UNESCO RILA: The sounds of integration

Episode 16: Artists on Conflict (30/08/2021)

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Gameli Tordzro
Welcome to the podcast series of the UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts. We bring you sounds to engage with you and invite you to think with us.

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Lauren Roberts
Welcome to the latest episode of the Sounds of the Spring School podcast series. I'm Lauren Roberts, one of the UNESCO Co-Ordinators. This episode contains a recording of Robert McNeil and Iain Campbell's session at the UNESCO RILA Spring School on the 28th of May 2021, entitled 'Artists on Conflict'. In this highly emotive session, Robert and Iain discussed how art is different from documentary. Both illustrate, report and record history, but can art take us beyond the facts? Listeners, please be advised that this episode contains discussions of war and genocide that you may find disturbing. We'd like to thank Rachel Burke for chairing the session. And now, over to Iain and Robert.

Iain Campbell
Hi, I'm Iain Campbell and I paint portraits. Our main focus was the paintings we created based on the genocide in Srebrenica in Bosnia, and we go in depth about our experiences there. This was my third Spring School that I've presented at and my second online. I love that as a consequence of having to work online, an event like this has been made accessible to people from all over the world. I was chatting to people from Canada, Iraq, and Australia from my studio in Govan. I've been a UNESCO RILA Affiliate Artist for a few years now. It's important for me to be involved in this work. Because of work that I've previously been involved with, I know that I can connect with an audience that's mostly white and Christian, and it helps open up a conversation with them about refugee integration. I'm part of a group exhibition at the Glasgow Gallery on Bath Street in Glasgow from the 28th of August until the 9th of October. I'll also be exhibiting at Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery late in October with a climate change project in advance of COP26. That project is a collaboration with Christian Aid, Islamic Relief and Tearfund, and it's the first time that they've all worked together so I'm quite excited about that.

Robert McNeil
My name is Robert McNeil, I'm a retired forensic technician, and between the years of 1996 and 2001 I was seconded to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia to travel out to the Balkans to examine victims from mass graves in order to gather evidence for the prosecutions of indicted war criminals. And after those five years of working, I retired and started to experience symptoms, quite minor symptoms, but nevertheless troubling, of PTSD. And I took up painting as, as a means of coping with that, and I began painting images from the bad dreams I was having and that seemed to work for me, and I've been doing that ever since. The work that I do now is, I act as an ambassador for the charity Remembering Srebrenica, and that gives me the opportunity to go into various venues such as schools and colleges etc. to talk about the history of the conflicts there. And when I found out about UNESCO RILA, I thought that that would be a wonderful opportunity to speak to people who, some of themselves have come from some pretty traumatic backgrounds, but also just to spread the word about the genocide that happened to the Muslim population in the Balkans, and so it's-- I'm extremely honoured to be part of UNESCO RILA for that reason, but also I've learned so much about other people's lives and other conflicts by listening to some of the presentations that have been given. If anyone wants to know any more about the work that I do, particularly the forensic work that I've done in the past and currently the work for Remembering Srebrenica, my website address is www.robertmcneil.co.uk.

[BIRDSONG]

Rachel Burke
Thank you very much for joining us for this wonderful session that Iain and Robert have titled 'Artists on Conflict'. My name is Rachel and I'm really honoured and privileged to be with you, for me this evening, for many of you today. I'm joining you from Awabakal land. So, I would like to pay my respects to the Pambalong Clan of the Awabakal people who are the traditional custodians of the land on which I'm currently living and working and joining you from this evening. It is my absolute privilege and honour to be chairing this session for these two remarkable artists, UNESCO RILA Affiliate Artists, Robert McNeil MBE, and Iain Campbell.

And if you're wanting to Google and find out more about Iain, he's often I.D. Campbell because he tells me there are many Iain Campbells out there. I was fortunate to meet Iain in 2019, which seems like a very, very long time ago now. Pre-COVID, I actually met him in person at one of the RILA UNESCO Spring School sessions. And I wasn't quite sure what to expect going into the session. And I found the experience remarkably moving and transformative in ways that I would not have foreseen. Iain's passion for sharing art as a way of memorialising and bringing to our attention the human experiences of these tragedies of war and conflict, and his commitment, I think, to foregrounding dignity and respect and hope within that artwork is truly, truly remarkable.

