

NORMAN SAYLE

AT HOME

- Roy Macmillan: Let's start at the very beginning, where were you born?
- Norman Sayle: In Douglas, in Dukes Road on the 13th of December 1926.
- Roy Macmillan: Is your childhood an easily recollectable store of memories?
- Norman Sayle: Yes. A very happy one Roy, extremely happy and in Dukes Road in those days, there was, we were, there were fields opposite. There are still fields opposite, there are still fields opposite, there are still fields opposite, but now it's a golf course, a miniature gold course. Em but there were a thing called the piggeries and there was a pond and there was wild hedges along there and we had a marvellous time going through these hedges and I look back on it with the greatest affection. I think it actually, it's just triggered off a sort of memory that I think it's from that time that I have this special affection for Celandines, you know as a five or six year old lad running around as a sort of red Indian, or cowboy and in that area in and in a pondy place these Celandines and stuff like that, yes it was a very very happy childhood, I can remember there were sort of horse drawn vehicles selling herrings and stuff you know and er most of the sort of deliveries were horse drawn and milk vans and fish people and what not. It was a very happy childhood and then we moved out to St Johns. Then my father built a new bungalow, my father was the man who started Central Motors Garage in Athol Street and he did very well and then we moved out in to St Johns, and he built a new bungalow and I had seven very marvellous years running round the countryside in St Johns, then we came back to Douglas.
- Roy Macmillan: Do you have brothers and sisters?
- Norman Sayle: No I am the only child.
- Roy Macmillan: How did that affect you?
- Norman Sayle: How did it, or how has it or both.
- Roy Macmillan: I suppose both.
- Norman Sayle: I don't know cause we've only one child you know. Well when I married Rosemary my wife, I met her at Goldsmith's College and she had, she was one of five and it was I think only then that I started realising that there's something to be said about being one of many. Has something to be said against it in a way I suppose as well. No I suppose, I never, it never bothered me. It doesn't seriously bother me now at all, no I just accept it and I suppose you get more attention and what no. I think I'm fairly sort of self centred really. I try and not to be selfish, but I am, I think I am self centred. I suppose in a way you've got to be self centred if you're an artist. Yeah.
- Roy Macmillan: There are some only children who say they prefer being on their own because they've spent all their life doing that and they find close

company can be rather difficult, others you say that they're fed up of being on their own because they've had to live with that all their lives.

Norman Sayle: Yes, I think really Roy that is when you come to bereavements that em you have the disadvantage of being an only child, I mean Rosemary and I, her parents in the early 80's, do I mean the early 80's, yes I do. All four of our parents were alive and em we thought well this is nice, of course there's a lot of stress involved in having parents alive, you've got to look after them and support them and stuff like that, but it's lovely to have them. And we thought aren't we lucky chaps, all our parents alive. And then in 1982 my mother died, she was the first to go and then by the next 5 years, they'd all gone, so we had em 5 years of death and I, I think Rosemary had er er, well I felt I wish I'd had a brother or a sister to refer to you know, that's all.

Roy Macmillan: You mentioned that your very happy childhood and the fields around were you lived and playing in them.

Norman Sayle: Yes.

Roy Macmillan: Have the friends you were playing with. Have friends always been of significant importance to you.

Norman Sayle: Yea, they have. Er before you got to that, what I remember about being at St Johns, it, we, one of the great pleasures looking back, we use to. I love maps, I still love maps. I look at maps, it's almost as good as going to places looking at maps and certainly when I've been to places because I love travelling and we come back and I look at maps and it's re-living it, I love them, but I now recognise that when we were living at St Johns and I was eight or nine or ten and I use to make maps of our territory tree house and dead man's gulch and stuff, it's lovely. I use to, that was a great pleasure doing that you know, you ask about friends. Em, yea I think I, yes I do have a lot of friends and I like them a lot and I rely upon them quite a lot, but my life has always been so busy you know that em I'm not over dependant upon them, in a way I'm, if it was a desert island discs job, no I don't think I mean that really. Yes er, yes I am a person who needs people quite a lot I think really, I enjoy people's company a great deal and I enjoy approval quite a lot as most of us do you know.

Roy Macmillan: How early did you start painting.

Norman Sayle: I, up in our room my father was an amazing man, he'd left school at 14 I think and he'd gone into the Royal Navy and in the short, in the first world war, in the short time that he was in there he became a Chief Petty Officer which was a remarkable achievement for a chap who had only just been to Tynwald Street School, or Demesne Road School whichever it was and he became a Chief Petty Officer and then when he came out of the Navy, he became the Foreman at the Athol Garage and then he set up his own business, but, which was Central Motors in Athol Street and em, then he made a business miscalculation. When the war came he thought nobody's going to have any petrol or any cars, so he decided to give up the business and in fact other people who'd, garage owners who'd hung on, they made a lot of money. However, that's not the point, but my father, there was a book we had which had

a beautiful watercolour sketch of a motor launch and in the channel and the uncanny thing about it was that this motor launch was the motor launch that my father had been on as engineer. ML433 I think it was and this was this glorious watercolour sketch in this book and I use to keep copying it all the time, do you know as a child. And to try and get it right and what not, so that's my earliest recollection of sort of being interested in art you know.

