

PAINTINGS AND POEMS

BART O'REILLY

MY FATHER'S WORK SHED



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Paintings and Poems by Bart O'Reilly

Dedicated to my wife Meaghan, sons Eoin and Ronan, my sisters Valerie and Elaine, and my aunts Marie and Margaret. In loving memory of my father Patrick O'Reilly, my mother Phyllis and my Uncle Barry.

Mountain Man - a letter from home

“Hold to the now, the here, through which all future plunges to the past.”

James Joyce

Bart O'Reilly comes from the 'Dublin mountains'. This is a range of ancient hills that stretches southwards from Ireland's capital, crafting the low clouds and softening the weather for its citizens. Dublin was built from the wheaten granite quarried and carried down from these hills. For centuries the border divided the colonists and the natives, and was known as, The Pale. Beyond it was a place of quarries and hideouts, of hillbillies, outlaws and hermits. Military roads were built to quell the last of the Irish rebels up there, and every milestone has a haunted house or a spooky tale of roadside banshees and headless corpses. At the dead of night, bodies are still being buried in the peat bogs that stretch southwards over 40 miles. This elevated position over the old sea level port city gives a vantage point across the capital, a scopic-world which changes from hazy grey working days, to a glowing sodium orange world at night. It's a good place to keep an eye on things, to watch Dublin's suburbs creep outwards slowly over the decades, a blink of an eye compared to the geological time in the mountains.

If you are from these hills, you have two choices, you can stay, enjoy the view, hunker down maybe get a truck and a trade, but those hill roads will burn out any clutch and the rain will find its way into every mechanical thing, so you will need a shed to fix and mend things, to store spare parts, old tools, half-empty tins, the essentials of a self-sufficient life. Or, you can leave, but this landscape makes its mark, and before long you will be looking for some high ground, some perch or eerie, in some foreign place, to make your work and your home.

As a fellow mountain man and artist, this is how I understand Bart's works, the familiarity and proximity of the clouds, the vistas, the dual worlds of earth and air. *A Northern Song Dynasty* painter in the Shan Shui tradition working in Baltimore. With liquid pigment on surfaces and words on paper, Bart makes elemental works that explore the *noumena* of two places, the past and the present, two sides of an ocean.

Mark Joyce

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More helpful than she probably realises, Elena Volkova took the head shot for the back of the book, she also urged me to have someone write an introduction. I asked Mark Joyce, who agreed and put my practice in context; a fellow mountain man, I couldn’t be happier with what he wrote. I would be remiss if I didn’t thank Caoimhín Mac Giolla Leith whose advice on pacing and tone led me to include 15 poems that I had been holding off on. To use his words, “*they act as répoussoirs anchored in the everyday in contrast to the elegiac tone of the rest of the book*”. Rebecca Rivas Rogers had the arduous task of giving my typos their first proof read and Richard Mullins was invaluable in this regard also. Finally, this book simply would not exist without my dear friend Fred Murray, he designed the entire project and has been there through out my life, encouraging and supporting the work I do.

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Only on Tuesdays
(The Piano Says Love)
Acrylic on Canvas Collage, 60"x72"
2016

My Father's Work Shed

Shelves, dust and cobwebs
On old magazines
Flowers sprouting patterns
Opaque, yellow screens
Paint hardened brushes caked in shellac
These are the memories of my father's work shed.

A place of curiosity for a young child
Familiar, yet completely unknown
I would go there alone
Climbing wide wooden rafters
Searching that place
Angle grinders and sanders
The tools of his trade.

Never clean or bright
With the strong citrus smell of Fast Orange
For removing stubborn oil stains from his hands
Or gelatinous green Swarfeega smelling as toxic as the filth
it took off.

Working hard on his dreams
Lorries, rally cars and anything with wheels.

Up the back an old Deutz digger that never starts
We beg him everyday, start the Deutz! start the Deutz! To
no end. Until a thunderous rumble, like the wall falling
down in the back yard announces its engine running and
we race up and ride with him.
The simple pleasures of young children
Immune from the toils of his world
We dig only for fun.



My Lost Summer Bird
Acrylic on Canvas, 24"x24"
2016

In the rally car
Aged two
Frightened by the sound
Or a roaring Mini Cooper engine
He torments me
I scream
Don't rev though!
Don't rev!
But he does.

Home from work frustrated
I embrace him
He shakes me from his leg
Too busy, too anxious for childish things
I consol myself by laughing at the STP sticker on the lid
of the dustbin Mr. Bellyman I call it, pealed and covered
in sticky foodwaste
Uncovering layer on top of layer
Replaced every year with the same label.

As a child his passion for work an obsession
To understand obsession
You have to get your own
And then labour at it
Every day
Forgetting everything else that matters in life
Even the people who love you.

But who am I to say?
To distinguish
What should matter to a man I love regardless
I have my obsessions
What will my children write about me?



Through Tears I see the Most Important Mountain in My Memory
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 30"x24"
2016

By the Door

It's by the door
Rejected
Back and forth
I found it
A light
An old bucket
A painted brick.

Moving around
Now the light by the door is dim and insufficient
A blackboard
Well
Partly
Painted
A test
Rolled on
To clean
To see
Then forgotten.

I would rather look at this than that
The new arrangement
Seems better
Hang on to it for now
It fits
Stops and starts

Fits.



