

'I want to be the one making art' — Linda Byrne

Kilcock fashion illustrator's passion for drawing

by Kate Donoghue

LINDA BYRNE, from Ballycaghan, Kilcock, studied animation, fine art, design and then business. She has worked as an animator, secondary school art teacher and is now a self-employed fashion illustrator.

It is not a path with a direct course, but it has one constant: having the drive and the passion to know and stick to what you love.

This isn't an easy task, particularly when the field you're passionate about is one that often comes with the tag "starving artist", but Linda's is a story of optimism.

Having parents who didn't oppose her desire to go to art college was a good start. Michael and Breda Byrne, Kilcock and Celbridge respectively, were always supportive.

"They never told me to get a real job, thank God," laughed Linda, "They always told me to do what I wanted to do."

This began by studying at the Irish School of Animation in Ballyfermot, which was something to which Linda would keep returning for inspiration.

After adding qualifications in fine art and design to her resumé, she spent a while working in an animation studio, but realising something wasn't right, she left after a short time.

"I worked in a studio briefly, it wasn't for me; too many computers. Most of the designing and drawing is outsourced and then it's sent to you to do the rest."

"I wanted to draw, and that's probably why I left animation because it got really computer-based and I just felt like I was being pulled away from drawing."

She later spent two years teaching art at Scoil Dara in Kilcock. Again, though she enjoyed it, it wasn't quite the right fit.

"I liked it but I didn't love it. I wanted to be the one making the art, not the one teaching it."

Subsequently, self-employment became the next venture for Linda, she had the artistic know-how, but lacked the business acumen; something she quickly righted.

"I decided then to do a six-month business course just to figure out how to get started because I've no business behind me."

In a way, going back to her "roots" in animation helped Linda to discover her current vocation.

"When you're doing animation training, you have to go out and just draw people from observation."

"So you'd come to a cafe and draw people. And that's probably where I got my interest."

"I really like the way fabric falls and drawing ladies, what they wear and their outfits and that's probably where it came from really."

For the past year-and-a-half she has run her own business as a fashion illustrator, working both from home and at events around the country.

"It wasn't that I set out to do that kind of thing; it just kind of evolved."

She makes her living from what she calls the "three branches" of her business. First, she gets commissions from beauty and fashion brands to do illustrations for their launches.

Secondly, she attends their events and does live-sketching of



Linda Byrne with some prototypes of the products she hopes to have in retail next year. INSET: A design Linda was commissioned to do for the launch of Kiehl's at Debenhams in Cork

the people who attend the event and what they are wearing.

And finally, as a quirky alternative to photographic memories, she live-sketches at parties and weddings so that peoples' outfits can be preserved in little works of art.

"People like getting their outfits drawn for those types of things. They really love the fact that you can draw their outfit

then and there.

"Especially for the likes of a wedding where you spend so much time thinking about your outfit, and then it's gone; it's over in a day."

"I do them in about four to seven minutes. I try and do it quick, just so as I can get through as many people as possible but I can lengthen it out a bit longer if needed."

International brands

Since becoming her own boss, Linda has collaborated with international brands including Kiehl's, L'Oreal and Debenhams.

This has given her the opportunity to live-sketch at Primark, Debenhams Cork and at events in Facebook and Google.

Staying true to what she is inspired by has also lead her to meet people she is inspired by.

As a fan of the programme Nationwide, it was a special moment for Linda when she got to meet and draw Mary Kennedy at an event in January.

Linda had been selected through the Kildare Local Enterprise Office to take part in Showcase, a trade fair for Irish

craft-makers, designers and manufacturers held in the RDS.

She spotted Mary Kennedy and her crew, who were there filming for Nationwide, so she asked the producer if it would be alright to draw Mary and got the go-ahead.

"So I drew her and gave it to her and she loved it. And then they said they'd come down [to my stall] and see me in action. My hands were shaking!"

"I love Nationwide because it shows so many crafts. I'm always watching it."

Though that may have been the highlight of Showcase for Linda, she explained it was also a great platform for networking and getting feedback:

"With crafts, everyone is in the same boat, we're all small businesses. Everyone is really encouraging and helps each other so it's a really nice sector to be in."

"I haven't found it cutthroat or anything like that. People are helpful, they'll come over and say look Linda, you need to sharpen up this, or do that."

"You need that when you're starting out. Especially when you're working from home and

you don't have anyone to bounce those kind of things off."

Going forward, Linda would like to move into retail, selling her work in the form of limited edition prints as well as notebooks and greeting cards with her designs on them.

"I've designed a range of products that I'm hoping to get into retail by the end of the year; I just want them to be perfect before I approach retailers."

Taking influence from both classical animation and fashion illustration, Linda has managed to carve out a career doing something she loves.

"I go back to my animation background for ideas with colour and different things like that. There's a girl, Brittney Lee who designed the visuals for Frozen."

"And there's an Australian fashion illustrator called Megan Hess. She works for Chanelle and Dior so she's someone that I'd really get ideas and inspiration from. I love her work."

"I'd love to eventually work with bigger fashion brands and be able to go to events around the world, but I guess you have to start local."



LEFT: Linda Byrne presents Mary Kennedy with a drawing she made of her at Showcase in the RDS last January. BELOW: Galway Races sketch: From start to finish: how one of Linda's designs is completed.