- Roy Macmillan: Where you aware of thinking this was something you enjoyed.
- Norman Sayle: Oh yes very much so, I loved it to bits, yes. I mean I was going to say it was the only thing I was any good at, it was the thing I was best at, I was reasonably good at other things, but that's what I was best at you know.
- Roy Macmillan: Did you enjoy school.
- Norman Sayle: Yes, immensely, yes I was at Douglas High School when it was a Grammar School and er it was a no frills place and very orderly and discipline and you were really in all?? The teachers and in admiration of them as well and em, yes I thought it was wonderful really. I did never have school phobia and we had a marvellous time and I met a lot of people, especially you know in the 6th form and a lot of my peers in the 6th form became Profs. And stuff like that you know. Yes it was lovely, I loved my schooling it was very nice indeed. I didn't like my early schooling at Murray's Road and what not and that was a bit bleak, but er no it was-by and large I really enjoyed it quite well.
- Roy Macmillan: From school, what more happened in terms of your painting, you'd been copying this picture of a motor launch, what happened at school, were you thinking there was a career on the way.
- Norman Sayle: Oh no no, I kept a, there was a thing called the Muriel Dawson Memorial Art Prize and the Art Master then was Peter Chisham, and Peter Chisham is mentioned in the Museum and what not, he was the boss man when Archie Knox was his assistant would you believe, which is fairly strange. But Peter Chisham was my art teacher and I, I did well, I went in for the Muriel Dawson Art Prize and won it about 3 or 4 times and stuff like that, so I was obviously fairly good at art. Now what did you oh yes, go on.
- Roy Macmillan: So you were winning art prizes, no career plans particularly.
- Norman Sayle: No career plans, because em.
- Roy Macmillan: What did you think would happen to you.
- Norman Sayle: Well my mother wanted me to be a joiner, my mother didn't want me to leave home or leave the Isle of Man, bless her, lovely lady she was. And em she didn't want me to leave the Isle of Man, but I had, I was going to be called up and before I was called up I volunteered and so I went into the Army, I went on a interview and went into the army. I did my own normal training and eventually found myself in Austria in the occupation forces, em I was there for a little while. It was a wonderful experience because er in the High School I'd done Higher

School Certificate, which is the same as A levels, Higher School Certificate French, Higher School Certificate Latin, Higher School Certificate English, Higher School Certificate Art. And then when I went into the Army, I volunteered for the Intelligence Corp and I had to go to London for an interview and I got accepted, and er went to, did my long course of training there, and then they decided eventually to send me to Austria, although I had no word of German and I had to buckle down there and start learning German PDQ you know, and it was a very interesting time, I was er I was one of a little group of people, called 58 Field Security Section, based in Wiellach and it was so organised that you had a Headquarters in Wiellach and we were on detachment so there'd be two of us on detachment here, two on detachment there and our job was to sort of interrogate people coming back from Russian prison of war, Austrians and Hungarians and things coming back from Prisoner of War camps in Russia and also in our detachment, was two of us there, em we were suppose to be in charge of the security of 8,000 displaced persons in the displacement, in the DP Camp at Feistritz, and em, and so we we, that was an amazing experience for a 20 year old, 21 year old er and we did our best you know, but it was absolutely fascinating stuff, you started learning what things were like you know, I mean we'd always had a very easy and privileged life and then you saw em, what other people had suffered for example er Roy, the lady who had been employed as our housekeeper, she was very dear lady called Verfrauyes Saschluss, Hungarian but from the Hungarian Aristocracy and em well looking back I wish I had, I wish we had treated her, and we were 21 years of age and she was about 60 or 70 or something, I wish we had treated her with a little, we treated her well enough in our terms, but I wish we could have treated her even better and now that I'm old I know what it's like and how vulnerable you are and how the past, how she'd lost everything and stuff it was a very disturbing experience you know, I won't go on about that anymore because I feel very upset about it really.

Roy Macmillan: How can it affect you, this you said that it was suddenly seeing a different world from what you were used to.

Norman Sayle: Well I, there was a specific experience, I was, there were two of us, was er, we were both sergeants in the Intelligence Service on this detachment with the brief of trying to find, trying to hold down the security of the whole area, with all these thousands of displaced persons coming back, I'm trying to sort of keep the stability of the place down and also try and hunt out Nazi War criminals too, and er, but Frau Saschlich for example, we were in this lovely billet in the middle of the woods at Feistritz and then suddenly it was decided at that instead of her living in the main building she would go out into an outhouse there and when we looked at it, it was absolutely filled with bugs and so we had to bring out people to sort of fumigate the place and I was, I was very upset like that, I thought this is not a way to treat people, but em I think looking back I could of done more, in fact I should of done more, but there you are you know, when your young and less kind and less responsible.

Roy Macmillan: And was there many other instances of similarlydealing with displaced persons from Russia.

Norman Sayle:

Oh but that was erm, it was erm, a strange business that they lived in these Nissan huts and on bunks and stuff like that, and er our interpreter Egon Verdisch who was a very splendid chap, he was our interpreter and he translated from Hungarian into English to me and then we managed through Hungarian and English to go through German and stuff like that, but he was a very tall aristocratic young man, er he must have been about 30 in those days, and I was 21 or so. And he was marvellous, he was such a gentlemen and he was our employee and he'd been an officer in the er, you know and it was a very strange business really. Looking back he was a wonderful man, he is, his breeding really did show, but I'm very pleased to say Roy I recognise that, no now, but I recognised that at the time and er it was wonderful how he sort of and he invited me into this grey DP camp of 8,000 people, as his guest and we had Schwarz Brot and Farm Butter and wine and stuff like that, they didn't have much and I was their guest. And er oh it was a very moving experience because they didn't have proper accommodation, it was just a Nissan hut and they had bunks and they divided off their kitchens with, well hanging what nots, you know, hanging curtains and stuff. Er it's all amazing now you know, but they were such remarkable people really you know.