The Troubled City Glimmers
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 34"x34"
2016

Sounds
The quiet hiss of brakes
Breaks.

Empty out
Shift
It suits
Sift
The orange map
It's gone
A good time to stop.



Drops on My Window, I've Been Walking This Crooked Path Too Long
Acrylic on Canvas, 24"x30"
2016

My Mother's Decorations

My mother's decorations
Of use to me now
Couches, rugs
Patterned, floral and cream
Reminding of cushion-shaped candies
and suites
The streets of her youth
From Camden to Green.

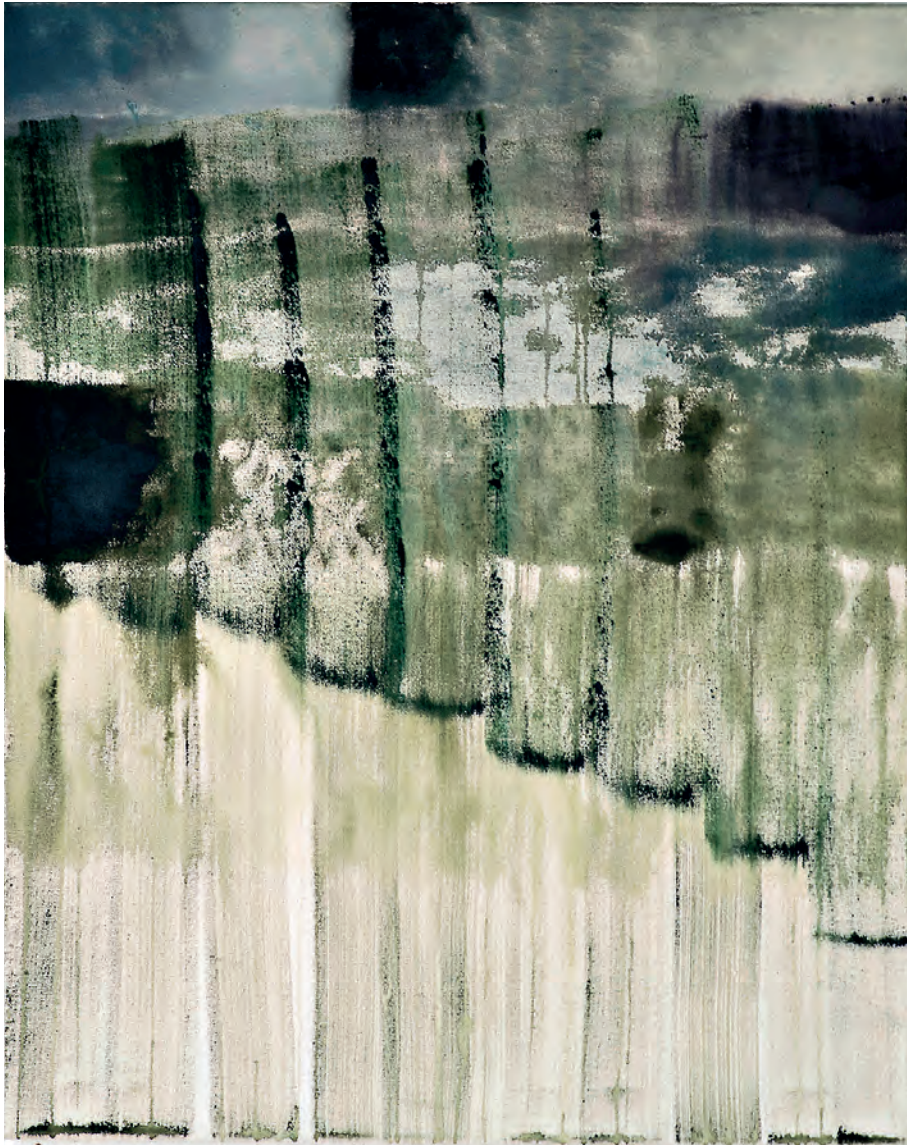
Afraid of the city I stayed close behind
The dirt of the footpaths
The soles of my shoes.

Ah yes
Once the subject of youthful disdain
Pretty lozenges, leaves
Naphthol red, blueish green
Decorated the room
While I drank in the rain.

Beaten down mountains
Bonk, Nugget and Rush
Amber cigarette glows
Cupped, still and hush

Now sit on that couch middle-aged
And reflect
Comfort was earned
Patterns pilfered
Arabesque.

You see, sewn in the weave of these curtains fine cloth
Memories meaning is made
In the things she left behind.



Tigh an Chnoic
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 30"x24"
2016

Acting

I can't tell if they are acting
Now they are acting
Maybe?

A hole in the wall
There's plenty of them.

The Rustic
The window
A piece of cloth
To cover the white paint
They are still acting.

I think.

Open the window to hear better
Yellow car down there.

Yellow car.



All This Time and Formless
Oil on Traditionally Gessoed Panel, 24"x24"
2020

Phyllis' Kitchen

Phyllis' kitchen
With pale yellow presses
Caked with the grease
Of a thousand mid-morning fries
For old Mr. Cotter,
With a Cork accent thicker
Than the swathes of Kerrygold
She spread over white Brennans bread
To mop up his egg
Drippy, how he liked it
As he came in from mixing
The cement
Of my father's ambitions.