I'm likewise absolutely delighted to make the acquaintance, albeit digitally, of Robert McNeil MBE, who is a UK ambassador for Remembering Srebrenica, and who likewise shares his art with the world as a way of making sense of his many experiences and deployments around the world in all sorts of contexts of genocide, terrorism, of war and crimes against humanity. And again, Robert's commitment to sharing that artwork that offers the world unique insights into those events, but also the importance of telling those stories of those people who have been part of those experiences, just truly remarkable. Robert and Iain have a wonderful session arranged for you this evening, so I'm going to stop talking. I just want to let you know that they're going to be inviting at the end of the session, toward the latter stages of the session, be inviting you to share what has resonated with you about the artwork and the session itself. So please, if you would like to contribute your ideas to the chat, and we can kind of engage with these remarkable artists later in the session.

Iain Campbell
Well, thank you very much, Rachel. Good evening, Rachel, and good morning, everyone else. D'you know, I don't think I could have imagined the-- I suppose it's maybe the one minor benefit that we've had from the COVID era, that it means it's easy for people all around the world to get together in times like this. And I'm sure-- And I really hope that that's gonna inform the way that we all work in the future. It's been quite an eye-opener for me. I suppose it would be, it probably goes without saying, but it's probably worth saying that in this session, 'Artists on Conflict', that there could be things that Robert and I share that could be triggering for people. We're talking about war. I'll mention briefly some other artists who have touched on war. I don't think… There is one painting from another artist that I'll be sharing that's a little bit more gruesome. It's probably worth mentioning that, but we will be talking about war and the effects of war.

A couple of things that Robert and I would love to share with you before we get going properly. Kelvingrove Gallery in Glasgow, they have an exhibition starting in the community gallery. There is going to be an exhibition specifically about the Srebrenica genocide, Robert has been involved in putting that together. There will be a number of artifacts, particularly from one woman who came from Srebrenica, things from the Sarajevo Museum. There is a brand-new painting from Peter Howson who was the official war artist during the Bosnian conflict. Robert, is there anything else that you'd like to mention about that exhibition that's coming up?

Robert McNeil
No, I think you've covered it Iain. It's quite a small exhibition, and you mentioned the artefacts from the survivor from one of the concentration camps, who has kindly contributed some really very personal items and very poignant items that are quite moving, and the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, they also contributed some quite

important, very simple items that were very important during the siege of Sarajevo to be shown. So, that exhibition will be running throughout the summer, hopefully a bit longer if possible, and I would certainly recommend that if people can, go along and see it. And I'd like to mention also a project that I'm currently working on for Remembering Srebrenica UK, which is… Not many people know that forensic experts from around the world, from 32 countries, were involved in gathering the evidence against the perpetrators and I've reached out to as many people as-- And all of these people have worked in Bosnia, and I've made contact with a large number of them who have kindly agreed to contribute to a publication that will be available sometime in June perhaps, with the contributions of people, the experts, the experiences. And the point of this is to challenge genocide, because that as you know, not just in the Srebrenica genocide but in all genocides, is the, probably the most sinister of the ladder of prejudice that you've talked about, Iain.

Iain Campbell
Yeah. Oh, now, I've just remembered there the opening of the exhibition. Does that coincide with White Armband Day, Robert?

Robert McNeill
Yes exactly. I'll maybe talk a wee bit more about White Arm Band Day because I feature it in one of the paintings that I'm going to show, but again, that's a not very well-known aspect of the Bosnian War where people were forced to wear white armbands to identify their religion.

Iain Campbell
Robert and I are going to be sharing some of our artwork and some of the stories behind it, but I'm just, I'm going to throw in a few paintings from the 20th century, just to set a little bit of context. This is an etching by Käthe Kollwitz, and throughout the first half of the 20th century Kollwitz portrayed the effects of war rather than the war itself. This piece is entitled, very simply but very starkly, *Woman with Dead Child*… Actually, she's probably best known for her works during World War I and World War II, but this was much earlier, this was 1903 during the German Peasants' War, and the emotion that she pours out in her work, usually monochromatic… Kollwitz's work, she just pours out the emotion. You know, there's no ghastly bullet wounds, there's no shrieking and screaming, there's no bombing, you just see two people, there's nothing more eternal, there's nothing more raw, than a mother holding a dead child as one of the effects of war.

