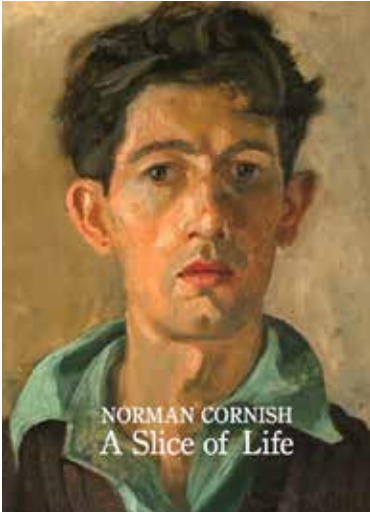


NORMAN CORNISH

A SLICE OF LIFE



Norman Cornish (1919 – 2014), was 70 when he was persuaded by his family and friends, to write his autobiography. He called it 'A Slice of Life' and indeed it was just that although one could say that it was a little premature given that a further two decades of remarkable activity were to follow its publication.

Apprenticed at the age of 14, at the Dean and Chapter Colliery, also known as the Butcher's Shop, he spent the next 33 years working mostly underground at various pits in the region. At approximately the same time that he made his first decent into the pit he discovered the Spennymoor Sketching Club, which he thought was "wonderful". There, he met Bill Farrell, Warden of the Spennymoor Settlement, who advised him to paint the life he knew, which he did compulsively thereafter.

In the prologue to 'A Slice of Life', he describes the Dean and Chapter Colliery as "lying at the foot of a huge pit-heap which reminds one of a volcano, not only because of how it looks but also because its contents have been spewed out of the depths in similar fashion." Imaginative and poetic perceptions are present throughout his paintings and drawings, which might reasonably claim to be his autobiography, but this book is invaluable as a reminder of Cornish's protean struggle to become an artist.

Reflecting on his life and work he wrote, "This special world of mine is constantly changing and many of the people who inhabited it are no longer with us. Many of the places that once helped to make up that world have also passed into time. I think of the houses I once lived in, that I grew up in, that my early married life was spent in and that my children were born in, but they're all gone... The local collieries have gone too, together with the pit-road. Many of the old streets, chapels and pubs are no more. Many of the ordinary but fascinating people who frequented these places are gone. However, in my memory and I hope in my drawings, they live on. I close my eyes and they all spring to life."

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