

Children as Artists: Katherine Mansfield's 'Innocent Eye'

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In 'Prelude', one of Katherine Mansfield's most famous New Zealand stories, she places Kezia Burnell, a privileged child, in front of a coloured dining room window. The window serves as a prismatic switch for the imagination: it has two squares of coloured glass at each corner, one blue and the other one yellow. The little girl, looking through the two saturated views no longer ordinary, is immediately transported to a new creative space, a momentary vortex in reality. She then departs from her known world, the 'ordinary window', and is invited to other imaginative possibilities, until an intruder—'a little Chinese Lottie'—comes into the yellow view, '[dusting] the tables and chairs with a corner of her pinafore'.¹ A question occurs, 'Is it really Lottie?'² Kezia is not quite certain until she pulls herself out of the de-familiarised world triggered by two prime colours, and re-focuses her vision through the ordinary window—the eye of reason, of normative order and cognition of colour, a window devoid of imagination.

This episode, brief as it is, is laden with meaning. Kezia's seeing process seems to engage both the transforming and the restorative faculties of 'the innocent eye'.³ As the exemplary child in Mansfield's New Zealand stories, Kezia represents childhood, memory, and creativity—all elements crucial to Mansfield's art. This coloured window episode is a marvellous aligning of Kezia's, Mansfield's, and our vision. It is through this vision, and

these alternating squares of coloured glass that we truly *see* the world of Katherine Mansfield.

Seeing through 'The Innocent Eye'

Mansfield's fascination with children permeates some of her best writings. Not only are some of her most memorable characters children, but also her ingenious encapsulation of these characters reflects the writer's own affinity with the idea of childhood seeing. Virginia Woolf once noticed that '[Mansfield] has a kind of childlikeness somewhere which has been much disfigured, but still exists.'⁷⁴ It is also worth noting that some of these Mansfield child characters embody her idea of art and the artist. I would like to use the concept of 'the innocent eye' to closely examine Mansfield's modelling of her child artists, and their relationship with seeing and representation, and stake my argument that there is more than a simple 'childlikeness' in these characters, but a serious thought process on art and the artist. I will also apply the Fauvist ideas of art and artist to Mansfield's portrayal of her child artists, given that Mansfield was closely associated with the Rhythm group when the stories in discussion came out, and the strongly Fauve expressiveness in these artists' works may have had an enduring influence in her works, especially when crafting images of children, and seeing via their innocent eye.

Although not a novel concept to artists and literary critics, John Ruskin was the first to put it into a more concrete term—'*the innocence of the eye*', which he defines as 'a sort of childish perception of these flat stains of colour, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify,—as a blind man would see them if suddenly gifted with sight.'⁷⁵ Ruskin's definition indicates the faculty of the innocent eye as having a kind of freshness, and abandonment of all previously taught means of perception. He further illustrates this concept by saying how grass can appear 'a

peculiar and somewhat dusty-looking yellow' when strong sunlight shines from a certain direction, and had we been born blind, at the moment we regained eyesight we would perceive the light and shade of the grass as 'bluish green barred with gold'.⁶ Ruskin's illustration recalls a description in Mansfield's 'At the Bay'—'The grass was blue.'⁷ There is no direct reference in Mansfield's works indicating her knowledge of Ruskin's '*eye of innocence*', yet this sentence (together with other examples I will explore in this paper) highlights her intuitive application of the concept. Ruskin concludes that 'a highly accomplished artist has always reduced himself as nearly as possible to this condition of infantine sight.'⁸ I believe this is what Mansfield aimed to achieve through creations of her child artists, who can perfectly align their creative faculties with the ever-refreshed and refreshing visions through their innocent eyes; their representations show what has not been seen before, and sometimes disturb a logical or normative perception which is as static as a statement like 'the grass is green'.

Ruskin's analysis substantiates what Henri Matisse advocates in both his writings and paintings. Being a key figure in the Fauvist movement who inspired J. D. Fergusson, art editor for *Rhythm* and friend of both Mansfield and John Murry, Matisse's affinity with 'the innocent eye' offers a more practical version of the concept's application to visual art, and perhaps also outlines the type of Fauve artist with whom Mansfield's child artists can readily identify. In 'Looking at Life with the Eyes of a Child', Matisse praises a child's ability to see pure visions, and is obviously endeavouring to imitate that sort of vision in his own works.⁹ What Matisse does with painting, Mansfield seems to be doing with her writing by associating her child artists with traits that are characteristic in an exemplary Fauve artist.

