like the Millie Flood currently at North Lanarkshire Heritage Centre.

00:02:41 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Lovely. So, the Millie Flood exhibition, how long has that been running for now?

00:02:44 **Rosie Shackleton**

So that opened in February and then it finishes in May. So it's a good three month run, which was really nice, and it's an art exhibition celebrating the life and work of Millie

North Lanarkshire Council Arts Development

Flood, who was an artist born in Motherwell. We have two paintings by her in the collection, so that kind of sparked the idea and we had a student placement; she started doing research on the paintings and realised actually we had something quite special here that we had two paintings by Millie Flood, and that really kick started that we wanted to do something about her, celebrate her, see if we could get more works to put on display, what research we could do and, kind of, really celebrate her as being a local artist from Motherwell as well as an artist that deserved more recognition.

00:03:32 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

So, why Millie Flood then? What is it about her work that is so special?

00:03:35 **Rosie Shackleton**

I think, from the perspective of being from North Lanarkshire, I think that's always really special; to celebrate local artists. So she grew up 5 minutes from the Heritage Centre so yeah, it felt quite special to be able to host so much of her work in the Heritage Centre, it kind of made sense. But I think her work is so unique. In the collection we have a lot of portraits. We have a lot of, you know, scenes of Councilman, but something about Millie Flood is just inherently different. Like, the colours she used, she was really a master of colour, and when you pull out the racking, it's a nice surprise to get when you see her works. So I think even just the look of the work was something different that we're not really explored before or put on display before. And I think the fact as well that she was hanging around with some really well known artists. So, you know, when she was working she was in the circle of John Duncan Ferguson who was a really well known colourist, Margaret Morris...really heavy hitters. And why is she not more well known? So I think we really wanted to get her name out there, celebrate her as a local artist number 1, but then get her hopefully more recognition in the Scottish art scene more widely.

00:04:47 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

So, you said that you had two pieces by her already, but there's obviously a lot more pieces now. How did you go about collecting the rest of the pieces?

00:04:55 **Rosie Shackleton**

So, the body of the exhibition is from this private collector, he donated about 12 works or something like that. And he was so willing to help us out and send them. We also got in contact with someone from...I think he used to teach at the Edinburgh School of Art. He had one of the Floods as well. And then the final one we got was from the Fleming Collection, which actually was on display in Edinburgh. So Dovecot Studios had an exhibition on Scottish women artists and they had a painting by her which is normally in the Fleming Collection anyway. And they were really happy to help and lend it, so lots of

North Lanarkshire Council Arts Development

sleuthing, lots of “please give me the painting for the shows” and it all came together well.

00:05:36 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Yeah, it's brilliant. They were all willing to contribute to this.

00:05:38 **Rosie Shackleton**

Yeah, exactly. I mean, obviously it helps that we're an accredited museum, so we're gonna uphold the proper care, transportation, you know, hanging of the paintings. I think that always makes things easier between institutions. But obviously getting so much content from a private collector, that was something a bit different, so you know, we had all the crates made specifically based on the measurements he'd given us, our exhibition technician went down and made sure they were all safe. And, you know, it's a different kettle of fish when you're dealing with someone's personal items rather than from a museum collection cause you kind of know what the craic is with that. But no, it all worked really well and everyone was-

00:06:20 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Cause you want them to trust you, don't you?

00:06:21 **Rosie Shackleton**

Exactly. Yeah. And, you know, there's maybe talk about doing the exhibition again or touring it, or getting more work from other collectors. So it's good that it worked out well this time that we know it will work out well next time if, if that makes sense.

00:06:34 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Yeah, fantastic. But there's not just, it's not just paintings in there. I noticed, and you were saying, that there was audio clips as well. Can you talk a little bit about them?