Roy Macmillan:

Having come from the Isle of Man, which is a small Island in many respects seeing the big wide world, where you were longing to get back or where you keen to explore.

Norman Sayle:

No, em oddly enough, I mean I was longing to get back, I always longed for the Isle, even when I was in London and later, in the summers I used to long to get, when it got very hot in London, we used to go to Epping Forest and that was no substitute for the Isle of Man, I use to, I use to long desperately long to get and there was one poem, I've forgotten, if I really bent my mind I could find it, but there was one little couple of lines, which use to come to me when I had this dreadful claustrophobia in London, I like London you know but it was white shores of longing stretch away, em and that's what I use to think of, I use to think of the, I use to see the Isle of Man almost from an aeroplane and there it was, the white shores and the sea breaking against them and the wind blowing and em that's what I remember, but em I've looped us round onto a side track haven't I forgotten what the original question was.

Roy Macmillan:

Well not really, I was trying to find out how early on in your life you felt the powerful connection that you feel to the Manx Landscape, the Manx Countryside and whether or not having seen the outside, the broader world, you thought there's so much more.

Norman Sayle:

No, oddly enough that made, that didn't make any difference at all really Roy no, no. My attachment to the Manx Landscape, it came from my school days when I used to go into the museum and look at these marvellous Knox's and there was a, there was a one also I don't, I mean I don't rate Hoggatt quite the same as Knox, or John Miller Nicholson, but there was one wave, a painting of a wave, a watercolour of a breaking wave of Hoggatt which I use to go and marvel at and also to be really fare, Hoggatt's big West Baldwin thing, I use to go in and I was spellbound, I still am and there's a lovely Hoggart of Port Erin which is a very sort of Monet type thing, I think it's quite wonderful

really, I mean I think it's a lovely bit of work, and they were my paradigms you know. Er and they're what's kicked me, started me going, you know, those were my standards and going to the continent I didn't really want to. I loved the Alps, I was terrified by the Alps, but it was a different sort of marvel, I mean, love Alps, I love mountains to bits, I got a phase when I kept on buying books about the north wall of the Eiger and I went to the Eiger and stuff like that, I like that but it's not as if I would ever want to paint it, I don't, well that's not true because I did once paint.

Roy Macmillan: But not concentrating or....

Norman Sayle: No, no, no, no it didn't, it was external to me you see really, I marvel at it in the same way that I marvel at this that and the other, but it's the Isle of Man things which are things I really want to celebrate, you know.

Roy Macmillan: Is it to do with em, I, you said that these pictures you admired were your paradigms, are you trying to paint your perfect picture.

Norman Sayle: No. Well

Roy Macmillan: So what is it that's making you paint again and again and again, the landscape, what are you trying to find or expunge.

Norman Sayle: Em, mm, em, gosh that's such a, such a question, it's sort of I mean when we went round the museum the other day and I said to you this is my favourite, and that was the one with the old church with moonlight I think it's called and it was the one where I said er, I feel this is where I have got and where I can honestly feel that I am free from Knox, I don't mean it, that by the way in any sort of em, er, I don't feel, I don't mean it any sort of competitive sense, it's just that er in a funny sort of deep way you feel you've got to say something of your own, entirely your own and that's what that was, that was the first thing, the first time I'd ever done it, I think, in entirely my own way. Now what I want to do now, is I want to, I think I want to go on from there, I don't know how to do it, well, well in a way the other night I had this idea and I should have got the thing ready to show you, er you can switch this off though. Can't you.

Roy Macmillan: So if you're not searching for the perfect picture that your still desperately painting and still painting and you brought down this, a new one of a cliff being plunged into mist, what is it then that you're trying to do.

Norman Sayle: It's a sort of, there's always got to be an element of surprise. When I was teaching, er I used to have to sort of rationalise these thoughts, I use to have to put them into lecture notes, because I was confronting classes of students and stuff, and I don't have to do that now. But em I remember from those days for example, er you could get a remarkable picture, you go to the national gallery or the Tate or somewhere and you could say, well that picture is a remarkable picture because it surprises you, not because of its composition but because of its colour, or because of its tonality or because of the lighting you see, and all because of the subject matter you see. And em, em, recently on television there was Maggie Hamling and you couldn't say there was

anything exceptional about the lighting or anything like that but it was just the actual distribution of paint, the aggression of the paint on the canvas, the way the paint was put on and you had to take it or leave it, there was this immense aggression, er em in the work you know, so the surprise element which has got to be in a picture can take very very many forms you know.

Roy Macmillan: And you, your paintings can really be described I don't think as aggressive, but you do say they can be quite confrontational.

Norman Sayle: Confrontational, yes, yea, I mean that one that we're looking at now of the the massive cliff em with the head of it lost in the mist is very confrontational isn't it, I think it's disturbing, I mean I think it's nice to disturb people a little bit, to ruffle them a little bit. I mean I

Roy Macmillan: It does mean that you've got to have something to disturb them with.

Norman Sayle: Yes, you've got

Roy Macmillan: To surprise and be confrontational requires a certain amount of vigour, but if you're going to disturb them, you've, there's got to be a, something you're trying to do.

Norman Sayle: You've got to sink it out you mean don't you. Yes.

Roy Macmillan: Well it's got to be something within you that you're trying to prod people.

