



Marjorie Helen Arnfield MBE nee Milburn - 1930-2001 – Artist

Marjorie was born in Newcastle and brought up in Sunderland, her father Dr K. V. Milburn was a GP and her mother Helen Milburn was a nurse. Marjorie was struck by juvenile chronic arthritis at the age of four and suffered from this condition for much of her life, but she never let her illness limit what she wanted to do, she attended the Sunderland Church Girls' High School, Sunderland College of Art and Durham University King Edward VII College of Art. After obtaining design and art teacher's diplomas she returned to teach at her old school in Sunderland. In the 1950's she made a series of oil sketches of miners gathering sea coal along the beach and attending their allotments. In 1958 one of her paintings *Landscapes, County Durham* was selected for the Northern Young Artists exhibition at the Graves Art Gallery in Sheffield.

Marjorie's married Ronald Arnfield and their early years were spent in Cheshire where she had her son Robin, and her juvenile arthritis resurged. In 1960 the family moved to Cumbria with Ron's new job – and where her second son Nick was born. In 1966 the family moved to Scotland, again with Ron's work, there Marjorie continued to teach as well as paint and exhibit.

In 1969 they moved to Nottingham, once again with Ron's work, and they lived in Westhorpe, Southwell. In 1980 Marjorie became a PT tutor in the Adult Education Dept at Nottingham University and remained there until 2000. In her classes she combined the teaching of the history and practice of art, a new approach in art adult education at the time. Despite debilitating health problems—two spine operations, knee replacements and polymyalgia rheumatica—Marjorie's career continued to flourish. She and Ron built a holiday home in Applethwaite in Cumbria in the late 1970s and Marjorie would paint there until the end of her life. She was drawn to scenes of Cumbria's industrial heritage and its natural landscapes. Her Nottinghamshire years were also very creative. She and Ron travelled extensively in the South of France, Spain, Greece and Italy on working holidays where she would paint 'en plein air' alongside a group of her students. She was inspired by the Mediterranean light and landscapes. In an interview for *Artists & Illustrators* (1998) she described her palette in those paintings as '*colours that sing*'.

Majorie's national reputation however came from her mining paintings. She had been fascinated by scenes from the North-East mining villages during her student years in Sunderland in the 1950s and made sketches of miners gathering sea coal on the

beach. In the mid 1980's, distressed by the closures of coal mines and impending privatization of the British coal industry, she decided to record the work of the miners and the way of life of their communities. She visited collieries, even descending underground in her wheelchair. She took inspiration from the stories of D.H. Lawrence and used archival photographs as a source. As the pit closures accelerated, she recorded scenes of demolition and of protest including a painting *Keep the Pits Open: Protest* which is now in the mining museum in Wakefield. An exhibition of these works was held in 1994 at Nottingham University under the title *Coal Mining in Nottinghamshire – A Tribute* honouring all those who dedicated their lives to the mining industry. The exhibition was sponsored by the British Coal Board and was a great success attracting much press coverage; the paintings depicted miners at work and at leisure, a Miners' Gala Day, women hanging their washing, and protest demonstrations. Over the next few years, the exhibition toured to many mining centres including South Wales. In 1990 *Marjorie Arnfield at Sixty 1945-1990* an exhibition was held at Nottingham University Adult Education Centre, and In 1996 she had an exhibition in the Pierrepont Gallery in Newark. In the last 1990's Sunderland Football Club got in touch and asked her to capture scenes from their matches. In 2000 she was awarded an MBE for services to art; and she was also busy preparing to mark her 70th birthday with an exhibition at Nottingham University.

Marjorie died on 26 April 2001 and the funeral service to celebrate her life was held at Southwell Minster and was attended by hundreds of people whose lives she had touched. A major exhibition titled *Marjorie Arnfield, A Celebration of Her Life and Work* was held at the Djanogly Art Gallery at Nottingham University from 21 July–21 September 2001. Among the most recent artworks on show were her studies of the Cumbrian landscape: rocky outcrops, abandoned quarries and iron works. The Times review said her commemorative exhibition was among the best one-person art exhibitions in the UK that month. Her work is held in many public and private collections, 17 of her paintings are included in the online Art UK catalogue of works in public collections. She exhibited her work in countless solo and group exhibitions all over the country.

With thanks to Robin Arnfield, Marjorie's son for his help with the information and images. 17 of her paintings which are held in public galleries are listed on ArtUK <https://artuk.org/discover/artists/arnfield-marjorie-19302001> there is also a Wikipedia entry on her (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marjorie_Arnfield) as well as an article in the Lorton & Derwent Fells Local History Society Wanderer magazine, No 58 Nov 2025