00:06:42 **Rosie Shackleton**

So (it's) quite serendipitous actually. So I said she grew up 5 minutes from where the Heritage Centre is. The people who now live in her house actually popped in and just made themselves known. So we popped round and asked if they'd be willing to be interviewed by us, if they can give us any more information; like leads of maybe where to find more paintings, anything they could tell us about her. The neighbours next door grew up next to Millie Froud, so that family have lived there since, like, the 60s and obviously they're friendly with the people who now live in the house. So it kind of worked out well and we actually went round to the house and they made us tea and scones, which was really lovely. And we interviewed them about what she was like. So they'd go around for Christmas and Millie Froud would give the kids and the family tours of the studio as a Christmas present. You know, it's really personal insight into her as a

North Lanarkshire Council Arts Development

person, not just as an artist. It was a lesser focus on the art itself, but more on what she was like. And I think that's really special. Being a woman artist; chronically under-researched in the whole of art history, that's just a fact, but I think one aspect of that is; okay, yes, the work's there, we can interpret the work as long as you want, but there's often information lacking about what they were like as people. So it felt special to see what she was like, and especially as well, the local element; she was known in Motherwell. She stood out in Motherwell, you know, people would have recognised her and she definitely would have made an impact on the people living here. So no, that was really great and we've shortened the interview down into snippets and then have put that in the exhibitions.

00:08:18 **Millie Frood's Neighbour**

She kind of stood out in Motherwell because she wasn't the conventional person that you saw walking up the town. Her dress sense was totally different from everybody else and we moved to that house in '63, so I was...that was when I was born, was '63. So that's when our family moved here. And when you think about it; in the late 60s, she dressed in the current Mary Quant miniskirts, coloured tights, which was unusual. And you know, like, the knee high white boots, wet look boots that you had, she was a woman of feather bows. So, you know, so you can imagine that type of person walking up the town in Motherwell, to this day would have stood out. She was more cosmopolitan than she was Lanarkshire, let's say.

00:09:06 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

It's interesting you say as well that that is such a part of it that's under researched. Normally it is all about the art that they make but so much of the art is the artists; her art would be different if she was different.

00:09:18 **Rosie Shackleton**

Yeah, 100%. She was a member of something called the New Scottish Group, she was founding member of it. So that was post-war Glasgow. It was an Arts collective that essentially...they almost felt grassroots, that they were doing something different. It didn't matter...no one was telling them "this is the art that's good". They were just experimenting and they paved their own way, and they exhibited together and things like that. And one of the members of that was Louise Anand, and she wrote a book which mentions what the New Scottish Group were up to. And she said that Millie Frood actually was a bit different in the group, you know, that maybe she didn't stand out in this group of really colourful artists who were around her out in Glasgow, but then maybe in Motherwell... and the neighbours said this as well; she might not stand out in London, for example, but she definitely stood out in Motherwell. But one thing she did say, Louise Anand I mean, was that she had a real passion for painting, that you could

North Lanarkshire Council Arts Development

see it in her being. She was a painter through and through, and that came through in her personality and obviously in the work that that she was producing.

00:10:23 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Yeah, definitely. So did she stay in Motherwell her whole life or did she move away at any point?

00:10:28 **Rosie Shackleton**

Yeah, so she stayed in Motherwell all her life and I think she stayed basically on the same street, if not in the same house all her life. And the family as well have been in Motherwell for a while; so her parents were Jessie and John Froot. On the birth certificate, John Froot is noted as being a Hatter and a Hosier, but then we know he went on to become a Provost of Motherwell and there's actually a Froot Street in Motherwell which we're pretty sure was named after him.

00:10:51 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Wow.

00:10:52 **Rosie Shackleton**

Yeah, the family has been there for a long time. She did travel; we're pretty sure she went to America and Japan. There was actually some prints in the house of Japanese origin that she might have brought back, but she always came back to Motherwell and to North Lanarkshire. That was one thing as well I think was really important to her, you know, she was with this group that was in Glasgow, but she also did exhibit her work in North Lanarkshire. But clearly she was wanting to...you get that feeling she wanted to give the art back to the community. She wanted to celebrate, you know, the art she was producing here with the people who lived here as well.

00:11:28 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Umm, yeah. You say that, like, yes, she did travel to America, Japan (but) she always came home to Motherwell. I think it's very fitting that this exhibition is happening in Motherwell, it's almost, sort of, bringing her work home as well. So it's very full circle in a way.

00:11:41 **Rosie Shackleton**

Yeah, it feels really right, it feels important that we're doing this. You know, I think it's nice to be able to have so much of her work here and hopefully people will come to Motherwell to see it. I think that's one of the end goals that we want, you know, we want her to become a bit more of a household name that people will go "I wanna go see more of Millie Froot's work and I'm gonna come to Motherwell, where she was from, to see it".