Picasso's *Guernica*-- I don't think I would have possibly heard of the town of Guernica if it hadn't been for Picasso's painting. This was during the Spanish Civil War. This very much showing a very raw side of war in Picasso's unique style. Really quite stark, but you know, he brought this to public consciousness, and again, like Kollwitz chose to work monochromatically. He felt that there was something more stark, more direct, more

immediate by being met by that. It's a huge piece. I've not had the chance to see that in real life yet, hopefully someday.

And I mentioned Peter Howson earlier. Howson was the official UK war artist for the Balkan War. This painting is called *Plum Grove*, which is a very simple and innocent title, but we see a corpse strung up in a tree and some children playing nearby with the innocence and curiosity that the children can only have. I was 19 when the genocide in Srebrenica happened and I think it was-- Which was in 1993, 1994, Howson was exhibiting his artworks. There was a whole load in the war museum down in London, the Imperial War Museum, but there's a Glasgow-based gallery, the Roger Billcliffe Gallery, who have always exhibited Howson's work and do to this to this day, and as an art student I went in and saw those works again and again and again, and profoundly was affected by those myself. When I was 19, I don't know how much attention I was paying to the news. I knew that there was this conflict going on in the Balkans. Yugoslavia, as it was then, was a place I had heard of, but it was a very confusing conflict, but Howson's art impacted me deeply. And I always thought, you know, if I ever had a chance to highlight conflict in the way that he has, then I would be very keen to be involved in that kind of work. Robert, why don't you share some of your paintings with us? Bella I think is going to put them up on screen for us.

Robert McNeil
Yeah. Well, just before I do that, Iain, I should maybe describe how I came to be involved in the genocide in Bosnia. And so-- And by the way, you talked about Peter Howson, who was a great influence on me, and he has very kindly lent a new painting, an unseen painting of his to the Kelvingrove exhibition, which is well worth seeing. So anyway, around late 1995, '96, I was nearing the end of a long career as a technician working alongside pathologists in Glasgow carrying out post-mortem examinations. And when I was invited by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia to travel to Bosnia to help gather evidence from over 8,000 victims who were allegedly executed and discovered in mass graves around the Srebrenica area. And over the next four or five years, I returned there to continue to work with the Srebrenica victims, but in addition to work with victims from other execution sites, such as the concentration camps in Omarska and Luka camps and many other sites, including in Kosovo. And the nature of the work didn't bother me, I thought I was used to it, but I was surprised to find that when I retired, I started to experience vivid dreams about my forensic work. And they were often very graphic, especially those depicting the atrocities that we uncovered almost daily, it was quite a challenge in those days to remain objective. And having also encountered columns of traumatised refugees in the roadside in the early days in Bosnia and certainly in Kosovo, I often wondered about what horrors they had endured and what became of them. And I suppose I'd locked away those images of these events in my mind, but they began to resurface, as I say, during the night and became a mild problem, if you like. And I'd read that some people who have had post-traumatic stress disorder have found it helpful to express

their feelings through the arts or speak about their experiences, and I'd always been interested in that. So, I took up painting as a hobby and I felt drawn towards painting some of the images that I was experiencing during the night. And the paintings were private, I didn't think anyone would be interested in them, no intention of making them public. However, a local gallery in Glasgow learned about them from my wife Kathy, and they persuaded me to hold my first exhibition entitled 'Witness'. And around the same time, I learned about the charity Remembering Srebrenica, and I offered to support it. And this presented me with opportunities to visit schools and other venues to educate people who knew very little about the genocide in Bosnia, as you alluded to, Iain. I also wanted to try to encourage people who'd experienced or were close to those who'd experienced conflict or were victims of hate crime to express themselves through whatever medium they felt comfortable with, if they felt able to do so. And out of respect for the victims and their family, instead of showing graphic photographs of violent death in my presentations, I prefer to use my paintings to help illustrate what happened there. And judging from the feedback I've had, I found this a more acceptable way of tackling such a sensitive subject.