Me climbing the worktops
In search of the treats
An old digestive biscuit
Or on a good day
A chocolate Hob Nob
Memories of brown and orange 70s tiles
Mixed with ceramic
In the 1980s
I doused them
With water
To imitate
Michael's moonwalking.

Then tired she sat rocking
Staring at nothing
With a steaming cup of Barry's
And 98fm
Or something like that.



Shattered on Edges
(Mist done surprising)
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 6.5"x5.5"
2021

Sundials

Sundials
Garden pathways
Shadows under trees
Deepening green coniferous
Needles prickling my knees.

Mythry recalled
Lichen stones where mosses crawled
Encroaching viridescent cage around dad's
truck yard wall.

A monkey puzzle tree
Grabbed for curiosity
Went at and scratched
their heads more
Made-up lemurs
as it me?

I foraged underneath
Musty pines, forgotten rhymes
Then in for China tea
Were the leaves from there
Or porcelain?
So delicate and delft
Camellia scents, East Orient
In cups,
Of Antwerp's theft
Our European wealth
Taken spoil
From conquered soils
Sit on aunty's shelf.



Autumn's Big Fall
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 11"x10"
2022

Wide angle shots of youth
Senses undulated
Recalled house
on Blackglen Road
Fact, fiction, complicated.

Swarm misinformation
They watch Fox News at 2am
For laughs and conversation
Report divided nation
Whether here or there
We have a flare
For hyperbolic statement.

Deep state down
Not underground
It's written on their faces
As they rile us up for ratings.

Those were times
In concealed fields
Fiery gorse and elevated
Now I'm here
Realising love
Is best given
Than when taken.



Her Lifetime, My Eternity
Oil on Canvas, 48"x48"
2020

A Poem From Scotland

Blinded by day break
Trees, limbs and all
Break up the skyline
Gulls rise and fall.

Swans sleepy backwards
By the edge of the loch
Eyes barley open
At 7 o'clock.

Erin go bragh
Wild swans at school
This one's not moving
In green shade so cool.

Iron Bru rambles
On wet gravel shores
In search of the day's lift
It's found
Opens doors.

Leafy through little
A thought for the day
Thumbing the pages
It's better this way.

Torn cover jackets
From multiple use
Each day a new one
Curved shores, shiny blue.



To Sear the Softly Squalling
Oil on Traditionally Gessoed Panel, 16"x18"
2020

Over the Sandy Fjord
He watches the news
Down, oily pits with wrenches
He paid all his dues.

My blazer was backwards
When the juice was let loose
I could be stumbling my way round
About this wee hoose.

Instead by the Lomond
I make a small loop
Before waking him for dinner
And helping with shoes.



Autumn Mountain Fires
Acrylic on Canvas, Sewn on Linen, 12" x 12"
2016

Dublin
(For my uncle, friend and mentor Barry Grace)

Dublin, your mauve blankets
Ever-changing grey
Brace against a clear dusk skyline
Sliver crescent, undistinguished streetlights
Houses cut from a rougher cloth.

Patterns painted
Sadness-tinged memories
From Grand Canal
To Wicklow's edge
A cold wind's blowin'
Our summer out of town.

This one's for you
The cobble streets
Winding narrow wayward stairs
The smell of hops
And autumn mountain fires
The whole lot
Take it and stay here
'til I get back.

Keep them close as songs
And your stories that made my heart.



These Colors Run it's what Makes Them Strong
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 30"x22"
2017

Some Things Go

Some things go
Let them.

Keep that one
Because it was there.

Almost gone
It's easier to keep.

Bent
Spared
Hum; Buzz
Hers
Thank you.



Brehon's Chair
Acrylic on Canvas Collage, 60"x68"
2016

Brehon's Chair

Alighting the Sugarloaf
Bells at noon made us laugh
There's more before Six One
Our Catholic past.

A tizzy of daydreams
And how would Cezanne
Render that mountain?
Maroon grey and calm.

A clear line of sight
From here to the cromlech
Once ancient druids
Mystic high sect.

Dublin encroaching
Blocks magical views
Planning permission
Vistas will loose.

Once in the valley
Icebergs molass
Scalped poor Enniskerry
The glacial past.

It's a matter of stones
And where they are placed
From Samhain to Soul's Eve
Our old pagan ways.

Erratics and dolmens
Please let them be
Scattered on mountains
For young ones to see.

Here's to the judgement
A tomb once there was
And me picking mushrooms
Beside Brehon's Chair.