North Lanarkshire Council Arts Development

00:12:04 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Yeah, absolutely. So what do you think Millie Froud would think of this exhibition then, if she were to walk in and see it?

00:12:11 **Rosie Shackleton**

I honestly do not know, I mean, yes she went to Glasgow School of Art, but she didn't adhere to what all these art critics were saying was good or bad or not. She kind of did her own thing. And I wonder if she would think we're holding her in too high regard, but she's just a painter from Motherwell and she's just, she was just producing this work because she wanted to. But I think she would like that it was local. As I said, she always came back. I think she would like that local people were engaging with her art. Yeah, that's actually an interesting question cause we know that she didn't sell much work in her lifetime. But now you know, some of her work...actually, a painting recently sold at auction for about, I think £700 or something. And, I wonder if she would be surprised by that or find it funny that since she's passed away...It's a classic, isn't it? The artist passes away, and then the art becomes more valuable. I wonder if she'd find that funny. But I think she'd enjoy that we're talking to the neighbours who knew her as well, like, you know, some memories that are very personal, alongside the art that she was making. I don't know actually. I don't think...that's a difficult question.

00:13:16 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Yeah, sorry. I don't mean throw you. It's just interesting to think about, isn't it?

00:13:21 **Rosie Shackleton**

No no no. Oh yeah, definitely, you know, from the sounds of it, she really was a character, I keep saying that, you know, really eccentric and really gregarious and really curious. And I can imagine she would find it quite amusing that we'd put on a show of just her work and that we'd kind of searched the ends of Scotland for it, you know, and brought it from so many different sources. And yeah, I can imagine she'd find it quite funny, actually.

00:13:47 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Yeah, good, good.

00:13:49 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

We'll hear more from Rosie later on, but for now, let's switch gears slightly. In Airdrie, on a sunny spring day, all four North Lanarkshire Community Choirs gathered together to mingle, share some stories and encourage new participants to join the choirs too. Veterans of the choirs, mixed with musical newbies to sing through some fun pieces and the result was wonderful. Have a listen for yourself.

North Lanarkshire Council Arts Development

00:14:13 **Alathia (Choir Fascilitator)**

Yours is actually easier because it's hard for you to think "have I got 1 note or 2?"

****Alathia takes the choir through a warm-up exercise before singing "Rock Around the Clock"***

00:16:39 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

As always, if you'd like to join in the fun, don't just listen to it; check out our website for details of all the different classes that we run, one of which might just be your new favourite hobby. But now, back to Rosie who's gonna share some more unique insights into Millie Froom's work.

00:16:54 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

I noticed that some of the pieces were undated as well. Do you know what the oldest piece is in the collection?

00:17:02 **Rosie Shackleton**

I think, from the top of my head, the oldest one that we have dated is Turning Hay, which we have as 1940. That's not to say some others that aren't dated aren't older, but the one that we know is the earliest is Turning Hay. And that's actually one that's in our collection.

00:17:20 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Right.

00:17:21 **Rosie Shackleton**

So Turning Hay...1940, it would have been around the time she was starting to get involved with the New Scottish Group. So when she was working with the New Scottish Group, they were all using these bright colours, gleaming colours. So yeah, I think that's the oldest one that we can definitely date, you know, in our timeline.

00:17:39 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Yeah, absolutely. So I'm curious for yourself; someone who's not from North Lanarkshire, is there anything in particular about Motherwell specifically that this work tells you?

00:17:53 **Rosie Shackleton**

I think one thing she did really well was the mixing between nature and industry, obviously North Lanarkshire is very industrial and she would have seen that. And what's interesting is that she returns a lot to farm scenes, rural scenes, which to me coming in, working at an industrial museum was like "where is that coming from?" Like,

North Lanarkshire Council Arts Development

where are you getting these rural farm scenes from? But if you look closer, I think personally, that the industrial area kind of creeps through and it's a real mixture of, yeah, nature and industry, like, one of the paintings we have, it's actually one in our collection, it's called On The Farm. But if you look at it, she's using blues and purples, the shapes are very angular, they're very mechanical, they're very industrial. You can see almost like a battle between nature and rural sides. And then the industrial side and I think growing up in this area, it must have been that environment seeping through. That's my opinion anyway, but having that industrial environment creeping into the work, and some of the other rural scenes she does, there's always a twist. You know, she's not painting pastoral, idyllic farm scenes. There's always kind of something there. And I wonder if it is that industrial edge that...North Lanarkshire obviously had so many industries for such a long time that I won't be surprised if she was affected by that.