So, as you say, I've included a few paintings from that conflict, which it should be known, people describe it as a civil war, it wasn't a civil war, it was a war of aggression against Muslims. But I think that the paintings themselves could be from any war, any war anywhere in the world. And so, Bella, if you could maybe pull up the first painting, thanks. This painting, we mentioned White Armband Day, Iain, and this is a painting about white armband. Very briefly, what happened was that the Serbs issued an instruction that all non-Serbs wear white armbands and hang white sheets from their windows to enable the Serbs to know that these people were non-Serbs and mainly Muslims. And so, these people were kicked out their homes, all their belongings were stolen from them. And in this painting, you might just be able to make out that the mother is pressing a photograph, smashed photograph against her child. And that indicates the fact that this was a once happy family, but the man was missing, the husband was missing. And in the background there, it looks a pretty innocuous building, and that in fact is the notorious Omarska concentration camp where hundreds of men and women were brutally treated and raped, and so that's what that painting is about. And as I say, as you mentioned, on Monday is the anniversary of White Armband Day, which took place in 1993, I believe, in the northern part of Bosnia.

This is a painting about refugees, I feel, and what happened to them after they were thrown out of their homes. Without their husbands, thousands of women and children were left to wander, to try and find a place of safety. Because Bosnia is a landlocked country, there was no-- A flight embargo, and people just couldn't get out. The UN created six so-called 'safe areas', but it just didn't prevent the carnage that continued there. And I wanted to depict just how difficult it was for people to find a place of safety. Some people were ethnically cleansed more than once and were just wandering around the country in areas where they weren't welcome. And incidentally, the wall in the background there is actually taken from

reality, I actually copied some of the graffiti that was on the wall there, and the two pictures painted on the wall. One is Ratko Mladić, the Bosnian Serb military commander who was responsible for the genocide in Srebrenica, along with on the right Radovan Karadžić, who was the political leader of the Republika Srpska who attacked and orchestrated the genocide there. And you can see some of the feelings there. “UN united nothing,” that was quite a common phrase because the UN didn't protect them. You might be able to make out some graffiti, for example, “My ass is like a local, it’s got the same smell,” that was actually written by a UN soldier, who were there to protect the Muslims and they didn’t do a very good job of that. And “Welcome to hell,” again is taken straight from an image that was on the wall there. And this painting-- And the other, I should say that the models for it were our daughter Ruth and our two grandchildren.

So, next one please Bella. This is a bit more disturbing in a way, if you like, and this is, this was taken from about July 11th, 1995, when the Serbs entered Srebrenica, which was a so-called ‘safe area’, and you’ll notice in that painting that there are very few men in it because the men were separated from their wives and mothers and taken away and killed. Most of the men tried to escape by running into the forest, but the Serbs were waiting for them and over 8,000 men and boys were murdered. And I’ve also included a little dog because ethnic cleansing just isn’t about throwing people out and destroying families. I mean, it was quite scary to see packs of thoroughbred dogs running around, starving dogs running around the streets there, because they were part of the ethnic cleansing programme. And many women were raped, and I’ve depicted-- And beaten, and I’ve depicted that in one of the scenes too, and I’ve seen this mainly in Kosovo as well, where in 1999 this was actually going on whilst we were involved in exhuming the bodies there.

And the last one, Bella, please. I wanted to just show a painting about some of the work that we were involved with, and this is a friend and colleague [coughs] excuse me, Alison Anderson, who also worked in Bosnia. And it’s basically a scene of a woman hanging out washing, but the victims’ bodies, some of whom had been in the ground for many years, were in such a terrible state that there was no possibility of relatives identifying them. And so we came up with the idea of once removing the clothes from the victims, we cleaned it, we examined it for signs of trauma, etc., and laid it out for the mothers and wives and so on to come and look at. Because what’s important to know is that the Serb commander promised the women that their men would join them after they had been separated. And the women believed, and wanted to believe, that their men were still alive. And so, we felt that if they were to look at the clothing and be able to recognise it, some of it, then they might begin to realize that their menfolk weren’t coming back. And this is full of symbolism, this painting, The slipper on the left is a Bosnian Muslim slipper. The jumper is a Dutch football jumper because the Dutch UN soldiers were supposed to protect the Srebrenica enclave. A pair of youth’s pants, a blindfold, many of the victims were blindfolded and had hands tied behind their back before they were executed. And finally, a child’s shoe, because

although people talk about the eight and a half thousand men and boys who were killed, many women and children were too. In fact, the eldest victim was a woman of 92, I think, and the youngest victim was a baby who was born on July the 11th and was murdered on that same day. And that's me, Iain, I'll hand back to you. Thank you very much, Bella.