Norman Sayle: Absolutely, absolutely yes, I think you see you're getting, you're getting to it now, that em that painting, people tend to think watercolour painting is in its essence different from oil painting see, it isn't at all, in order for a watercolour painting to really impress people, you've still got to have the intellectual pressure behind it, it's still got to have this originating and notion and and whatever it's called, I'm lost for words for the moment, but I've always known that and so my sketch book is em, I was talking to the other day in the museum, almost apologising for working from photographs and but not really apologising, do you remember because my sketch books are full of these compositional possibilities, dozens of ways of presenting a certain pictorial theme. So that it will take people off balance and surprise them, and so that applies to oil paintings and watercolour paintings just the same, I just think that in watercolour painting it's slightly more difficult that's all you know, it is, but there's it's, it is, I mean watercolour painting does demand a great deal of technical prowess from people, there's no doubt about it and you could, it shows when people are not competent in watercolour painting, it shows more than it does in oil painting I think maybe. But nevertheless that's not what really counts. What really counts in watercolour painting is the idea, it is, the quality of the thought behind it and em and so that's the difficult bit of it really. You know you've got to sort of go through your sketch and you sit there thinking, oh gosh I've got to, I really want to surprise people, I don't want to go on doing this, I want to surprise people a little bit and that's when the really tough bit comes along. And as I explained to you in the museum, sometimes this happens at the camera stage you know, sometimes you're walking around and you think, I've got to, I've got to

find something that surprises me, if it doesn't surprise me, it won't surprise anybody else either. And it's really difficult to find things, which surprise you. It's very difficult and er I suppose as I get older, it's going to be more and more difficult, I'm just hoping that at 70 plus, and I have to tell you this really Roy that being 70 plus is not something I really like very much, I've got to fight against it you know, I knew I would have to, but I don't like it very much and I'm a sensible person, I realise that er that er, it's likely that my competencies are going to go down rather than go up and that saddens me immensely, er I just hope that em when I look at that picture there for example, it doesn't seem that that's happening at the moment, but if I could have another 5 years of creative work, I mean that would be wonderful you know, I'd love that to bits, cause I've still got some plans.

Roy Macmillan: Is that were some of this vigour comes from.

Norman Sayle: Yes. Yes I think it is, yes I think it's a sort of desperation, yes it is. Very perspicacious of you if I may say so. Ha ha ha.

Roy Macmillan: Just a drift back in time to get to some events on the record, so you are posted by the Intelligence unit into Austria at the end of the war dealing with displaced persons and helping to find Nazi agents if you can. From there were.

Norman Sayle: Then I went to Goldsmiths College, oh no no, from there, from Austria, I went to the Isle of Man Art School for a year and then.

Roy Macmillan: So by that time you decided that painting was, what you.

Norman Sayle: Oh yes, oh yes, arts anyway, arts yea. And then at Goldsmiths, I mean and then at the local art school, and then I was suppose to be on a two year course, and the principal at the time, he was very displeased when I wanted to get away to London after the first year. Which is what I did, I went to Goldsmiths college and em I did illustration, I just want to go to London and em the fact that I, the vacancy I found was in illustration was beside the way and I mean I should have gone into painting I suppose, but I went into illustration at Goldsmiths, that's where I met my wife Rosemary and then I was there for 3 or 4 years and then I got a job, it was funny how it happened, having qualified at Goldsmiths, jobs were very hard to come by, and I think it was 1952 and em I'd applied for teaching jobs and nothing came through and I thought oh well I've gotta do something, so I wrote four letters to the motor firms and Austin and Morris and whatever, asking whether they'd got any vacancies in their styling departments you see, because I was scatty about motorcars in those days and er the very next morning an invitation came to an interview to a new Secondary Modern School in St Mary Craine tent near Orpington and I and I got the job and it was wonderful because I told er, when I did a lecture at the museum, I turned up there and the existing art teacher was a little chap, a PT teacher, and he showed me around the place and he said you know, having showed me around he said, I'm afraid I don't think you're for this job, they're very tough here because he said er, the kids here have been moved out from the east end of London, that's most of them and the rest of them are gypsies, and he said it's tough, it's a really tough place, he said it's not your sort of scene, he said you ought to go to a

Grammar school you know, and he said, I've tried everything, I've done my best he said. Now Roy what I'm going to tell you now it's not a joke it's really true, he said yes he said I've tried everything I've tried wearing a berry but no I can't get, it's not your job, I wouldn't accept it if I were you, and er and so I got the job and I was there for a couple of years, then I got a signal from the Isle of Man that there was a vacancy going in my own Art School in the Isle of Man and I took it and that was em 19... I started here in the September of 1954 at the Art school, when there were about 6 full time staff altogether and I was there for the next 35 years one way and another.

Roy Macmillan: Teaching I assume you enjoy sort of because you kept at it for that long or am I wrong in that.

Norman Sayle: Well the first 11 years were not very happy years to be honest, em the management lacked something and we were overloaded, yet it was desperation, we were, we were demoralised and we weren't able to show what abilities we had and then em, the management changed and things started taking on a completely different aspect and things looked up a great deal, and one started having a bit more confidence in one's self and em, and getting a bit more recognition and stuff you know and em the College expanded and er they had things called Heads of Department and I became a head of department for a long time and then we moved up to the new building, that's Monty, shut up Monty. We went up to our new building in 1971 or 2.

Roy Macmillan: We was the old building.

Norman Sayle: The old building was in Kensington Road, that was originally built as an Art School you see and em, er we went to our new building which was very posh and stuff like that and eventually, and the college expanded a very great deal and eventually we had a new principal, er either was Ken Roberts, I had the great pleasure of working with for 20 years, he was a real gentleman and a very very hard worker who developed the college a very great deal indeed and a splendid chap to work with and then he retired and Brian Hallworth came along, er who was also a workaholic and expanded the place even more, well it became a financial centre by that time and we had a very big business studies sector and I was promoted to, instead of being head of art, I was promoted to become College Development Officer which was a completely new post and my my.