00:19:14 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. That's a really fascinating answer. And so, for people that are maybe coming to see this exhibition, what do you hope that they take away from it?

00:19:23 **Rosie Shackleton**

I think that amazing art can be made outside of these great institutions. It doesn't matter that you're from a small town like Motherwell. There were amazing artists to be celebrated here, but also even just to look...if local people are...I really hope that more people from Motherwell come and can be proud that they've got such an amazing artist from here. And I think also just just be open that there are more artists out there, especially women artists, to be discovered that haven't had the light of day that they deserve, haven't had the recognition they deserve and that there's more work to be done. There's more Millie Floods out there that might be in private collections that we don't know. So just to ignite that interest in her, I think is definitely one of the main goals.

00:20:04 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Yeah, I think you're right; just triggering that that thought of "yeah, there's so many of these people out there."

00:20:10 **Rosie Shackleton**

Yeah. Oh yeah, definitely. And you know, I'll say again, she really was hanging around with really famous people like...JD Ferguson is very famous. Like, he's one of the great Scottish colourists. Margaret Morris, she went on to found Scottish Ballet, you know, these were really, really famous Scottish artists and you kind of wonder why she kind of slipped through the cracks, almost. There are other members of the New Scottish Group that you don't really see anywhere either, so there's definitely more work to be done.

North Lanarkshire Council Arts Development

00:20:37 **Millie Frood's Neighbour**

And then we were given, every year on Christmas morning, we were given...up the stairs to the back bedroom, which was the studio. And we were given a showing of all the work that she had been working on, and it was just...there were huge paintings, I mean, massive paintings, so, you know, like metres long, like 2 metres by 1 metre and things like that, which again was an unusual thing for us to see, you know, because we had paintings in our house but they were like that, you know. So we would go up there and as a family we had to walk around and she would show us all the paintings and my memory, because I was so young, was I couldn't interpret a lot of them, some of them are very, very abstract. Some weren't; you can see things. But one that sits out and that stands out in my head; I remember standing there and being dunted by everybody was...I think it was titled the Seven Elephants or the Five Elephants or something, right? And of course, the older brothers and sisters I've got, who were teenagers, were going "oh yeah, yeah, yeah" and you knew to appreciate whether or not you understood it or not...

00:21:41 **Rosie Shackleton**

We have that she taught at Bellshill Academy, but we've not been able to find any information about it; when... we assume she taught art, I'd be surprised if she taught something else, but we don't know when. I guess maybe from the 30s to the 60s maybe. But we're really on the hunt for maybe people who went to Bellshill Academy who might have been taught by her, if they can share anything about what she was like. Also, you know, any neighbours. Are there any more people who knew her? The neighbours that we have spoken to said that she was really well known in Motherwell because she stood out. You know, has anyone else remembered seeing her walking up Motherwell Town Street dressed in feather boas? You know, we want to hear more from the people in Motherwell who might have seen her and interacted with her. Also, we've collaborated with Art-Scot, which are a group of folk who write and research about Scottish art, and we've made an online version of the exhibition, which is a bit more condensed. But on that website, if you just Google that, there's a Project tab, and you can e-mail in, members of the public can e-mail in, with information they have about Millie Frood that we don't have, and we're wanting to kind of add to that to a database essentially of information that we have about Millie Frood and see if we can find out more about her life, find more works that we don't know about, and just find out more about her as a person and build on what we have. You know, we've put a whole exhibition together, but there's so much that we don't know about her life.

00:23:17 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Yeah, exactly.

North Lanarkshire Council Arts Development

00:23:18 **Rosie Shackleton**

So we want to know more basically. So that was a call out, please!

00:23:24 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

And that's another answer, I suppose, to "What do you think she would think of the exhibition", you could ask her these questions yourself.

00:23:31 **Rosie Shackleton**

"What were you doing at Bellsouth Academy?" Yeah, no. Yeah, I can imagine she would find the whole thing quite funny.