Iain Campbell
Thank you so much, Robert. There's, oh, there's the weight of what is now history in there, it's quite astonishing. The-- It really only, it was really only when I, I travelled to Srebrenica in 2019 that some of the information that you're sharing with us there really started to sink in. The story of the few days of the Srebrenica genocide and what happened afterwards is so complicated. With the four paintings that I have to share with you… The four paintings that I have there, I paint portraits, and I've painted four different people that I met when I visited Srebrenica and I've tried to put these in sequence to, to, in a-- My aim with these paintings was to try to help people who had no understanding of what happened in Srebrenica, to give them a very quick snapshot of what happened. This lady is Kadefa Rizvanović. She is part of the Mothers of Srebrenica Association, who are a group of women still campaigning for justice to be done and truth to be told about the Srebrenica genocide, which was the worst massacre in Europe since the Holocaust. Kadifa fled to Srebrenica in 1992 when the Bosnian war started, two days after giving birth. She had begged her husband to leave her behind as she could hardly walk. He said, "I will carry you, but I will not leave you," and they walked together for 22 days through the forest. Srebrenica had been designated a 'safe area' by the UN in 1993. The area used to have less than 10,000 residents; it was a spa town. For those of you who live in Scotland, if you think of Crieff and Crieff Hydro, that's the kind of place that Srebrenica was. By then, it was under siege, and it was packed with six times the people that they would normally have had, mostly Muslim refugees. The 11th of July 1995, Bosnian Serb forces attacked the town. And the UN troops who were there to protect the town failed to stop the assault. They were absolutely overwhelmed. Thousands of men and boys who didn't expect that the UN would be able to protect them, tried to walk through the hills to reach a free territory, most of them unarmed, and Kadifa's husband was among the men who tried to flee, and they didn't see him ever again. The men and boys who stayed were all killed. The Serb army slaughtered more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys. Between 20,000 and 50,000 women were raped during the war. At the age of 27, Kadifa became a widow. It was only 18 years later that her husband's body was found and laid to rest at the Srebrenica Memorial Centre. I was quite astonished when I met the Mothers of Srebrenica, they've never sought revenge and they've never acted with hatred, because they say that hatred's a sign of weakness and they refuse to give into that, they're just looking for justice and truth.

Someone else I met on that trip, Hasan Hasanović. Hasan is three days older than me. He was also 19 when this all happened. When the Bosnian army attacked Srebrenica, Hasan and his twin brother Husein were there, they set off with their father and their uncle amongst between 10 and 15,000 men and boys. They set off in a column through the hills and the

forest to the free territory of Tuzla 63 miles away, people called this the ‘death march’. As they assembled, there was gunfire from the surrounding hills which were controlled by the Serb military. Hasan told us, “They didn’t care that we were unarmed. Their primary concern was that we were Muslim, and they wanted us dead.” Hundreds of men at the back of this column of people were all killed as they ran into the woods. And Hasan soon realized that his twin brother Husein, his father, and their uncle were all missing. After that, they walked for six nights and five days through continual heavy gunfire, and thousands of men were shot dead. Hasan survived only with a small amount of sugar and water that he had. And when they arrived in, in Tuzla, his feet were a mass of bloody blisters. Of those 10 to 15,000 men that started on the death march, only 3,000 survived. It was 2005 when Hasan was able to bury his brother. Hasan actually works at the Memorial Centre now, which is where I met him. He returned to Srebrenica in 2009 to work there as a curator and translator, and he shares his story with everyone who comes along.

Now, this lady here is Dr Dragana Vucetic. She works currently as a Senior Forensic Pathologist for the International Commission on Missing Persons, who Robert worked closely with. They have helped identify almost 90% of those 8,000 men and boys whose bodies were missing because of the Srebrenica genocide. Bodies were piled up in mass graves as Robert said earlier. Often those mass graves were dug up and then buried elsewhere to hide the evidence. Dragana told us that the remains of one man were found in four different sites 50 kilometres apart. The ICMP, they operate what is the world’s largest DNA human identification facility. And since they were established in 1996, they’ve taken more than 70,000 blood samples from relatives of the people who were missing, people have called it the world’s greatest forensic puzzle. Now, one of the really interesting things meeting Dragana was that she’s Serbian, and she’s too young to remember much about the war years. She told me at first that the work really affected her greatly. She was straight out of university when she went into this work, but her work has helped families lay their loved ones to rest, and it’s used as evidence in war crime trials as well.