Perhaps I Can
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 10"x8"
2022

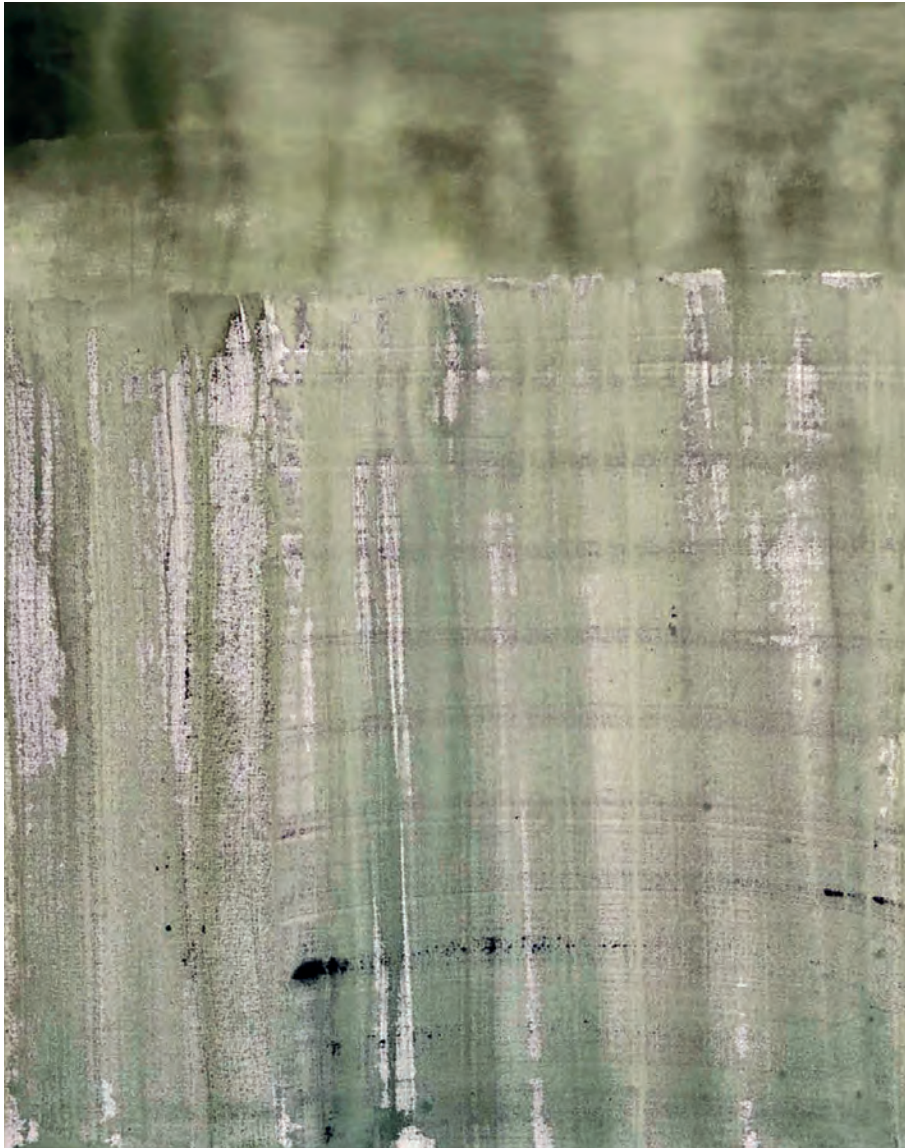
My Grandfather's House

Then came a dream of my grandfather's house
With its dark brown tobacco-stained textured wallpapered walls
Witness to countless family memories
Good and some bad
And how he'd play piano until his fingers could no longer
Stiff with old age
And then sat in his chair
Packing his pipe with pungent leaves from a tartan pouch
In between smoking stinking John Player Blue
Watching the BBC News.

Visits at lunchtime
Australian soaps and how granny couldn't even boil an egg
A house with some sadness
Memories past
He's no longer there to visit and neither is she
But the old house holds their essence as it sits on Nutgrove Avenue
Watching the cars go by.

The dream went on
I drove home in snow although it was summertime
The enjoyable nonsense of nighttime imaginings
Drunk off the road
Can't tell grass from concrete or dirt from asphalt
I drive off the road
Prompting old memories
Of what I did then.

But back to that wall
A big part of the dream
Not quite a vision
Although I imagined wall paper
Pealed to reveal blue mould on plaster
The layers of consciousness
Embedded in stone and sticky, gummy wallpaper paste
They saw my mother as a child and her mother too



Rolling Over Green
Acrylic on Canvas, 30"x24"
2016

And how she left her so soon.
Leaving her to fend
In that small house
In Churchtown
Where they grew up.

Across the Hall

Across the hall
A child's bedroom wall
Glowed like pale winter's sun
A bright lemon yellow.

As profound an afterthought
Snatched from the isles
As Turner's soft plains
While his dogs walked on water.

Torn from a notebook
Sandpapered scrawls
Kitchen ephemera
On teenagers walls.

Summer storm lashes
A hole in the roof
Not this day's theme
Calm and serene.

Stared at for years
But now like an answer
Calling quietly
To all of these things.



In the Things She Left Behind
Oil on Panel, 48"x32"
2021

Under Clocks

What's found in things we whisper?
Under clocks to say goodbye by
Advancing time goes backwards
Dissolving sense of place.

A short and gentle handshake
Confirms tonight's farewell
We're writing over distance
Our last? I cannot tell.

I say it and you hear it
A patterned rug cushions my feat
She's threadbare in its innards
Silently beneath.

I have book of love for you
But I cannot find the line
To tell you what you mean to me
Perhaps I've shown you that, this time.



Tibradden
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 30"x24"
2016

Stillness

Silence forgets
It moves west
And takes with it
People
Trains
They move west.

Yes.

That wall's west
The other one might be too
A place on a place
Interchangeable
You hardly notice
What do we get?

Stillness.

I would like to be here when the sun comes up
Now I'm in the way
Something approaching
Bass pumps
Moving closer
It's silenced
Not for long
Gone west
Taking the people that way
What do we get?