But as the term develops in depth and meaning, it starts to bear a two-layered association. Jonathan Fineberg observes: 'Although there is an ancient tradition of the child as an unknowing seer, it was the romantics who allied the naïveté of

the child with “genius”.¹⁰ The ‘unknowing seer’ represents an ideal artist, but the innocent eye inherited a ‘double legacy’ according to Fineberg: ‘it was innocent enough of convention to see through the emperor’s new clothes, so to speak, and at the same time the child was gifted with a privileged view into the mysteries of the divine plan.’¹¹ This ‘double legacy’ complicates the implication of the innocent eye which is no longer a strict equivalent of seeing without any interference, but rather a complex process that involves purity of visioning which offers something new each time, and a sophistication which leads to remembrance or representation of that vision. ‘Thus the innocent eye’, as W. J. T. Mitchell concludes, ‘is really a highly sophisticated sort of vision.’¹² Innocence and sophistication, then, are the two ends of the spectrum of this ‘infantine sight’.¹³

Corresponding to this ‘double legacy’ of the innocent eye, Mansfield also demonstrates a complex if not conflicted creative vision for her own work. Two creative impulses dominated Mansfield’s career: one is that of ‘real joy’, which impels her to capture what is ‘delicate and lovely’, a creative impulse that initiates innocent visions and pure receptivity of beauty and life, and the other is the famous ‘cry against corruption’, ‘an *extremely* deep sense of hopelessness’.¹⁴ The two ‘kick offs’ play out and balance with each other throughout Mansfield’s writings, and bear a particular significance to my discussion. John Middleton Murry, critic and Mansfield’s husband, comments that these two impulses are ‘vital to any true understanding of Katherine Mansfield’; it was in the first state of mind that she wrote ‘Prelude’, and in the second that *Je ne parle pas français* and ‘A Married Man’s Story’ were created.¹⁵ Both of these impulses are true of Mansfield’s creative visions, which according to Murry, ‘alternate incessantly’.¹⁶ Such alternation is a manifestation of an artist’s anxiety for her creative visions. This anxiety, so to speak, produces a parallel that Mansfield herself may not have been aware of when she wrote ‘Prelude’. Her writerly optical illusions

or imaginative play form a metaphorical parallel to Kezia's experimentation with the dining room window.

In the discussion of Fauvism, Mansfield and the innocent eye, two crucial elements will come into play: drawing and colour. To the Fauve artists, Marcel Giry appreciates,

Drawing and colour must obviously have the utmost freedom in the way they express reality. The Fauve picture is a lyrical explosion whose brilliant colouring is the most spectacular feature, but [...] one that must not be seen out of its context. Fauvism does not consist simply of the use of arbitrary colours but is created by the painter's realization that a harmony of colours unconnected with reality expresses the relationship between his ego and the world'.¹⁷

Therefore for the Fauve artist, drawing and colour bear equally significant weight: both are given 'the utmost freedom', yet neither should be viewed out of the 'context' which essentially expresses the relationship between the artist and the world. For Mansfield, too, drawing and colour are interactive means for self-expression and the expression of reality. But her visual features are often registered under the gaze of the innocent eye, a channel through which the child artist's perception and relation with the world is rendered.

A juxtaposition of 'The Aloe' and 'Prelude' is most revelational in terms of the revised version's engagement of the innocent eye. I am, of course, referring to the dining room episode which was not yet conceived in 'The Aloe'. The 'Prelude' version creates an illusion of coloured images and identity; it simultaneously evokes confusion, distortion and restoration. Kezia has to 'ben[d] down to have *one more* look at a blue lawn' and 'yellow fence'.¹⁸ '[O]ne more look' speaks of familiarity; it tells us that Kezia is the discoverer of the coloured world through the blue and yellow glass, and this episode of gazing is by no means the first time for her. At first this episode appeared

to be an accidental discovery, but at a closer look, it is clearly a re-visit of a world that Kezia knows at heart—it is a reiteration of memory, and yet something new is uncovered at the same time mostly because a new character intrudes into Kezia's known picture frame, interrupting the ease of her gaze.

It is not difficult to imagine that Kezia's first discovery of the 'blue arum lilies' and 'the yellow lawn with yellow lilies' has been equally thrilling, and the action of re-adjustment through the 'ordinary window' has taken place at least once at some point in memory. What we see now is most likely a second discovery and re-adjustment, which still surprises her. Kezia's gazing experience in 'Prelude' sums up the essence of seeing via 'the innocent eye', namely the ability to see things anew every time, and the agility to restore a normative vision. Kezia is an artist in training.

'Thus, for the artist creation begins with vision', writes Henri Matisse.¹⁹ To see things anew every time, according to Matisse, is crucial to an artist. An artist must see as a child, and such power of seeing through 'the innocent eye' enables the artist to render subjects in 'an original, [...], personal way.'²⁰ This in a way explains Mansfield's method. In order to avoid a hackneyed delineation of a subject, Mansfield places Kezia in front of the seeing lens, and gives us a vision that in itself is 'a creative operation'.²¹