Let me introduce you to one last person. This is Almasa Salihović. She was just a little girl when the war started, and she took me to the graves of her brother, her father, and uncle. Almasa was our translator when we were there for the trip with Remembering Srebrenica. You can see on the graves there, written is the name of her brother Abdulah, you can see that in the bottom right-hand corner. Abdulah was 18. He and Almasa's older sister, they were separated from the rest of the family. Everyone tried to rush to safety at the UN base. Those two ended up penned inside what was an old battery factory. They were all-- There was thousands inside, about 5000 inside, and no more people could fit in, and the UN soldiers shut the gate. There was this meadow where the graveyard is now and about 20,000 others had to stay there. Almasa and her mum and other siblings stayed there for two whole days in the open air. And on the third day buses finally came to evacuate them to the refugee camps at Tuzla. Her younger brother was with them, and their mum managed to

hide him on the bus under a pile of bags and clothes, they knew that the Bosnian Serb soldiers would take all the boys away, and he lay on-- He lay there just covered with clothes and bags. When Almasa's sister, other sister, and Abdulah, her 18-year-old brother, tried to get on another bus later, he was spotted by a soldier and taken off. He was told that, "Oh, you'll be reunited with your family later, you'll be on a different bus," and they never saw him again. In 2008, 30% of Abdulah's body was buried, and that was all that was found. Almasa's mother has one most treasured possession, which is a set of prayer beads which Abdulah made himself. There aren't even any photographs of Abdulah, there's only a grainy video of Abdulah reading the Qur'an at the mosque the year before he was, he was killed.

All the paintings that Robert and I shared with you there, they're all on two sheets in the welcome pack, so please do feel free to look over those. And, you know, they're worth reflecting upon. It really takes me back, just sharing all that with you. November 2019, I'd got to go there, and in time for the 25th anniversary of the genocide last year I'd completed those paintings. Robert.

Robert McNeil
Yeah.

Iain Campbell
I was just thinking there, the work that you did for a long time in Srebrenica, you had a lot of chance to reflect on the root causes of hate, where hate comes from and where it ultimately leads to. Now, there's a model of the stages of hate leading to genocide that you've used in education with different groups, isn't there?

Robert McNeil
Yes, that's the-- It's called the ladder of prejudice and it's… It's five stages, I think, leading up to genocide. Beginning with speech, I target usually schoolchildren about the effects of bullying and what it can lead to, and so on, and so speech is one of those that comes into that category. And the next rung of the ladder is avoidance, where people are shunned by their friends and other so-called friends and classmates, etc. That can lead on to discrimination where, where there's support for people to be excluded from, from workplaces, from employment etc., and that can then lead on to physical attack that's permitted by the authorities, and that then can lead to genocide. The one rung that's missing is denial, and just to go back slightly to your session there Iain, we've talked a lot about Srebrenica, but Srebrenica is now a Serb-controlled town. And despite the fact that that beautiful memorial centre and cemetery is on the outskirts of the town, the Mayor of Srebrenica, who's a Serb, denies that there are any victims, any Muslim bodies in those graves. He makes all kinds of other excuses to say that there was no genocide whatsoever.

And one other, just, fact regarding the bodies, and in particular the influence that the

Mothers of Srebrenica had on the process of identification. I think it's important to know that the ICTY, the International Criminal Tribunal needed the evidence, and so that was funded by the UN. Identification of the victims' bodies wasn't really on their agenda; it was far too expensive. However, the Mothers of Srebrenica, who were still waiting on answers to what happened to their men, they formed this pressure group and, to cut a long story short, embarrassed governments in the West to try and identify the bodies. And you see the bodies were, the bodies from the primary graves were exhumed and buried in other places, but those bodies were torn apart using mechanical diggers and dispersed around, throughout Bosnia, and instead of eight and a half thousand men and boys that turned out to be over 17,000 body parts that the experts had to try and put together and ultimately identify, and that work is still going on today. And there are mass graves that still haven't been discovered, and as you rightly point out, Iain, families who still have only had part of their loved one's bodies returned to them. And it's a terrible dilemma for the mothers to decide whether or not their loved ones who may-- Could be buried, even although the rest of the body hasn't yet been found. And it's just so cruel for them to be told after they've been buried that they've discovered an arm or a leg or another body part belonging to them. And so, it has to be… Well, I feel very strongly and passionately about the suffering that particularly the women had to endure during those times and even to this day. So, I just want to mention that.