Roy Macmillan: Was that something you were happy about.

Norman Sayle: Well yes and no. I was immensely flattered at the age of 58 to be offered this post, er I don't say I was happy about it, but I didn't really want to sort of hold the back progress.

Roy Macmillan: What made them think that you would be able, what qualities did you have n, no, no. What qualities did you possess that they thought would be able to enhance the college in that sense rather than using

Norman Sayle: No, I'll tell you Roy frankly what it was, I was a very good communicator, I got on well with the staff and em my brief in the new job was em, marketing the college and in service training. And em, so I

became instead of a line manager, which I had been, I became a sort of PR man and it was quite demanding really, I, I, my my relationship was with all the staff, instead of in my own department, I had to treat with the whole staff, at that time there would be about 80 full time staff and several hundred part time staff and em it was a very busy time, to put it mildly and er I was very flattered and it was a very exciting time, but er, I was er I was very good at inter personal relationships, I think, I think I was very good at that, I got on with people well, I'm a good communicator, I'm not sure, I don't think I've been a particular good, I was a particular good manager. Em but one way or another I got very high blood pressure indeed and then I decided to retire, but I was 63 you know I didn't get out early, did you, did it stunt you at all because since your retirement there seems to have been almost an explosion of work, and of work which I think even you would agree, has just developed in quality.

Norman Sayle: Oh absolutely. Yes it's very strange you see because em I owe this, I worked with a fellow called Dave Fletcher, he and I were the, Cas, Pals and one or two others, we were a wonderful team, who taught the full time art students, em Cas who's still there and David's still there. Cas was textiles and fashion and she was, is a wonderful person, she's self effacing and just got on with the job, whereas Dave and I tended to be sort of slightly pre Madonna-ish, we were slightly elitist and em, but we, what Dave Fletcher is the Royal College of Art guy and he and I were the main people dealing with art students, we got on particularly well, and em he's helped me a great deal because when I retired he encouraged me to stick to watercolours, because I'd been working in oils and acrylics and everything like that, but he said 'what you're best at is this Manx Watercolour bit' and I took his word for it, and it's paid off, you know. I think he was right about that, I think I would have gone on with funny things like the one you see here, like that, I was doing that when I retired which is called *Celt tickled pink*, which is a jokey picture really, you know it's in oils, it's a jokey picture, and I was doing all sorts of strange things you know, but I think.

Roy Macmillan: Was that a conscious attempt to find your medium.

Norman Sayle: Yes, em and Dave, I'm very grateful to Dave because he er, he said you ought to, when I was, when this exhibition came on, I said well what I'd like to do, I'd like to have *Celt tickled pink*, and I've got a big picture in there called em, I've forgotten what it's called now, never mind. The *Wizmark Archipelago* it's called, *The Wizmark Archipelago*, it's a massive picture, like it's a picture of jazz music, it's an abstract of jazz and he said no, I honestly think if you want my opinion, it ought to be a watercolour painting. So I thought right I'll go and he was right I think, I think he was right really, er maybe some time or other there might be a retrospective with all these other weird jokey things which might interest people, you never know. I would like it but em, he was right about that and er no he made me concentrate, you've, at my time of life you see at 70 plus, em you haven't got the time to do everything. I love, I love oil painting, I love the smell of oils and everything about, but I've just done watercolours and I don't regret it for one moment because there's so much still to learn from them you know, I'm in good spirits psychologically you know about painting. I want to go on and have so much, I'm still as keen as anything to do it you know. It's not that, it's

just that I keep looking over my shoulder all the time and I realise that I can't get things done as much you know, things in the garden and things in the house. You tend to get a bit bothered about cutting out time to do this, because everything else takes so much longer really you know.

SIDE 2

Roy Macmillan: I'm interested to know if you can take me through the process that you go through in making a picture, it's sort of a day in the life of a work of Norman Sayle. You've mentioned that you've photographed things, but from the very beginning is it you use what a certain view, is it because you you've always wanted to paint something, is it an entirely imaginative moment, what happens and up to the point were you put it in a frame.

Norman Sayle: Well, em the best way to answer that is, there are certain things that appeal to me in landscape, that don't appeal to other people, now for example, one of the things that always appeal to me was when you go up onto the mountain and you're at 500 feet and there's a gap in the hedge and sheep have been tracking through it and so you get this web of things coming through that. And do you know what I mean Roy, you get a wall which then deteriorates into a lower wall, which is covered with turf and so you get these turf mounds and em now for some reason or other those mean something special to me, I've no idea why there must be some association in childhood, like Celadines you see now Celandines have got a special meaning to me, you can't paint them, it's not something that I could paint or wouldn't attempt to paint, but they've got a special meaning, and er also, buildings em, cement gables where the cement takes on a certain patina.

Roy Macmillan: Where did the interesting architecture come from?

Norman Sayle: I've no idea, I've just no idea, I don't know I can't account for it really. I mean when we were students we had to do an examination, had to pass an examination in architecture as one of the things we did, but maybe it's that. But it's not the architecture as architecture so much as the sort of nostalgia of it, it's the sort of patina of the old cement you know.

Roy Macmillan: The crumbling geometry.