If painting starts with visioning, then writing for Mansfield must have started with imagining, which is a literary form of seeing. For Mansfield, this 'creative operation' involves being able to see as a child. Jeanne Beauchamp remembered her sister as 'a child among the children'.²² Mansfield has both a child's fascination with a world that can be re-imagined in her writing, and the artist's impulse to break and reassemble an image. In a journal entry, Mansfield writes that she is 'in love with rainbows & crystal glasses—the rainbow fades—& the glass is splintered into 1000 diamond fragments. Where are they scattered—in the immensity of the sky to the four winds of heaven—gone...'.²³ The 'four winds of heaven', or rather, the four *corners* of heaven

is a more abstract and cosmic parameter for Mansfield's visioning and imagination, whereas Kezia's window in 'Prelude' is narrowed down to a much more concrete and decipherable platform for viewing and re-visioning the world. Mansfield is fascinated with both the 'rainbows', the summation of all physical colours, and 'crystal glasses', the medium through which colours are filtered or intensified. Visioning then for Mansfield is the result of such a unifying force of both recognising the original colours and the act of seeing through clear crystal glass; it is a formative stage where Mansfield, like Kezia, is looking through the window, amazed and at the same time trying to process what she sees. Mansfield thus re-summons her own vision of 'rainbows and crystal glasses' in what she enables Kezia to see in 'Prelude'.

Kezia's window may be small, but the whole effect achieved is analogous to Matisse's 'Tree of Life' in the Chapel of the Rosary at Vence. Matisse explains that in this piece he 'tried to achieve that balance of forces', and the key effect is a 'living product of harmony' and 'mutual relationships' between the colours of blue, green and yellow, which are stained glass works on the chapel window, interacting with natural light, and playing with the white floor and wall 'embroidered' with black line drawings on the opposite wall.²⁴ He further illustrates the intention of such a design:

The contrast allows me to give the light its maximum vitality, to make it the essential element, that which colors, warms, and animates the whole structure, to which it is important to give an impression of boundless space despite its small dimensions. Throughout the chapel, there is not a single line, not a single detail that doesn't contribute to that impression.²⁵

Matisse talks about three colours (two of which happen to be the same colours through which Kezia sees), and how they harmonise and interact with the white, which recalls the

'ordinary window' in 'Prelude'. Anyone who has seen Matisse's Vence Chapel and read Mansfield's 'Prelude' will not find it difficult to associate the two windows. Upon entering the chapel at Vence, our eyes are immediately captivated by the play of light utilised by Matisse's 'ultramarine blue', 'bottle green', and 'lemon yellow' and sun light; movement is an indispensable component to this harmonised composition.²⁶ If Matisse painted the windows of Vence Chapel with light, Kezia uncannily did exactly the same thing in front of the Burnell dining room window. This is an ultimate overlap of 'the innocent eye' where a child artist, though fictional, through the vision of Katherine Mansfield, anticipated a pivotal artistic creation which Matisse himself confessed to be 'the culmination of a lifetime of work'.²⁷ The coloured glass window in both Matisse's and Mansfield's cases is the *eye* through which each artist sees the world and, under its guidance, creates. Kezia's window may be limited in dimensions, yet it has a similar purpose because it is through these small squares of glass that a Matisse-like 'impression of boundless space' is built and extended.²⁸

Kezia's looking through the coloured glass is a defining moment of distortion and transformation. Joanna Kokot observes that the point of view of the character and the narrator overlap precisely when the momentary confusion and wonder occurs.²⁹ The effect is immediately transmitted to the reader. Colour plays a key role in this transmission. Without its illuminating and transforming power, Kezia's vision will not be equalled to that of the innocent eye, which encompasses both a sensation of colour distortion, and soon after, a restoration of normative vision. The positioning of the coloured glasses indicates removal, however briefly, from reality. Transformation occurs when Kezia alternates between the 'blue lawn' and 'yellow Lottie', hence the question: 'Is it really Lottie?'; certainty is only obtained when Kezia looks through the 'ordinary window'.³⁰

Kezia seems to be a privileged child among Mansfield's child characters, one who has seen and understood the essential

colours of imagination as well as reality, and is able to represent them in mirroring forms, which are her own imaginative recreations. Even though Kezia never draws, her ability to re-create her vision is manifested in her understanding of reality, and in particular, of the adult world. In the children's tea party, according to Kokot, the Burnell girls pretend to be 'sophisticated women'.³¹ Their role-playing reveals their naïve yet sharp perception of the essential lines and structures of the adult world, and how it operates. If Kezia were observing reality through distorted shades, like seeing through polarised sunglasses that filter noisy colours and leave the essential ones, then at the tea party, she is re-making perceived reality—a vision that is essential because true.

A question may be raised as to why Kezia has never demonstrated the ability of 'true representation' in John Willats' sense of the term.³² She has certainly reached the first phase of seeing, but has not continued onto the realm of drawing, or at least within the limited scope of Mansfield's fictional writings. But the definition of representation should not be limited to paper and pen; in other words, it can be extended to the play of light, and to memory and design. Willats' 'true representation' then should be called *material* representation, which only applies to the kind of visual or plastic arts that seek expression in materialistic format such as on paper or canvas. The fact that Kezia, like Matisse, is able to 'paint' with light does not negate the fact that her work is also 'true' in its representational rights. Kezia is a privileged seer in 'Prelude' and other stories such as 'The Doll's House' and 'At the Bay'. Her sense of beauty often coincides with an element of surprise and re-discovery, as with the coloured window, or when she imagines how she could 'surprise' grandmother with the unusual content inside a match box:

She wanted to make a surprise for the grandmother. ...
First she would put a leaf inside with a big violet lying on

it, then she would put a very small white picotee, perhaps, on each side of the violet, and then she would sprinkle some lavender on the top, but not to cover their heads.