And… But yeah, hate crime is insidious. And I think it's worth pointing out that some people aren't sure what's the difference between hate crime and any other crime. And, you know, hate crime is when it's not a crime against an individual, it's a crime against a group. And that's what makes it so insidious when it comes to, when it leads up to the other rungs on the ladder of genocide that I was talking about there. Iain?

Robert McNeil
Yeah, do you know, I found that it's… Some people think, will think, "Gosh, that's a terrible situation that happened over there, but it's nothing to do with us." I was really struck before I went over to Bosnia in 2019-- I live in Govan in Glasgow, and it was November 2019 I went over, but in August 2019, there was a sectarian riot in Govan. One group were trying to have a march, and then another faction decided to oppose them. And it was the first time I'd ever seen with any of these parades that the riot police had to be called out with the great big see-through shields and all that kind of stuff, wheelie bins on fire in the middle of the road. And anyone who's seen what's happened in Glasgow over the past few months, because so-called football fans decided to celebrate the win of their football team, it becomes a little bit clearer how one group's hatred for another can very quickly become violent. And if there's one thing I'd be keen to impress upon people, it's how easily this happens in a place. If it can happen somewhere like Srebrenica, it can happen anywhere.

Robert McNeil

Can I just say, and that's a very good point to raise about football in particular, Iain, because I too live in Glasgow and was brought up under a really quite sectarian and quite horrible atmosphere of hatred from Protestants, Catholics and so on. One important factor that you've alluded to regarding football is that one of the major tools of stirring up hatred in the Balkans was football. One of the most infamous warlords, a man called Arkan, he was president of Belgrade Red Star football team, football club, and whenever they were playing a team from Zagreb or Sarajevo and so on, he would incite his players to kick the hell out of the other, the opposing side, in order to generate anger amongst the two sides. Now, you can see-- That doesn't happen in that sense, the management of either Rangers or Celtic, but it's the power of those messages getting through that it's okay to smash the head of the opposing fan just because of their religion, and that was a very, very powerful tool that was used as well as media discrimination that was going on at that time, so you're quite right. I mean, we saw scenes in Glasgow just a couple of weeks ago when Rangers won the League, masses, thousands of people overran the centre of the city, and some of the scenes that were reported from that were quite disturbing really, and that had the hairs on the back of my neck were raised because of it.

Rachel Burke
We've had some fantastic comments. We've had one earlier commenting on that term 'ethnic cleansing', and talking about how strange that is in this context, this notion of 'cleansing' and just the bizarreness around that and those events that you've described and communicated through your artwork. Did you want to speak to that?

Robert McNeill
Yeah, well, ethnic cleansing, you're right, it's a strange term, and funnily enough I mentioned the warlord Arkan, it was he who first described that term 'ethnic cleansing'. During the war he was responsible, for example, of releasing hardened prisoners from jails in the area to form paramilitary teams who were people, some of them with severe psychiatric problems, who committed some of the cruellest crimes, I mean, you saw in the Howson painting the image of the man being tortured and so on. And we came across injuries that I can't even speak about; they were just so bestial. But ethnic cleansing as a term is a strange one, but it's so common now that people use it. It's almost something like sanitising a group of people, and it should be said that the reasons behind what happened in Bosnia wasn't really about hatred of Muslims, they were just a tool for those who were power-mad to take over a country that was predominantly Muslim, and they used discrimination as a means of churning up that hatred that Iain and I have alluded to, and so the Muslims were just the victims in all of this. Although I have to say that there were crimes committed by all sides, and I worked with Serbian victims, Kosovans, and Croatians, and so that that shouldn't be forgotten, but… So anyway, I think that the ethnic cleansing was a strange term to use, and people in the West at first didn't quite understand how sinister a term that was.

Rachel Burke
Thank you so much for sharing the stories and the insights, and how moved people are. We also had Alison talking about how incredibly moving… And she was really struck with the journey through this work, and the way that perhaps it has changed you through kind of, these enduring relationships and also the kind of body memory too of your experiences that's expressed in this work.