Norman Sayle: Yes and the backward looking Dylan Thomas thing that we talked about the other day in his poem where he talks about of the legends of the green chapels you know and things like down the rivers of the windfall light, it's that, it's a sort of, it's a nostalgia it's to do with, it's not to do with the structure of the architecture so much as the, that it contains or reflects feelings for the past, that's what it really is, it's an emotionally loaded thing, rather than a structural thing, but the structure does come into it as well because I love the structure of buildings you know as well in paintings, it's the two things go together. I mean the one over the fireplace there now of Douglas rooftops, it's

got both things in it, I like the structure of it all and it's got all this patina of ancient scaling walls as well hasn't it.

Roy Macmillan: I'm just wondering whether I'm detecting in the few pictures I've seen of your very most recent work, em a, just a suggestion of optimism which in some of your previous works, wasn't exactly lacking, but you've said yourself they're nostalgic, you tend to prefer the decay threat and the crumbling architecture, but there is an energy about them which is refreshing.

Norman Sayle: Do you know it's very strange because when I've had to write things for various exhibitions for the Sunday Times and things, I find myself when I re read them afterwards, I'm talking about Celtic gloom and nostalgia and stuff like that and the greyness and the gloom and stuff like that and I look at the pictures and they're not very gloomy really. And I've got this idea em, er I don't know what you'd call Poem in October gloomy or not, you see, it's both things. I mean, I mean the end of the Poem in October is gloomy, no it isn't. It's em I have here a magnificent decanter which my friends gave me on my 70th birthday and I was very moved to receive it and on one face of it there is engraved by Chris Spittle, exquisitely, the last four lines of poem in October and they are Oh may my hearts truth still be sung on this high hill in a year's turning. Now I don't know whether that's optimistic or gloomy, do you, it's both isn't it. It's Dylan Thomas saying I might not be here in a year's time, but I'd like to be, so it's both things and maybe I feel very much like that, I'm er, when I go round my daily life I don't feel happy, I feel a sort of basic gloom, I think life is basically very sad, although I've been very lucky, there's a basic sadness to life that we know that we're going to snuff it and I've never ceased to think about that, it's em I mean as I say I've been particularly lucky, not very many tragedies have happened to me apart from family bereavements, but I still feel that the weight of that fact that the human condition is er is not a happy condition, we're very brave the way we face it, even lucky people like me, I feel that you've got to have a certain courage to come to terms with it if you're a thinking person you know.

Roy Macmillan: Are you a fatalist?

Norman Sayle: No, I don't think so, I don't think I am a fatalist, I think to be a fatalist you would have to. You know I did an open university degree in philosophy, em well that sounds pretentious, an open university degree in humanities and I did all the philosophy courses they had and then I ran out of philosophy courses and I packed, I got a degree but em I did, I did the staggering, the open university did two 4th level courses and I did one of them, I actually managed to get through one of the A401 was called Wittgenstein philosophy of Language or something like that, I actually managed to survive it which was wonderful for an old fogey like me and I did it because I felt that maybe people thought I was an art, I was head of art of the college and you know, matter very much they were sort of, people could just put marks on paper and there was no intellectual dimension, dimension to it and I thought, right, right monka and I thought well I'd like to measure, whether that's true or not you know, so I embarked upon it and I did 5 years and finished up with the A401 and got through it and it was marvellous, it's the most wonderful thing to do, absolutely marvellous and going to York

University for the final summer school, and you would have badges on your chest with the label A401, you know. I mean that was some cache, um marvellous, I've been a lucky person, marvellous, yes eventually getting it, it was wonderful, I loved, I loved philosophy, I love philosophy, if I'd only been better at mathematics, em I would have got much more out of it you know. I did a bit of logic but I wasn't good, my maths wasn't good enough, but I picked up a great deal of, I can't understand about mortgages and things Roy, I'm extremely thick about that honestly but I could, I could understandof the philosophy of language and I have some ability in that but when it came down to the hard maths of mathematics, of philosophic logic, I can feel my limitations there, we can't win them all.

Roy Macmillan: You say you're not a fatalist, that you enjoy the knotty intellectual problems, but that you think that life is fundamentally sad, is there a faith that makes it possible to bind these. Or is it?

Norman Sayle: Well the only, I wish there were. I've been very near to having faith for a long time and lucky enough to be a close friend of Brian Partington, Archdeacon Partington, and em er he's a great guy and I find a great deal of comfort in his company and I've often been on the edge of it, I'm psychologically that sort of a person. Er why I don't go over the edge I don't know. In my early years I, when I say I studied, a little bit of oriental philosophy,and that stuff, but I don't, I've never been, I'm not prepared to sort of. In order to have Christian faith, I think you've got to just throw your arms up and that'll happen, but I've never been quite prepared to do, though I would like to do it, but I mustn't do it, I mustn't pretend to do it and not deeply feel it you know what I mean. But the nearest consolation I have ever had is about, 10 or 15 years I had this thought that er when we die, whether we get cremated or buried, all the molecules of which we're made still go on participating in the universe, so that in that sense I can believe in eternity which is just a scientific belief rather than a religious belief, do you know and so I can believe in that, and that offers me some consolation you know, so I'm not complaining as it where, it's just that I'm, I have to tell you that I'm bothered about being 70 plus, don't like it a lot. I think I must enjoy life a great deal because I don't want it to end and that's why is bothers me immensely. I am pre occupied with it, always have been preoccupied with time and stuff, but er I don't know it's just a, I'm in good health and em I'm a bit of a pessimist in a way, I just hope that er, for example I've got a caravan, I love caravanning, I hope I'll be able to pull the caravan, I don't mean me I mean the Volvo will pull the caravan for another five years, I'm realistic about it, I don't think there'll be more than five years, em I hope I shall paint decent pictures for another five years too. If I do that, I've had a bloody good run for my money haven't I really.

