

And what did she bring to the relationship?

“I think – feistiness, I suppose. Vitality,” she replies with an uncertain laugh. Not that Reg was timid, “he was very solid. He was the kind of guy you couldn’t push around... And a much stronger person than me, in terms of ego. He was very solid.” So she brought – what, a certain energy? Helen laughs again, shrugging: “Don’t know what I brought, really...”



I assume they completed each other, as with all happy marriages – but her reticence about her own contribution seems typical, nor is it just false modesty or self-deprecation. It reflects her worldview and the kind of artistic expression she’s drawn to, that kind of plainness and restraint as well as a sidelong, implicit quality. She’s vehemently anti-Brexit, to give an

example, to the extent that she fell into depression towards the end of last year as the deadline approached, yet she’d never think of making so-called ‘Brexit art’; “I’m not going to jump on any bandwagons”. Likewise, here in Cyprus, she doesn’t plan to traffic in the usual clichés about the Green Line: “I don’t want to be one of those artists who parachutes in and glibly says: ‘Oh, the Cypriot situation is so profoundly this-that-and-the-other, and I’m going to make work about it’. I mean, for goodness sake!”. Instead she deals in pomegranates, static shots of earth, sea and sky (*Sadness of Farewell*, from 2018), and measuring the sea in buckets.

Much of this stems from childhood (it always does), a not-unhappy childhood marked nonetheless by outsider-dom and a gnawing sense of being abandoned: “My parents really didn’t like children very much. My sisters always joked that the horses got the best treatment!”. The parents were an English couple who’d relocated to the middle of Ireland – a place called County Westmeath – to breed horses, living apart from the Roman Catholic locals and part of a sort of “threadbare gentry”, the so-called Anglo-Irish ‘Ascendancy’ of posh Protestant squires (Helen’s mother came from a landed family in Somerset). It was rather like the Raj, very formal dinners and glamorous teenage balls, everyone being “more English than the English” – though Helen herself was an outsider among outsiders, her early artistic ambitions discouraged both at home and in adolescence, after she’d been shipped across the Irish Sea to a strait-laced, very prestigious boarding school called Cheltenham Ladies’ College.

Public-school life of that generation was tough (her housemistress was “a sadist,” she recalls bluntly) – though the Spartan training came in handy years later when she travelled the 53 days and 19,000 kilometres from Calais to Kazakhstan (and back) in an old BMW, a 60-something woman in the company of two much younger men (one of them was Simon Pruciak, now Programmes Director at the CAA), for a three-channel video installation called *Image of the Road*. At the time, however, her inchoate dreams of studying at the Slade School of Fine Art were starved of funding – so instead she did Social Studies then became a social worker in deprived west London for a few years in her 20s, “because I wanted to change the world at that age”. Sounds like she was quite a fiery young person, I offer, but she makes no reply. Or perhaps idealistic? “I was idealistic, yes.”