She often made these surprises for the grandmother, and they were always most successful.

‘Do you want a match, my granny?’

‘Why, yes, child, I believe a match is just what I’m looking for.’

The grandmother slowly opened the box and came upon the *picture* inside.

‘Good gracious, child! How you astonished me!’

‘I can make her one every day here,’ she thought, scrambling up the grass on her slippery shoes.

(*Fiction 2*, 72-3, emphasis added).

This episode suggests not only Kezia’s sensitivity to the idea of design—her creating a ‘picture’, but also that the design should carry an element which involves emotional input—surprise. Andrew Bennett also notes this element, which is closely associated with a ‘strangeness’ that Mansfield captured in the Burnell stories. ‘Surprise—’, writes Bennett, ‘the revelation of the unknown, the unexpected, the unfamiliar [...] inhabits the Burnell world in powerful and disturbing ways.’³³ Mansfield’s main concern, according to Bennett, is the distance between perception and reality both for her characters and the reader, and she is ‘concerned [...] to articulate, to play on or perform, a certain surprise and a certain strangeness in writing’—a Mansfieldian play of the ‘innocent eye’.³⁴

Kezia plays with light and design, and conceives independently a work of art by combining emotional and pictorial effects. This new piece of art bears a personal mark—the artist’s signature, so to speak. Kezia’s innocent eye enables her to perceive new images, as well as reproducing them anew each time. It is in this sense that Kezia becomes an artist in both

Ruskin's and Matisse's definitions: she not only surprises herself with an ever-renewed vision, but can work with the ephemeral substance of light, like Matisse, for she stores images in the even more intangible and transient capacity of memory, until the next creative trigger calls for replacing or re-registering of new images. She is an exemplary Mansfieldian embodiment of 'the innocent eye'.

Drawing Something *Else*: 'The Woman at the Store'

But Mansfield's interactive play with 'the innocent eye' and children as representative artists began with an earlier prototype of a Fauve artist—Else in 'The Woman at the Store'. Very often Mansfield's child characters bear remarkable traits that can link them to the art world, especially Fauvist art. These characters, or rather, child artists, are frequently associated with colour and/or drawing. This 'and/or' relationship does not mean that some of these little artists possess the power of the 'innocent eye' while others do not, but that these characters, when juxtaposed together, represent the two spectrums of this concept: one by colour and distortion, and the other, by abbreviation, drawing, and repetition.

The child artist Else in 'The Woman at the Store' is not given much personality when she first appears, and it is only gradually that her voice and appearance are acknowledged, and eventually become crucial to the climax of the story. Else, a suspiciously haphazard name, is a stark contrast to Kezia, who has been delineated with Mansfield's fond memory of her childhood New Zealand. Jenny McDonnell also points out that Else is 'obviously identified as 'other' within the story by her name. [...] she is excluded from authorial language and uses a different medium (her drawing) to express herself.'³⁵

In the beginning of 'The Woman at the Store', Else is simply referred to as 'the child'; even the dog is rendered in more direct and descriptive terms than she: 'the yellow dog, a mangy beast, scuttled back into the whare, his tail between his legs.' The child's voice, too, is paraphrased by the mother (*Fiction 1*, 269):

My kid comes runnin' in ter me. "Mumma," says she,
"there's three brown things comin' over the 'ill," says
she. An' I comes out smart, I can tell yer. They'll by
'awks, I says to her. Oh, the 'awks about 'ere, yer
wouldn't believe.

The child's name—'Else'—may indicate that she is Something Else, who does not resemble the mother even though the woman insists that '[s]he's the dead spit of me. Any fool could see that' (*Fiction 1*, 271). Sickness is associated with Else from birth. This recalls a similar type of 'silliness' we will find in the unnamed character in 'The-Child-Who-Was-Tired', who sees a recurrent vision, though she has no opportunity to capture or represent it in material form. The mother, once again, takes up the narrative responsibility by relating the child's background: "I 'and't any milk till a month after she was born and she sickened like a cow'" (*Fiction 1*, 271).

And yet Else survives. She seems to share a trait with Kezia in that she also prefers a voyeuristic point of view. The rationale behind this observatory stance, according to Willats, is that '[t]he human visual system is designed to extract information about the shapes of objects from view of scenes, and picture perception works in the same way.'³⁶ The major difference of the two characters, as we find out, lies in Else's extraordinary ability in representation in addition to engaging in the Kezian gaze. Else is able to transform what she sees into drawings, into Willats' 'true representations', or rather, material representations. Else makes explicit declarations with both her art and her actions, and her artistic impulse to create and display her art explains the revealing of the murder sketch. Else not only perceives, but also

sees from multiple views, which explains why the narrator has no difficulty in interpreting the child's pictorial representations.