00:23:36 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Yeah, Imagine she was like a PE teacher or something. She just totally dropped the art.

00:23:40 **Rosie Shackleton**

I'd love that! Well, well, actually, that's really funny. So the neighbours, when we interviewed them, the kid's window looked onto her garden and apparently she would exercise, like, right up into her 60's. She would get dressed in the full, like, sweatpants like sweatbands and run laps around the garden. So you know what, she could have been a PE teacher.

00:24:05 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Maybe we're on to something!

00:24:08 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Thank you so much to Rosie for her time, her knowledge, and for letting us use some of those audio clips from the people who knew Millie themselves. I'm sure you'll agree, it really does paint a broad picture of the woman that Millie Frod was and the beautiful artwork she created. "Strange Horizons" runs until the 6th of May and I'd highly recommend checking it out for yourself. As always, thank you for listening and for being part of the growing conversation around art and creativity in North Lanarkshire.

I'll leave you with one final short clip where Rosie and I stood in the exhibit in front of Turning Hay, one of Frod's most prolific paintings, discussing what it means in the landscape of her body of work.

00:24:47 **Rosie Shackleton**

Turning Hay, dated at 1940, it's part of the North Lanarkshire Council Collection and it's showing just that; it's two farm workers turning hay. She's used really golden colours here. Like, it's not just hay anymore. It feels not unusual, but it feels elevated. There's kind of a golden glow here. Like, the background is really dark blue. You'll see in a lot of

North Lanarkshire Council Arts Development

the other paintings; she has a real love of dark blue, which means that the hay itself kind of becomes almost golden. You see it kind of wrapping around the figures. I almost like to think of it as like they're almost weaving golden thread. It's not hay anymore, it's something more.

00:25:27 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

To me as well, its kind of evoking fire, because there's bits of orange and red in it as well.

00:25:33 **Rosie Shackleton**

Yeah, yeah. It's more than...it's not just a figurative depiction of humble farm work. It feels celebratory. There's, like, a pride there because look at the colour she's using. It's very joyful.

00:25:45 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

This was oil. Is it all oil painting that she works with usually?

00:25:48 **Rosie Shackleton**

It is mainly oil paints.

00:25:50 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Yeah. Why do you think that is that she used oil? Just what she had at the time?

00:25:52 **Rosie Shackleton**

I honestly don't know. I mean, oil is such a luscious product. It's like, you can really apply it thick and like, you'll see there's a lot of texture in the works. She's layering it up and things. I think it's easier to layer up. You get kind of it's not just flat.

00:26:07 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Yeah. I think it's almost 3D to an extent.

00:26:11 **Rosie Shackleton**

Exactly. Yeah, I think the texture is also a big part of that along with the colouring. With oil you can really slap it on and it'll stand there. But it's one of my favourites. I think it's just it's really...I don't know. It's just such a special painting to have in the collection. I think it's her at her best honestly. The colours are so delicious, I can't describe it any way else. When you come in, we've had a picture of it blown up for the front; it's the first thing you see. I think it makes quite an impact.

The way she paints Labour is really special. It's celebratory, it's not, you know...she wants to celebrate these people. There's a pride there in the work. It's like a, you know, she's seeing what's happening and going "oh wow. Okay. These people are working

North Lanarkshire Council Arts Development

hard". I get that feeling anyway when I see them. And you know, she returned to farm scenes throughout. There was something there that made her keep going back to it.

00:27:15 **Scott Fleming (Host)**

Amplifying Artistry is a podcast by the North Lanarkshire Council Arts Development Team. To find out more about the team and the work that we do, visit www.culturenl.co.uk/arts. This episode was produced and directed by Aaron Hawthorne for North Lanarkshire Council.

This episode was edited, hosted, and facilitated by me. Scott Fleming. You can access a transcript of this episode at www.culturenl.co.uk/amplifyingartistry. All interviews and audio excerpts have been included with kind permission from the participants.

You have been listening to Amplifying Artistry. See you next time.

END OF TRANSCRIPT

Transcript generated by Artificial Intelligence and edited by Scott Fleming.

If you have any feedback or questions about this transcript, Amplifying Artistry or North Lanarkshire Council's Arts Development Team, please contact arts@northlan.gov.uk.