Stillness.



My Homesickness Forgets the Weather
Oil on Canvas, 70"x52"
2020

Lucky

And how do we feel?
Lucky, I guess. Lucky to live here in this time or just to live at all
But more than to live
To have
To hold.
To watch children grow and somehow hope their world will be
something worthwhile despite it all
Not because of us, but because of them
My first unselfish thought happened when my first son was born
They have happened with frequency ever since
What are we building that they may one day need to tear down?
What are we teaching them that they will one day have to unlearn?
That is not for us to know
So, teach them what we can
Falter for sure, but give them what we know
Some of it will matter, even things we don't think
We will form a well of memories to carry them through
Loving
Loosing
And if they are lucky
Loving again.

Soy Son
(For Eoin)

Let's not talk
Ok
How are my?
Look how far we went
Beautiful
I found some treasure for us
Nice.

This is cool that we are walking this
This is cool that we are walking this far, isn't it?
Right
We are scarecrows that can walk
Cos we're in a field
We are at the top of the hill
We can't even see the house
I know.

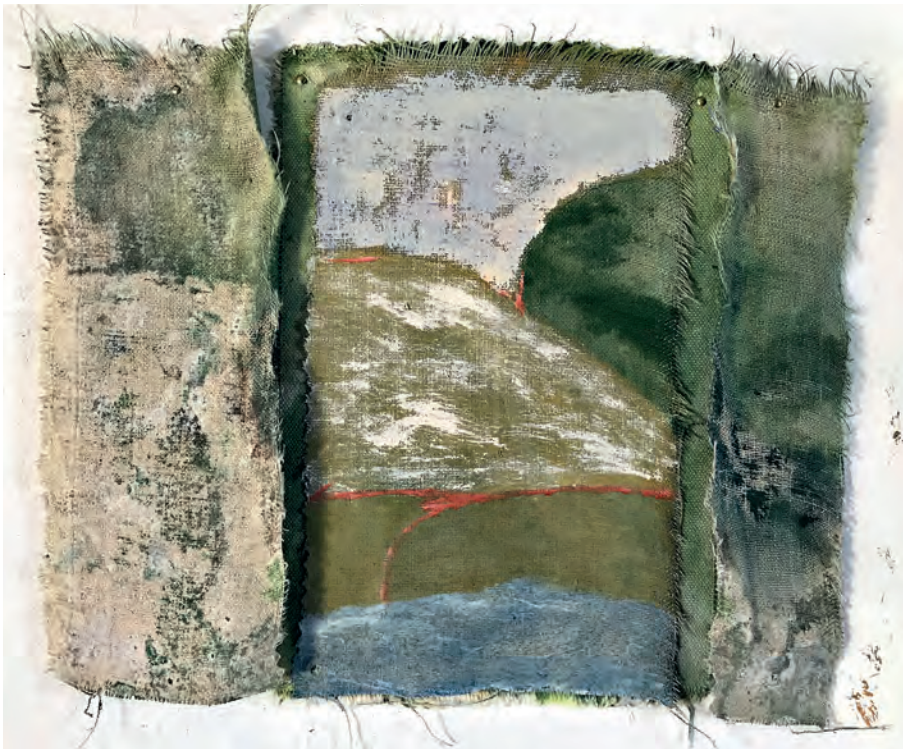
Why do I keep falling down?
The gaps
Is one minute up?
Let's look
When you are down this low you can see only the soybeans
Want to get on my shoulders?
Can I walk now?
For a minute
Let's walk the other way
Far out
All the way to the edge
Tired walking to the edge again.
Look how far we are

Can we do that again?
Anytime you want
I know your whole name
Look no more soy
One more minute
Breaking
Sounds
Wind
Birds
Breaking sounds
Shuffle
That sounded good
Let's walk back, ok?

Sounds of walking, wind,
Sun on
On
On
On
On the field
Sun on the field.

When you were little did you have a field?
The field was called Foxes
It was owned by a man called Mr. Fox
I thought he was a real Fox.

Underfoot, shuffle.
Dad is this a racing track?
That's where tractors go
Are you alright?
My best.



Fresh Marks the Shallow and Trails into Light
Acrylic on Raw Linen Collage, 8"x9"
2017

I can see the shed now
When we get to the snow let me get down
The people who own the farm
Look a big hole
I think it's a foxhole
Or a rabbit hole
Or a snake hole
This must be a rabbit
Too big for a snake
You wanna get down?
I want to fall, I like falling.

See if we hear sounds from inside it
And see what kind of holes are in there
Or we could wait and see what comes out
Who else has holes?
It's probably ground hogs.

Do you want two soybeans?
Eat one
Do you like it?
Another hole
Where?
Do you hear your echo?
Don't walk that fast
You go first
We are at the end of the soy Daddy; I'm tired of walking to the end
Shut the door.



We Go Further Back Than We Care to Remember
Oil on Canvas, 70"x52"
2020

Between Us

The distance between us
Was never an ocean
I burned it in the fire with my resentments
Now we stretch a divide
That vanishes, reconnects, or becomes a circle.

I like that idea
Time as a circle
Not doomed to repeat
But blessed to relive.

Your space and mine now almost the same
I inherit you
You are always
Tools strewn
Lacquer.