Mansfield has not shown a Kezia who reproduces her vision in 'Prelude', at least not in the traditional sense of painting, yet she shows Else transferring her internal visions into drawings. Else appears to be a Mansfieldian prototype of a child artist, who, like the Fauve artist, is perhaps difficult to accept or understand in the beginning; she is the type of artist whose very intention is to overthrow conventional criteria of beauty and harmony. Mansfield's first artist then is appropriately a child who is 'mad', utterly motivated by truth, and who completely identifies with her art. Else, like Matisse and his friends, is a rebel.³⁷ According to Charles Riley, the inherent nature of 'the innocent eye' determines its '[opposition] to the very notion of system', it is 'spontaneous' and 'antisystematic'.³⁸ In 'The Woman at the Store', the narrator's—an adult's—perception represents the 'system' against which Else creates. Riley's interpretation of the innocent eye's rebellious nature encourages further association between Else and a Fauve artist. If the narrator could be taken as a representative of a public in the early 1900s who was bewildered and overwhelmed by a new way of expression, then Mansfield's child artist shares strong affinities not only with the Fauve means of expression, but also with the negative reception that the group of artists experienced. When the Fauves began to show, Giry comments, '[c]ritics hostile to avant-garde art used such words as "spineless" and "incoherent" [...] when passing judgment on the friends of Matisse, who thought an unfinished form more expressive than a fully defined one.'³⁹ Giry goes on to conclude that in 'such circumstances, young painters who sought to change the traditional means of artistic expression clearly could not hope for understanding'.⁴⁰ Such is Else's situation, and we can only but imagine what 'shocking' images Kezia would have produced had she been given the means or a larger audience.

The two children form a fascinating pair when juxtaposed together. If Kezia looks into a possible artistic future via the innocent eye, Else then is the image-maker who delves into the past—a past of violence, crime and compulsive story-telling. Thus it is, and perhaps only an artist like Else who can disclose the secret of her mother: a woman who murdered and buried her husband.

Else is clearly established as the artist in the story. She preserves memory and seeks to utter what she has remembered in pictorial forms. Drawing in this case becomes more direct and realistic than the narrator's words. Given Else's physical surroundings and disposition, it is unlikely that she reads or writes, but her most powerful tool of communication, more effective and affective than language, is her drawing. When this one outlet of communication is activated, Else can hardly suppress her excitement. The narrator observes that Else is thrown into a mad fit when her work is discovered. Such excitement, concludes the narrator, is manifestation of a 'diseased mind' (*Fiction* 1, 274). Else's drawings are of events, of happenings, and never still life; it is as if she is acquiring the expressive and recording properties of drawing as a language. But her drawings must follow her own set of rules, internalised by her artistic vision. Willats explains the otherness of children's drawing in terms of language acquisition: 'As with the early rules of speech, the drawing rules young children use are different from those used by adults. This is why drawings by young children look so *strange* in adult's eyes.'⁴¹ This helps to shed light upon the narrator's depreciation of, or even disgust towards, Else's art, but at the same time places Else in the spectrum of 'the innocent eye', setting the child's cognitive power aside from the adult's appreciative capacity.

Else also differs from Kezia because the latter discovers, but Else preserves and reveals with stark brevity. Each of Else's pictures marks an event that motions the story, and her final drawing epitomises abbreviation—a highly valued expressive

method of the Fauve artists. Kezia's artistic visions seem to share more affinity with the ephemeral nature of colour, while Else is capable of capturing the 'essential lines'.⁴² Before the climactic revelation of the murder image, Else proudly announces to her mother that she has 'made a picture of them on the 'ill, an' you an' me an' the dog down below' (*Fiction* 1, 274). This detailed piece of information confirms from the child's perspective what the narrator describes to us in the beginning of the story (*Fiction* 1, 269):

We are on the brow of the hill, and below us there was a whare roofed with corrugated iron. [...] and as I looked a woman came out, followed by a child and a sheep dog—the woman carrying what appeared to me a black stick. [...] The sun pushed through the pale clouds and shed a vivid light over the scene. It gleamed on the woman's yellow hair, over her flapping pinafore and the rifle she was carrying. The child hid behind her, and the yellow dog, a mangy beast, scuttled back into the whare, his tail between his legs.

From the beginning of 'The Woman at the Store', a sense that the narrator prides him/herself as some sort of artist prevails. This sense is communicated by elaborate descriptions of the visual aspects of the surroundings: colour, light, shadows and shapes. It is very likely that the narrator's later involuntary and harsh judgment of Else's drawings obviously springs from a pre-existing notion of art. But the narrator also acknowledges, however sarcastically, that Else's drawings are 'artistic'.⁴³ The similarities in Else's description and that of the narrator at first appear to imply an aligning of their visions, but we soon discover that although the two see the same scene, their presentations are radically different. In fact, by eliminating unnecessary details and focusing on the defining lines, Else's version releases more power. Compared to Kezia, Else possesses an ability in capturing the essential lines and shapes, which are akin to Fauvist methods.