Roy Macmillan: Where do you paint?

Norman Sayle: Where? I paint in the sun lounge there, dining room sun lounge, or in the kitchen. And em I've often meant to have a studio and we keep extending this little house, but it think to myself, if I had a studio I don't think I'd want to be up in there really, I want to be in the middle of things really, em I think so. On the other hand it would be very nice to set one's easel up and not have to clear away and stuff, em I feel

slightly guilty that I've not had the wit to get myself a studio, and be honest with you I think I should have had a studio, I feel that almost I'm not a proper artist because I haven't got a studio, because when people phone me up from England like Richard Hagen and things, and we'd like to come over and see your studio and stuff and oops! Haven't got one you know. I'm too, it's em I'm 70, I'm not going to start worrying about it now.

Roy Macmillan: So you'll walk around, you'll find those areas of the countryside that, or the landscape whether it's within the town or the landscape that appeal and perhaps several photographs looking at lots, beginning to frame the picture, maybe some sketches as well.

Norman Sayle: Yes, sketches as well sometimes.

Roy Macmillan: Back home.

Norman Sayle: Usually the sketches come back home, dozens and dozens of compositional sketches and trying to screw the most power out of the subject you know, this business of power and confrontation and shock, a surprise comes into it all the time, I've done dozens of them you know, my sketch books are full of these, there only about 1 1/2 x 3 inches, dozens and dozens of pencil outlines you know and so you get the structure of the thing because in my article in the em before, for my booklet I keep emphasising structure, which I think is the most important of all the things, the sort of way, the distribution of the masses in the picture is the most important. Do you know the one in Bradda Head, in the museum of Bradda Head for example, where you have Bradda Head squeezing against the sky, there's a little sliver of sky left up and it makes the most of this massive Bradda Head you know and that's where the real power comes in at these little tiny stages you know. Painting the picture then, there are technical problems, I mean the technical problems of painting a full imperial watercolour are immense, I'm terrified, at my age, I'm terrified of it, and em I mean technically it's very very difficult to do, to manage, it's a management logistic job and I'm sure that people like Dave Vernon, Nancy Corkish and all those, they know exactly what I mean that you embark upon it and once your committed you know you've got to go on, you can't sort of say well I'll stop and have a cup of tea, the wash is running down there and you've got to jump to it, you know so it's a fascinating business really.

Roy Macmillan: What things do you enjoy, we'veto cope all about your lifework like a painting obviously, but as with everybody else, their life is made up of many many others things, you mentioned your wife and your family. What things do you like, what books, what music, what makes you laugh.

Norman Sayle: Viz, Viz makes me laugh immensely, yes I love Viz, em no I think it's wonderful Viz, I absolutely love it, I mean I use, Adrian my son, use to get private eye occasionally, we used to just find it around and then I about once a year, I buy Viz. Which is just wonderful, I love the sort of crude force form humour, it's so, it's so clean and forthright, there's no pornography, even the fat slags, you couldn't call them pornographic, they're so wonderful, I love them to bits, and I like Viz and I like Radio

Four, I'm a Radio Four addict, I like em, my favourite programme on Radio Four is Humphrey Littleton. Do you know the one em 'haven't a clue'. Sorry haven't a clue. That's my favourite one, I think that's superb. Em music, em well I don't play so much as I should, but I like Mozart Opera a lot and I like the Beatles and dare I say it I actually like the Carpenters, yes I think they're, some of Carpenters music is so polished and accomplished, I like Handel, but many most, oh I do like Jessie Norman singing 4 last songs by Richard Strauss, that's wonderful, yea, yea fairly catholic tastes in music really.

Roy Macmillan: You mentioned that one of your most recent pictures em reminded you of a Back piece and I suspect you were talking there about the so many different lines and the constructions within it.

Norman Sayle: Yes, just the structure of it isn't, the vertical horizontal structure. I always think of Bach as having a vertical horizontal structure, like Mondrian and yes that's what I think of it. My son Adrian once bought me many years ago a marvellous record, the big one when we had records of a Bach, cello piece, unaccompanied cello, and it was just wonderful, but I can't look after records, they always get dusty and they're scratchy and so, so I don't play it anymore. But that was wonderful, yes. I've gone through stages of liking lots of things, but of all the things, the thing I like best is Mozart Opera really, I love it to bits, it's the structure of it and stuff like that and then when Pat Brookfield sent me Jessie Norman *Four Last Songs*, I played it the first time and I thought oh this is not my sort of music, it's constant stream stuff you know and I thought oh well I'd better play it again and then it grabbed me and I thought, oh this is absolutely marvellous and that's what got me into the sort of German tradition with em, with er, well I won't say as far as Wagner, but I do like Richard Strauss a lot and Bruckner and stuff like that, yes, yes I do. I have to say that we had a structural alteration in the house and it's cut off my extension speakers into the dining room and that discourages me, I'm going to get it reconnected so I'll be back into music again then.

Roy Macmillan: Would you say that you were a romantic or.....

Norman Sayle: Yes, I am very much so, I mean the very fact that er, that I, I search out like many of my fellow artists in the Isle of Man, I search out old Tholtans, what is that, but romanticism, eh, I mean.

Roy Macmillan: And yet there's this quite evident intellectualisation about what you do and what you believe that er, which seems somewhat at odds with it. Or perhaps it's that conflict that stops your pictures from just being pretty.