Robert McNeil
Well certainly the work, I didn't realize it as I said, at the time, but it did have a profound effect, it changed my life really, doing that sort of work because it was just relentless. I mean, I had worked with death, before I retired, for 40 years, and I thought I'd seen everything. And I know… It's interesting, I mentioned post-traumatic stress disorder, but I've worked with a large number of people who have experienced, who you wouldn't think of, experienced post-traumatic stress, and that includes people like interpreters who have to relate those stories. I mean, in Kosovo for example, the interpreter we had was a young woman of 19 years old who daily had to tell us the most horrendous stories, and I spoke to a woman in another event that I was involved with who interpreted for the Nazi war crimes in Nuremberg, and she too told me that all of the interpreters suffered to some extent. And one quick other anecdote, when I go into prisons and talk to prisoners about my experience, I found it really interesting that on my first visit to Scotland's really toughest jail, a few of the prison officers approached me and said that they would like to come in and listen to my talk because they had served in the British Army in Kosovo or Bosnia, and they were telling me about some of the experiences they had that were really quite traumatic, but after I gave the talk to the prisoners, many of them on every occasion-- I've done this about 10 times now, and after every talk I'll get prisoners coming up to me, approaching me and saying that they too were British soldiers and had served in warzones. And I found it really quite interesting that you've got those two groups, the prisoners and their guards, who had come from very similar backgrounds but just took different roads, and I'm sure that their experiences of what they saw had affected them, and will affect them for the rest of their lives.

Iain Campbell
Yeah, Almasa who was our interpreter and the lady in the fourth painting that I shared, she had been an interpreter for quite some time and working with groups coming over with Remembering Srebrenica, but it was… She's in her 30s, it was the first time she had shared with a group about her experiences. She'd never talked about it, sharing with a large group before. Very difficult, takes an awful lot of time for these things to come through.

Rachel Burke
We're running out of time. Ji has asked the impact of all of the local artists that are responding to different conflicts in different areas – for example, the revolution in Egypt since 2011 – whether these new artists, artists in Turkey, etc., impact your work and

whether that shapes your kind of consciousness about the work that you produce?

Robert McNeil
I've looked at, in the past, art, war art if you want to call it that. It took me a while though to come across art that was anti-war art if you like. I mean, I was conscious growing up of these fabulous paintings, glorifying wars, you know, from the past, and although I admired their techniques and so on, the subjects disturbed me and it wasn't until artists, you know, Iain mentioned Picasso and Howson, but I look at artists like Paul Nash and John Singer Sargent from-- Artists, war artists from the, mainly from the First World War and those paintings, including new works, new artists, are extremely profound and moving and, you know, what I do as an outsider, if you like, doesn't even touch what, I don't think, what those people who have experienced it themselves, lost loved ones and friends and so on and then express themselves so in art, and that's why I try to encourage people to-- You don't have to be particularly knowledgeable about how to draw or paint and it doesn't have to be in art, it can be in music or writing or poetry, whatever, but I never push it because there are some people who will never want to talk about their experiences. I mentioned, or Iain mentioned the exhibition in Kelvingrove where the victim, or the survivor of the concentration camp, is a very brave woman who talks openly about her experiences, and both she and her husband who were engaged at the time, they were taken to Omarska Camp, they suffered unspeakable injuries to them both, and her husband to this day will not talk about it at all. And I think having worked with some of those victims who were murdered, I can understand why it'd be so difficult for them to do so.

Iain Campbell
Just thinking about artists who are from the countries where these atrocities have happened, I've been very glad to be able to find artists online. It's astonishing the number of people that pop up on Instagram now. Between 1998 and 1999 I lived in Bogotá in Colombia, South America, and there had been a long, for a long time a civil war going on there and there was a lot of people who 'disappeared', was the phrase that was used. And one artist, whose name I can't remember just now, did the most phenomenal artwork, painting on hot paving slabs just with water, portraits of people. And of course, in real time, they vanished before she even finished painting these faces. You would see this dark image just evaporating, which was one of the most profound things I've seen.

[BIRDSONG]

[JINGLE]

Lauren Roberts
Thank you for joining us on this latest episode of the Sounds of the Spring School podcast. You can find details of Robert and Iain's work in the show notes, links to their websites are

available there. The next podcast episode will be out on Monday the 13th of September.

[JINGLE]