She fulfills the role of memory collector or preserver, but the simultaneous departure from and overlap with a more sophisticated vision indicates that Else's artistic expression in seeing and remembering is a much more complex one.

The purpose of preserving these images is so that they will be displayed to other speculators, much like in an art gallery. But there is one person who prevents her from exhibiting her most important work of art—her mother. To be forbidden drawing, to Else, is to be deprived of speech. The continuous sealing-off of her expression catches Else between the desire to display and the fear of exposure. Else's dilemma is very real and poignant. When the travellers coax Else into showing her drawings, they realise that her art is 'extraordinary and repulsively vulgar', the 'creations of a lunatic with a lunatic's cleverness', thus showing their disgust but also a reluctant appreciation (*Fiction* 1, 274). Like the Fauve artists who challenged the conventionalised aesthetic sense of their audience, Else's work also pushes the narrator's appreciative boundary to a dangerous extent.

While Else seeks honesty by engaging the 'essential lines' of reality, the narrator looks for charm.⁴⁴ But charm in art is temporary. Matisse, when writing about the Impressionists, says that he '[p]refers], by insisting upon [a subject's] essential character, to risk losing charm in order to obtain greater stability.'⁴⁵ The narrator in 'The Woman at the Store' is obviously not 'charmed' by Else's art. What is balanced in reality is thrown off in art, if the artist, like Else, insists upon re-creating the real stripped of embellishment. In fact, that the narrator is overwhelmed when he/she sees the final image Else has created indicates the effectiveness of the drawing—no more to be said or done, for everything is within the picture. Condensation lies at the heart of both Fauve art and Else's drawings.

Matisse writes in 'Looking at Life with the Eyes of a Child' that

The effort needed to see things without distortion demands a kind of courage; and this courage is essential to the artist, who has to look at everything as though he were seeing it for the first time: he has to look at life as he did when he was a child and, if he loses that faculty, he cannot express himself in an original, that is, a personal way.⁴⁶

His idea of distortion versus originality applies to both Kezia's and Else's creative impulses. In both child artists we witness a removal from distorted visions: Kezia from the coloured glass windows, and Else from the narrator's views. A type of artistic courage dictates both children's representations. Matisse's belief is that we see only distortions because our cultural education is an ongoing process of being fed ready-made images, assimilating our own original vision to a socially acceptable frame. The antagonistic reaction the narrator has towards Else's art is a manifestation of two visions in contention—one seemingly more sophisticated, with colours, shapes and contours complete, and the other one simple almost to the extent of crudity, but carries astonishing power through its honesty. Matisse's explanation of an artist's vision makes sense of both the Mansfieldian child artist's ability to create original works of art, and the narrator's inability to appreciate Else's art. Else's drawing is new because she resists existing cultural and visual influences; her art does not resemble in any way what the narrator describes, nor look like artistic offspring of the 'old pages of English periodicals' on the wall (*Fiction* 1, 270).

The fact that the narrator goes so far as to claim that Else is mentally ill further demonstrates that the two have opposite understandings when it comes to drawing. The narrator, though unable to appreciate Else's art, remains a close observer of her emotions, particularly when her drawings are shown to the adults. An ecstasy accompanies this moment: Else relishes the very fact that her work, though misinterpreted, is shown. Such a

strong sense of identification in the child artist compels her to further revelation and creation. What is seen in Else is not lunacy, but the intense joy an artist experiences when her work is completed and placed under the public gaze. Thus the impulse to draw, not acceptability or family loyalty, occupies the centre of Else's representational concern, and becomes the focus of her creative vision.

In his 'Notes of a Painter', Matisse writes that '[t]here was a time when I never left my paintings hanging on the wall because they reminded me of moments of over-excitement and I did not like to see them again when I was calm'.⁴⁷ Matisse describes a double reaction in an artist: there are both the 'moments of over-excitement', which are by-products of the artist's creative energy, and a moment of calm, which indicates re-visioning of the artwork via a normative view, suggesting the artist's distancing away from it. Else's art has a similar effect on her; the action of merely looking at her own drawings throws her emotions off balance. Apparently for both Matisse and Else, art is too irresistible a stimulus to be contained in the ordinary sense of perception. This also marks the difference between Matisse, a painter who tries to imitate the effect of the innocent eye, and Else, an unaffected artist who does not yet know how to segment 'over-excitement' from the serenity of creation; she is too close to her own art to be able to adopt an aloof point of view.

Matisse writes that 'Drawing [...] is the expression of the possession of objects', or subjects, as is the case of Else.⁴⁸ The child expresses her possession of 'objects' and knowledge via drawing, an action that entails power. Once this power is asserted after she presents her final piece of work, Else falls asleep 'breathing loudly' (*Fiction* 1, 276).

