

CHARLOTTE SALOMON ARTIST FROM THE PAST

Looking at the wall of Andrew Bracey's paintings and observing the names, I must admit being a woman and in full knowledge that men have been the dominant force in art history I was drawn to the female artists. A name that particularly struck me was Charlotte Salomon, because of the surname being part of my genealogy, in the form of Salmon. As part of my research I googled the name, and was surprised that this 20th century artist is well known: from Germany, where a primary school and a street bears her name in the city of Berlin¹, and in Amsterdam as part of the Jewish history and holocaust heritage, and in France "where Salomon has enjoyed a kind of cult status since the publication, in 2014, of the best-selling novel by David Foenkinos, "Charlotte," inspired by her life."²

Charlotte Salomon, in her short life, was full and tragic, from abuses suffered by her grandfather to an extremely productive life as an artist and film director, to her demise aged 26 at the hands of the Nazi's. Where does one begin in this story of her life, her birth into the family. It appears there was a history of depression as eight members of her maternal family had committed suicide, whether this was from hereditary depression or from abuses within the family or both who knows.

³ Charlotte had found out about this vicissitude from her grandfather, which caused despair yet inspired her to create over a period of a year, over 700 pieces of works about her family. These art pieces included paintings, text, poetry, and some pieces accompanied by music, and short films, which she packaged together and titled *Life? Or Theatre? An Operetta*. "It is a work of mesmerising power and astonishing ambition"⁴ the New Yorker states and I think many agree including myself. This work was given to a friend for safe keeping before she was detained 5 months pregnant by the nazis because of her Jewish heritage. It is fortunate for us that she did and which has created this cult following of this young woman's works.

She had managed to enjoy two years at the Academy of Arts in Berlin before she had to leave because of the rise of the nazis. Her mother having committed suicide when she was young (told she had died of influenza) her father in a Nazi camp, she joined her grandparents in the south of France. Her 35 page letter that was found in years past, of her confession to murdering her grandfather. The letter suggesting that her grandfather was sexually abusive and how she hated him, and how she had poisoned him as she penned her letter as he was dying.⁵ Most disturbing about this was that as he was dying she drew his portrait. I drew pictures of my own father when he was dying and a portrait of him dead, being visual they were from memory, it felt right to do it as I processed his dying, but I had nothing to do with his death, I think that is why Charlotte sketching her grandfather perturbed me, yet I sense that like her artworks of her family members that it was part of her process in dealing with it.

After the perusal of several articles about Charlotte Salomon's life I am torn between admiration for the amount of work created and the exploration of her ideas through mixed media to the disturbing admittance of the killing of her grandfather in no less than 35 pages. The latter seems in keeping with her vast body of work in her short life lived. Her life an operetta indeed.

Lincoln based Artist Amber Richards, currently studying a Masters in Fine Art at the University of Lincoln and due to complete September 2022. A feminist and with a background in psychology and Primary School teaching, Amber has combined her art skills to produce work on aspects of the human condition, as well as her love of nature. Amber has shown her work in various exhibitions in the UK, and she received a Study bursary in 2019 from the prestigious Hertford Art Society. Amber's work can be found in homes around the globe.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlotte_Salomon

² <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-obsessive-art-and-great-confession-of-charlotte-salomon>

³ <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/salomon-charlotte>

⁴ <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-obsessive-art-and-great-confession-of-charlotte-salomon>

⁵ <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-obsessive-art-and-great-confession-of-charlotte-salomon>