

Life & Style Profile

## Conceptual artist with a taste for ‘less is more’

By Theo Panayides · March 17, 2021 · 0 Comments · 45

SHARE

0



**THEO PANAYIDES meets a performance artist whose past life as a barrister is a far cry from the pomegranates, earth, sky, and measuring the sea in buckets of her current work**

“I’m a bit of a contrarian,” muses Helen Kirwan, sitting in her studio near the Cyprus Academy of Arts (CAA) in Limassol. “If somebody says to me ‘It can’t be done’, I’ll bloody well show you that it can!”

Yeah right, thinks the cynical reader; the artist hasn’t been born who’d ever describe themselves as pliable and going with the flow. Yet it does seem like Helen tends to do things in her own particular way. Even (or especially) when it comes to age, that implacable force that laughs at so-called contrarians, her path has been quite unconventional. Back in her 20s – prior to embarking on a career as a barrister – she was married to a man in his 50s. Now, in her 70s (she was born in 1949), she behaves like a person in her 30s, going on road trips to Central Asia and churning out work like a much younger artist.

What kind of work? She calls herself a conceptual artist, though she’s also been described as a minimalist – by Jennifer Thatcher, in an interview now on YouTube – and reckons Thatcher may be “on to something”. A video she made last month, for instance, in her capacity as ‘artist in residence’ at the CAA, shows Helen sitting on a stool, chopping up blood-red pomegranates with a serrated knife – for a whole hour! Another example is *Memory Theatre*, a two-channel video piece from 2017, in which Helen, clad in black, wades into the sea off Folkestone in Kent and proceeds to ‘measure’ it out in buckets.