Quite Like Yours
(I Recall)
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 8"x7"
2022

No Match for Daylight

I

Night approaches
The lights are out
Can this black picture be taken?
No light
Each brush stroke covers
Some but not all
It will never go away
At night it will change
Come from a new source
But still will be there

Nothing is impossible
That sounds optimistic
But it's not what I meant.

Nothing is impossible
It is impossible to have nothing
At least as far as I know.

Empty out
Volume
Present
It's all there
Briefly there
It's all briefly there.

On I will go
With a vague plan
Always subject to change
Or chance
Analysis
A way of doing
A way to go on
Once it gets close



We Arise Like the Day
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 7.5"x10"
2021

Reverse it
Cover to uncover
One step at a time
A vague notion
No absolute
Though black is close
Put against the window it's not
It is transparent.

No match for daylight
Always a hole
Or a spot
Or a tear
No match for daylight.
On goes the talking
Away with the daylight
Wednesday night noise surrounds
The usual sounds
Not new
But different
Wednesday night approaches
A time to listen
To hear
To move on.

Blackout
Forget
Conceal
Mask
Block
Shut Out
Darkness
Less light
More noise
Constant
Inside
Outside
Familiar
Distant.



A Balance for My Introspection
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 7"x6"
2021

In it for a second
That's where they started
It goes
Towards darkness
One step
The less said the better
They all have their limits
Some come quickly
Some go on.

Cover the middle
Stop
Break it up
In a rush to cover
Written in the dark
There comes a point where you can't
A point where you won't
Fake it.

II

I'm no match for glimmering
Corn fields or shimmering
I'm no match for sunlight neither
As she gently fades into the ether.



Turning Stones in for the Sun
Oil on Traditionally Gessoed Panel, 16"x18"
2020

We Made the Ghosts

You dug your own garden
But I'm getting the scents of others
Least of all yours
We go further back than we care to remember.

And in this space, it's endless
All that time, and formless.

The smell of rain on roses
And intermittent greys.

In longing it's found
Dust marks the ground
We made the ghosts
Turning stones in for the sun.



The Way Things Appear
(Lunas Wry Zing)
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 7"x5"
2021

The Way Things Appear
(Lunas Wry Zing)

We arise like the day
Obedience jettisons her swoon
Then calls to mind her mystic
Dull, sharp and in-between.

Welled up like leaves
In children's memories.

The way things appear
(Lunas wry zing)
Shattered on edges
Mist done surprising.



Father's Own
(Moon and Stone)
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 7"x6.5"
2021

Father's Own

Father's own
(Moon and stone)
Leaves me with the trees he planted
And my romance behind their branches
Now tall enough to be his cane.



In This Space It's Endless
Oil on Traditionally Gessoed Panel, 24"x24"
2020

Dreams of Outside

I

Perfect one
Push another
Absolute freedom restrains
Spanned over lifetimes
Through the trials of warming
Your sublime follows rainbows.

II

There is a part of the architecture
That dreams of outside.

With its paths taking detours
And the right to be radical
Earned along the way
What is known at the start
Is only confirmed nearing its end
But we never get there.

As the light falls this evening
Inspiration may not be there in the morning.

I hold on to old certainties realizing that
Those teenage perceptions
Are now yours and not mine.

Yet there is a part of me
Out there in the world
That I fail to notice, until I settle into sounds
I'm breathing in that breeze
With crickets in the trees
On the edge of earthy grounds.



Distance Won't Quell
Oil on Canvas, 16"x20"
2020

II

Between the language of half-open doors
Become what you are,
A rhythm in infinite space
Ancestral constrains
Formed in the compost
We augur our dreams.



Mine are Much Closer
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 9"x7"
2021

Sounds

I

I respond to night's conditions
Leaving sounds as they are
To dictate new words
Pulling lines down from the solace of solitary stars
This chorus will not rest
While our backyard's abundance
Impinges on Epiphany's last call.

The bar is high
But like the woodland frogs, I'm jumping anyway.

II

Inside
An unsettled soundtrack forms our
Background noise
Small screens distract all sense of place
Still, I see you frame this difficult poise
With much less of my old anxiety's malaise.

Longevity screams
Go on,
As childhood deems, its reward in building a story we revel to relive
Knowing
Not wiser, just by being
We find our beginning
I gave you yours, but strangely you gave me mine
To which part of this moment will you always return?
Maybe tired
Less inspired
Nonetheless
A catharsis well earned.



Mine's a Belonging
Oil on Canvas, 16"x20"
2020

United
(A poem for Dad)