Norman Sayle: I am a very, I'm an extremely analytical. No I'm a very analytical person as well I am, I, I tell you what Roy, I've always been very interested in language and the relationship between language and reality, I've been preoccupied. I mean the work I did with open university for 5 years was mainly concerned with the philosophy of language and I've always loved it and em preoccupied with it and it em, I don't mean when I say, language and reality, I mean mainly English language and reality of course, but I mean the language of painting and reality. Because it's a funny business doing a painting and er and you say to yourself now, em what's that painting about there, what is it about, or not so much that,

but the one of Bradda Head in the museum, is it a painting about Bradda Head, what is the subject or is the painting about Bradda Head, or is the subject of it really watercolour painting technique or is it Norman Sayle's state of mind or is it something to do with the history of painting, or how Archie Knox, I mean all these components come into it don't they. So if you asked the question, what is the real subject of my Bradda Head painting in the museum which is being bought by Joanne Sayle by the way. Em er, you realise then it's a silly question because it's got all these components in it, it's a lot to do with Bradda Head because we went there and that's what I thought of doing it, took lots of photographs and things. And then the desire to do it, thinking it was a good enough thing to tackle because that's a big thing as well, you've got the photographs there saying well is it good enough to tackle and I tackled it and it was good enough and and then there's the business of all the influences you feel upon you, I could feel Archie Knox almost looking over my shoulder when I did it, and there's the business of trying to get enough impact, power, surprise em light and it's a very complicated business really that, that one turned out very well incidentally, but that's, that's what goes on, I've forgotten what the original question was.

Roy Macmillan: You were discussing the donation of meaning in paintings and we came from a question concerning, em are you a romantic and yet there is this intellectualism within your..

Norman Sayle: Yes, that's right yes, now now I have to tell you this that Chris Berry who was one of my ex students who designed the book for my show, and absolutely brilliantly in my opinion, I think it's just a superb bit of work, I mean I'm knocked over by it and people have been, I didn't think it would be so impressive, but people bought it in hundreds for Christmas presents and stuff, and Chris Berry, when we were discussing the booklet and he talked about this painting of Bradda Head, and he said you know you get lost in it, in the bracken of it and er I hadn't thought about it in those terms, but he's quite right I can see that, that that this great foreground of bracken er from a painter's point of view, it's a very interesting psychological artistic and technical problem because you want to say to people look at this incredible expanse of bracken, that's what you're trying to say, but in a painting you can't just have a flat wall of bracken colour, because that would be unacceptable, tedious, wrong and so you've got to employ all your skills to sort of say, there's a recession, you know it goes from here to there, it's a bracken, em but you mustn't overwork it and it's like juggling, it is incredible act of juggling.

Roy Macmillan: But at the same time of course, you're saying something by the fact that you put that much bracken on there, you're taking that risk, so it is about the scenery but it's also about you and your relationship to your viewer,

Norman Sayle: Yes it's about my, yes exactly which we were talking about earlier, this business of 'brackeness' about an expanse of bracken which has always bugged me as well, Laxey Head is another place, you think would you believe, look at this expanse of bracken, isn't it stunning you know and so this is another thing that comes into it, you've got to say, in fact you've just made me realise it that this expanse of 'brackeness' is

something that's been with me for 30 or 40 years as a component, so there's the nostalgia coming in again you see, it's not just something you suddenly see, er last year at em Bradda, it's something that's inside you ready to be alerted when you see it again, you know. Em that's quite a good way of putting it really, I didn't think I was so good with words like that, but never mind.

Roy Macmillan: The last few years have seen your public profile considerably enlarged, there's been the successes in competitions and now there's an exhibition at the Manx Museum, are you fairly comfortable with your, with your position. I mean people are knocking on your door saying can I talk to you about this, and that, are you happy to be seen as the great artist.

Norman Sayle: Er I'm not the great artist, but quite a successful artist, but I like it very much, it's lovely here so it's wonderful, em partly because em, er when I was teaching I worked very hard for 35 years at the college, em and I got on immensely well with my students and they were lovely, I mean I taught art students for 30 years maybe and they were wonderful, I hardly had a crossed word with them and they're gentle wonderful people, I was a great privilege to do it and I just, I mean that it was a wonderful job and then the last 5 years I was on sort of admin sort of stuff like that, but then em, then I had this, but you wouldn't, knew I was Norman Sayle, I was College Development Officer and so. But after this recognition in the Sunday Times is a different matter altogether and I have to say, I like it very much, it's wonderful and em what's been marvellous Roy that em I've had some, I mean the exhibition's been a great success, em I mean all the pictures have sold nearly, but I've had marvellous letters from ex student who've bought my pictures, I've just replied to one tonight I'm trying to catch up, oh letters off students who were with me in 19. In the 19 late 50's and with appreciation of the times they had and er that's what's been marvellous really. I mean it's been wonderful having the success, I don't deny it, I really, I'm revelling in it, I do like it, quite a lot really. It's just, I have to tell you that my exhibition's coming down on the 1st Feb and I go in occasionally er to show people round and stuff and I stand there and I think, I really dreaded coming down, it's like a bereavement, that these pictures will all be dispersed and they will never come back together again, and a gentlemen phoned me up today, er about nothing particularly to do with the exhibition, but he said I must go and see your show and I said well it's finishing on the 1st Feb and I said well I have to tell you this that I'm going to feel really choked when it all comes down and all the pictures disperse to their happy owners and will never come together again. Do you know what he said, he said 'like families' and I thought wow, you know that was something else and in a way, that's what they are, these pictures are a sort of, are like children in a funny sort of way, in a vague way, em they're sort of as much as I can do to talk about my life.