FALMOUTH
UNIVERSITY

TIM SHAW - GRADUATION CEREMONY SPEECH TRANSCRIPT

FELLOWSHIP AWARD ACCEPTANCE SPEECH GIVEN AT THE 2013 FALMOUTH UNIVERSITY GRADUATION CEREMONY

Transcript

"Well, thank you very much to Falmouth University and to those individuals responsible for this award. Life as a full-time practising artist is often a solitary and sometimes an existential experience where there's disconnect from the company of others and indeed everyday reality. And so it's all the more of a privilege to receive this award and may I add it's also a privilege to be on this stage, which was shared by Mark E. Smith and The Fall two months earlier. And when I graduated in 1989 we didn't have hats and gowns, so I probably looked on photographs of my nephews and nieces with a little bit of envy, and now I can join them on the wall as well, which is a great pleasure.

In 1984 I left Belfast via the Liverpool boat to arrive in what I described as the glamorous exotic shores of England to study an art foundation at Manchester Polytechnic, which was then called Manchester Polytechnic. And then I was asked during that year where would I like to go in the country? And I rather cheekily said as far away from here as possible. And Dawn had said that there's this art college called Falmouth School of Arts, which was greatly revered, greatly recognised as a wonderful art college where staff carried surfboards underneath their arms. So I got on the bus, went on an eight hour journey to Falmouth having never known where Falmouth was and indeed had some idea that Cornwall was at the bottom of the UK. And I attend that interview and I didn't see tutors with surfboards under their arms but I fell in love with the place and the palm trees and slightly exotic aspect of the place.

Falmouth School of Arts, which it was then, was an institute of about 120 degree students and 80 foundation students which belonged to another annex. So it was very small and very, very special. And I had a great time there in which there was a culture of really getting on and doing your own thing, and tutors came to you and guided you and cultured you along your path. I left the day after my show came down, my degree show, and worked across southern England as a restorer and conservator of old buildings and sculpture. And I was haunted by the idea that I really needed to get on with it and do things in terms of being a sculptor. My mother had said why don't you go and visit F.E. McWilliam, a sculptor, still alive. He was one of Northern Ireland's most celebrated sculptors living in London. And in those days you could pick up a book at the library and find their address and write to them, which I did, and visited him. I met him and he liked the work and he gave me my first contact into the art world. And that's how it all started.

Falmouth today is of course a very different institution, much larger with a total student population of over 4,000, is that right? And I've needed to keep quite independent from it just to get on. But it was a great pleasure to come to a conference recently called Fascinate, which I spent a couple of days attending at The Performance Centre. And I was actually really proud

to be part of this and see what a great place it actually is - The Performance Centre is something special - and be surrounded by people that came from all over the world. So indeed it must be somewhere that is really on the map.

Now, this is to the graduates, and I've just put down some thoughts and reflections that certainly helped me along my career path, and if I may, could offer these to you. And you might find them of use, you may not, we all have our own path to travel I think. I met Seamus Heaney back in 2005; I'd made a portrait of him and had spent a wonderful afternoon with him and his wife drinking buckets of wine and so forth. And his father had said to him to make something of his life, and I think that's one of the important things, to find yourself and find out what it is you want to do, what you want to achieve in life and make something of it. That's the first thing. Secondly, I think it's important to know that talent alone does not rise to the top, but that this together with a lot of hard work and determination will help, including rubbing shoulders with those that can help you realise what it is you want to achieve. And I have to say that there's also an element of luck and good fortunate that plays its part. And I think that that's where belief in miracles and having a positive outlook on life is important.

The third thing I think is getting wired into the circuit of the path that you choose to follow. By that I mean that I think it's important to go to the centre and to meet the people that you need that could be of use to you, because without that things may not happen. Another thing I think is important is dare to go where the fear is and face your demons and face prejudice and presumptions that are made, and analyse these, take them apart and see what they are.

I've just taken a couple of things that I put on the wall from time-to-time to help me as I'm working. And these are sayings from certain people, one from Leech is one must feel chaos within to give birth to a dancing star. Fear eats the soul; beware the things you do to get by. And perhaps I would include and add to this that over the last 12 or 13 years I've noticed that the art world has evolved into an industry that's very much market driven. But I think that it's important to think in the box, to think out the box, and within that little formula is to throw a little bit of sex, drugs and rock and roll with a bit of dangerous thinking in there because you don't want it to be too serious and sober. Thank you very much."