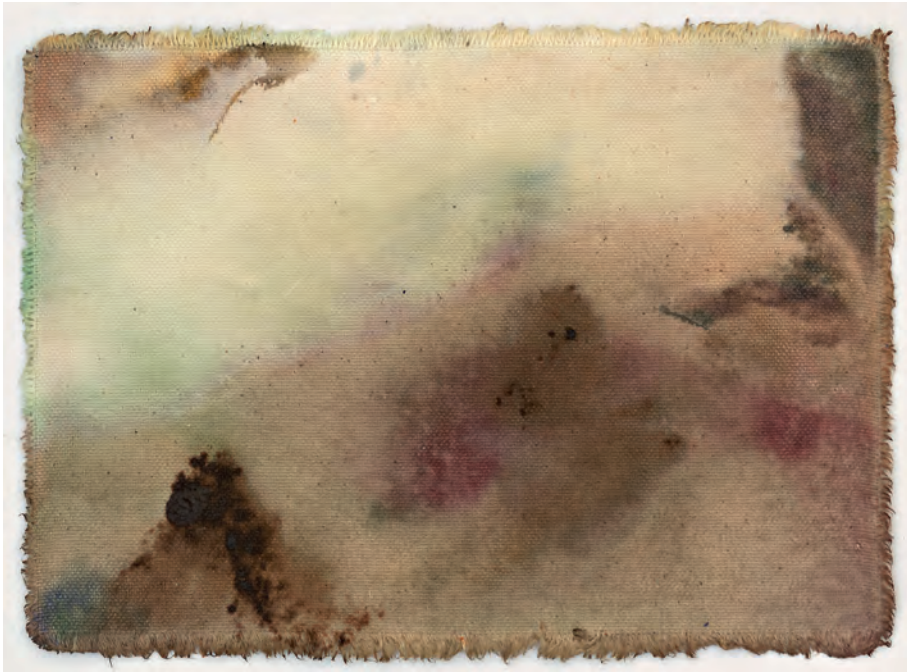
This powerful jet's ephemeral
Yet it encapsulates me in its sound
It will fade when I touch the ground
Like you
Will you wait for me?

Up here, she's the sky and you're the water
Reflecting as your body's caught here
Between sunlight's deepening orange hues
And Potomac river's muted blues
I've made these complementaries rhyme
Just like you two from time to time
Such words are comfort now I know
You've joined her in her aura's glow.

Delmarva's sunset saw you leave
This world for now and while we grieve
We'll find you in such subtleties
As raindrops on web's filigrees.

It's early now but I suppose
I'll think of you as gardens grow
The flowers you held with tender care
How often did we find you there?

But you planted more than shrubs and trees
In each of us you placed a seed
Of passion for the things we love
Whether in the yard or up above
We saw you nurture work and rest
Yes, blessed are we who knew you best.



Valley's Edge
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 5"x7.5"
2022

Before You

78 years today
Yet we talked in geological time
Of rocks that hung from edge to edge
On our Enniskerry drive.

A 99, a magazine
Before you, Stepside
I think you knew on that day too
This was our last goodbye.

But how I hold to valley's edge
Like doubling sports hotel
There must be words and metaphors
That carve a way to tell.

How glaciers left a road for us
To go our separate ways
I'm clinging as erratics hang
Over globally difficult days.

But you're not gone
As ice and stone
Take shape in different forms
You're with me as I drag the bins to the side of New Forge Road.

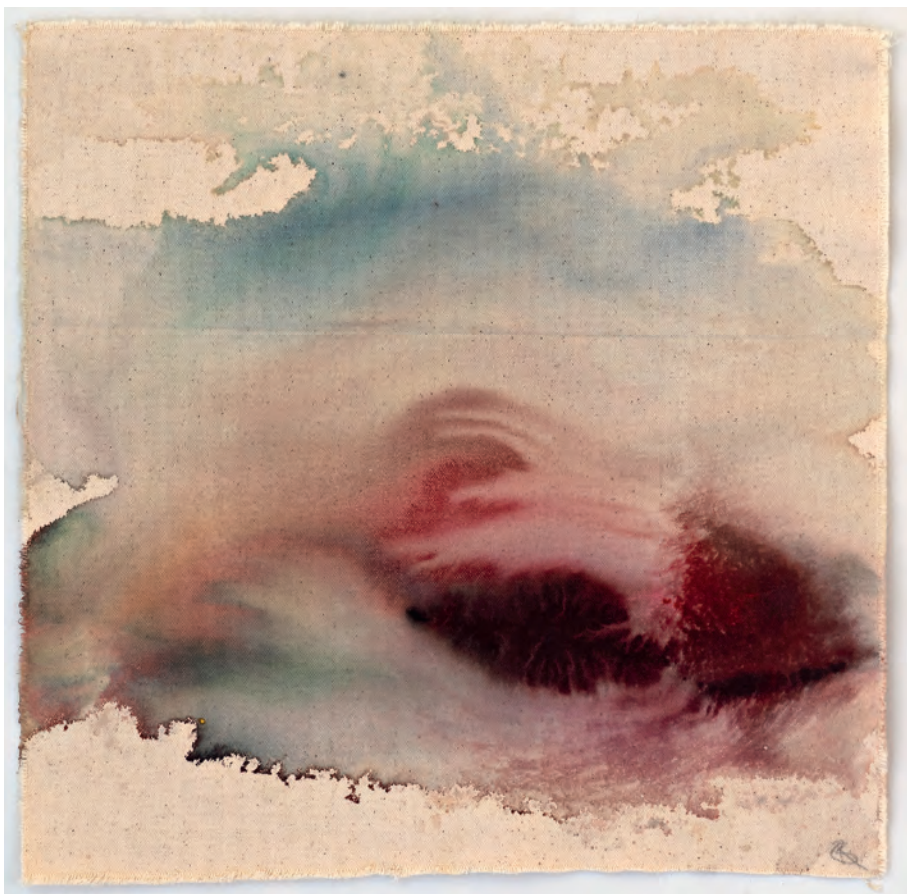


Dust Marks the Ground
Oil on Traditionally Gessoed Panel, 16"x18"
2020

Perhaps I Ought

Despite this tragedy in time passing
It's as if the hills had your back
Behind our citadel
Indecision leads me to do it all
For you
Granite stones, stained windows, red floral hall.