The narrator's description of this drawing communicates urgency: 'The kid had drawn the picture of the woman shooting at a man with a rook rifle and then digging a hole to bury him in' (*Fiction* 1, 276). There is no punctuation and no pause. It is as if

the drawing is done in such a way that a viewer is unable to segment one movement from another, or to put the two events in sequential order. The drawing, if we try to imagine it, must look more like a collage of simultaneous happenings—it should not resemble the narrator's delineation of images, which are linear, and occupy clear spatial pigeonholes, but rather, it shares more affinity with Kezia's way of seeing, which encourages simultaneous processing. Else's drawing must have disturbed the narrator's accustomed way of seeing objects. In the narrator's point of view, images follow a given track of movement—they are organised, composed, and safe. But Else's art is brutally bare, honest, and violent; it echoes John Middleton Murry's manifesto for modern art which is characterised by a rhythm 'strange to the eye, unaccustomed to the ear'.⁴⁹

After releasing such creative energy, reconciliation between the child's compulsions to record and reveal has been reached. From Else's 'mad excitement' to this undisturbed slumber, the child artist has undergone a journey via the overwhelming power of drawing. Else's art may very well have the ability both to provoke and to calm, even though she has not quite mastered Matisse's skill to securely separate the artist from the emotional stimulus created at the sight of his or her own art. According to Matisse, drawing is not

an exercise of particular dexterity, but above all [...] a means to expressing intimate feelings and descriptions of states of being, but a means deliberately simplified so as to give simplicity and spontaneity to the expression, which [speaks] directly to the mind of the spectator.⁵⁰

Else's art is powerful precisely because it is 'intimate' and 'direct'. What the narrator describes to us are the images immediately from his/her mind's eye. Whether willingly or not, the narrator is pulled away from 'the ordinary window' by the child's drawings.

Else and Kezia appear to be two distinctive child artists in Mansfield's stories. An initial impression is that Kezia may be the

one who truly possesses the power of ‘the innocent eye’, for it is she who can observe without hindrance, imagine without entrapment, and unites visions through an ‘ordinary window’ without violent encounters. Kezia seems to be the agent who roams freely from imagination to reality and vice versa. But this does not negate the legitimacy of Mansfield’s portrayal of the other child artist Else, who has an explicit passion towards art, and whose work challenges the other characters’ established criteria for it. In fact, these child artists together represent two crucial aspects of ‘the innocent eye’ in that one fully embodies childlike wonder via a continuously renewed vision, and the other searches and appeals for truthfulness and a highly simplified way in telling that truth with her art—an oxymoronic statement which entails both the sophistication of vision and the power of ingenuousness.

Mansfield’s child artists’ interactions with colour, drawing and image-making seamlessly coincide with one of the key characteristics of Fauve art according to Giry: that imagination, not just colour, is given primacy; ‘[it] acts first on the field of chromatic expression, then on that of drawing.’⁵¹ Seeing initiates the desire to recreate; by eliciting such a creative impulse, the artist is impelled to reproduce, represent and re-imagine as Kezia and Else do in ‘Prelude’ and ‘The Woman at the Store’. Neither child stops at the stage of comprehension, but expresses via their action or imagination to the phase of representation and thus expression. Neither can fully represent ‘the innocent eye’ alone, but together they can obtain both that most original vision, and its recreation. By using such little artists to explore and represent art’s intimate interactions with vision and colour, Mansfield renders her own artistic presentation which demonstrates a strong sense of refining the innocence of her own creative vision—through the eye of a child.

Notes

- ¹ Katherine Mansfield, *The Aloe with Prelude*, ed. by Vincent O'Sullivan (Wellington: Port Nicholson Press, 1982), p. 34.
- ² Mansfield, *The Aloe with Prelude*, p. 34.
- ³ It was John Ruskin who coined the term. His original phrase is 'the innocence of the eye' which he explains in *The Elements of Drawing*. I choose to use 'the innocent eye' as scholars such as Jonathan Fineberg and W. J. T. Mitchell do because it is a more concrete term to which my argument and discussion can adhere.
- ⁴ Virginia Woolf, *Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Anne Oliver Bell (London: Hogarth, 1977), vol. I, p. 216, entry for 9 November 1918.
- ⁵ John Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing in Three Letters to Beginners*, Sixth Edition (London: George Allen, Sunnyside, Orpington, 1898), p. 5.
- ⁶ Ruskin, pp. 5-7.
- ⁷ *The Collected Fiction of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. by Gerri Kimber and Vincent O'Sullivan, *The Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, [2012]), 2 (1916-1922), p. 342. Subsequent quotations are taken from this edition, and reference is provided in the text.
- ⁸ Ruskin, p. 6.
- ⁹ Matisse, *Matisse on Art*, ed. by Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 218.
- ¹⁰ Jonathan David Fineberg, *The Innocent Eye: Children's Art and the Modern Artist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p. 3.
- ¹¹ Fineberg, p. 5.
- ¹² W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 118.
- ¹³ Ruskin, p. 6.
- ¹⁴ *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. by Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott, 5 vols (New York: Oxford University Press, Oxford: 1987), II, p. 52.

- ¹⁵ John Middleton Murry, *Katherine Mansfield and Other Literary Studies* (London: Constable, 1959), p. 86.
- ¹⁶ Murry, pp. 86-7.
- ¹⁷ Marcel Giry, *Fauvism: Origins and Development* (New York: Alpine Fine Arts Collection, 1981), p. 10.
- ¹⁸ Mansfield, *The Aloe with Prelude*, p. 34. Italics mine.
- ¹⁹ Henri Matisse, 'Looking at Life with the Eyes of a Child', *Matisse on Art*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 217.
- ²⁰ Matisse, p. 218.
- ²¹ Matisse, pp. 217-8. Matisse believes that what we see every day is in fact distortion, not original form. Such distortions are caused by 'acquired habits' that are imposed upon us, and inculcated by ready-made images such as posters and magazines. He says that 'images which are to the eye what prejudices are to the mind.' This is why artists, such as himself, need to renew their vision every time when they create, namely to see life with the eyes of a child.
- ²² Gillian Boddy, *Katherine Mansfield: The Woman and the Writer* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1988), p. 15.
- ²³ John Middleton Murry, *Journal of Katherine Mansfield 1904-1922, Definitive Edition* (Auckland: Hutchinson NZ, 1984), p.13.
- ²⁴ Matisse, p. 219.
- ²⁵ Matisse, 'Looking at Life with the Eyes of a Child, 1953', p. 219.
- ²⁶ Matisse, 'The Chapel of the Rosary: On the Murals and Windows, 1951', p. 198. Matisse explains in detail in this essay how simultaneously ordinary and extraordinary the three colours are, how their power lies in their 'simplicity', and yet each is able to filter and interact with sunlight to a different effect.
- ²⁷ Matisse, 'The Chapel of the Rosary, 1951', p. 197.
- ²⁸ Matisse, p. 198.
- ²⁹ Joanna Kokot, 'The Elusiveness of Reality: The Limits of Cognition in Katherine Mansfield's Short Stories', in *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Modernism*, ed. by Janet Wilson, Susan Reid, and Gerri Kimber (New York: Continuum, 2011), pp. 67-77 (p. 67).
- ³⁰ Mansfield, *The Aloe with Prelude*, p. 34.

- ³¹ Kokot, p. 68.
- ³² In *Making Sense of Children's Drawings* (Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates, 2005) John Willats advocates that '[t]rue representation' in children's art 'begins only when a child intends to draw something specific and has the competence, however crude, to carry out this intention.' pp. 150-1.
- ³³ Andrew Bennett, *Katherine Mansfield, Writers and Their Work* (Horndon: Northcote House Publishers, 2004), p. 62.
- ³⁴ Bennett, p. 62.
- ³⁵ Jenny McDonnell, *Katherine Mansfield and the Modernist Marketplace*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 60.
- ³⁶ Willats, p.152.
- ³⁷ Giry, p. 11: 'Between 1904 and 1907 the Fauves did some original thinking on the problems facing them and found innovatory artistic solutions. They had a rebellious, questing spirit, and a desire to break with the past (especially Impressionism) which has often been neglected.'
- ³⁸ Charles A. Riley, *Color Codes: Modern Theories of Color in Philosophy, Painting and Architecture, Literature, Music and Psychology* (Hanover NH: University Press of New England, 1994), p. 16.
- ³⁹ Giry, 9-10.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid, 9-10.
- ⁴¹ Willats, p. 1. My emphasis.
- ⁴² Matisse, p. 39.
- ⁴³ *Collected Fiction*, vol. I, p. 274: 'I pushed back my chair and went over to the kid, who immediately sat flat down on her artistic achievements and made a face at me.'
- ⁴⁴ Matisse, *Matisse on Art*, p. 39: 'Suppose I want to paint a woman's body: first of all, I imbue it with grace and charm, but I know that I must give it something more. I will condense the meaning of this body by seeking its essential lines.'
- ⁴⁵ Matisse, p. 39.
- ⁴⁶ Matisse, p. 218.
- ⁴⁷ Matisse, p. 38.
- ⁴⁸ Matisse, p. 156.

- ⁴⁹ *Rhythm: Art, Music, Literature Quarterly*, 1.1 (Summer 1911), 2, ed. by John Middleton Murry, Brown University and University of Tulsa, The Modernist Journals Project (1995) <http://www.modjourn.org/render.php?view=mjp_object&id=1159905483482363>
- ⁵⁰ Matisse, p. 131.
- ⁵¹ Giry, p. 11.

Journal of Commonwealth Literature, the *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, and the *Journal of New Zealand Studies*, among others.

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