Though my ambitions outsized this place
I never really left
To be where your feet were planted afforded me some grace
Now I'm back in my garage realising that my sense of
organisation comes from you
The staples on the floor stab into my stocking feet as I sneak
out at night to remember
They never fit the gun you bought me before I left for America
I didn't tell you that
You didn't understand abstract painting, but the day you saw
me building a stretcher it made sense to you
And you made sure I left with the tools I needed
You gave me this and so much more
The sound of trucks from Interstate 95 comes faint through the
opened garage door, they hum in the
Nighttime and remind me of you
As I paint, I think of the vice grips in the yard and how I
struggled free from its taught
I always think of how I needed a father but rarely of how you
needed a son, perhaps I ought
As I carry on without you, I remember the times we both tried.



Tentatively Revealed
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 13"x13.5"
2022

Quiet Time

It's gone
Taken down until next year
Look at it this way.

The light is going
Early March
Quiet time
But for some sawing.

Enjoying it in an old-fashioned way
Slow down
Look at it this way.



Digging Deep
(Violets)
Oil on Canvas, 16"x20"
2020

Continuous

We're a continuous entity
Reaching back through the years
With the smell of this work site
I'm remembering clear.

Your red truck with writing
On the side of the door
The name of your father
Whose burden you bore.

In Dublin Corporation
Tearing down flats
There was pain in their walls
Now I feel like that.

The grease on the tipping gear
Never helped you let go
Of too many problems
I watched, so I know.

Now I've grown and have mine
Quite like yours, I recall
In the fields where they play
For the last time this fall.

What did you ask me?
That last day on the phone
The sound of your voice
Tethered to home.

How is the weather?
Or something like that.
Are you home on your own?
Do you still have that cat?

I miss our three minutes
Even eight at some times.
Now that number for Ireland
Is merely a line.



Purpose Meanders
Oil on Canvas, 16"x20"
2020

Sharing

Sharing
A reason for not sharing
I don't want to look at them
Just go.

Too much revealed.

A totalitarian place
A choice but no choice
We wander.

11:11
Tomorrow
Another day
Retract, too much.

Maybe by the river,
A place of escape
But on they rumble.

I don't want to look at them
I do that too much
A way to find
Repeat.



Wrapped in a Time of Longing
Oil on Traditionally Gessoed Panel, 48"x24"
2020

Fresh Snow

Even this morning
As the world moves on without you both
This yellow settles down below a horizon line of trees and
scattered power lines
I'm treasuring the time
I took what was perhaps my last drive with the two of you
In the snow through the Featherbeds
Not far from our house
That will never leave me
Nor will either of you.

The three of us were captivated by the beauty of the fresh
snow laying softly on the mountain heather
Dad stopped the car
I got out
I took several pictures
I can no longer find them on my phone
Maybe that's for the best
I prefer my memories to pixels on an iPhone.
You both told me I should paint them
I never saw the point of painting from photographs
I said I would, but I did not
Mam reminded me that my paintings never really gave
people what they wanted
I laughed
I was used to that
I might even miss it
Philistine
But not as much as I miss the two of you.



Under Different Skies we Reach
Oil on Canvas, 70"x52"
2020

Today, without the photographs
But even stronger, the deep memories flooding back
I wipe away a tear or two while listening to Samuel Barber's
Adagio for Strings and Organ in G minor
Perhaps I can
Paint you both the landscape you wanted
That I can now do now
Without a hint of irony
It's presence a loss
Like when the gentle blanket of snow melted in the foothills of
the Dublin mountains.

You slipped away with it
Into the compacted soil
Buried underneath.



Forgetting They are Only
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 7"x5.5"
2022

An Imagined History of an Old Shed

By the road
Sandwiched between two cookie cutter developments.

In it we will look like archeologists to discover what was there
What was left behind.
But because we are artists
We will use this to construct our own story.

What will we find?
What will it tell us?
How will it affect our imagination?

Let the place tell its own tale
Written in dust
An imagined history
By the side of the road.

We can't get in
Yet I imagined him there
In an unused hut
Tired as before.

So, sit still and listen to last night's ambient sounds
The same as before but different
The bike hums on the highway
Trucks sing
And cars purr
The pulse of nighttime
Ever different from day.
What was he doing?



Tonight's Invitation
Oil on Canvas, 70"x52"
2019

Why do I care?
An endless fascination
I don't want it to change.
No
Stillness and the impossibility of silence
All is becoming
Unfolding in a constant flux
It's different
So new
I know
I knew.

Listen to stop
And be in the present
A part of it all.

Why are we changing?
What is it for?
Are we becoming?
What were we before?

A move around stillness
Not wanting much more
I'm always changing
Where was I before?

And in it hear motion
A back and a forth
At once an undoing
At once bring forth.
Pulses and flashes



Ashes at the Edge of Darkness
Graphite, Ash, Dust, Joint Compound
on Watercolour Paper, 55"x27.5"
2013

It's past me they go
Undo me and change me
The ebb and the flow.

And night passes through me
It's constant the flow
The listening intermittent
I'm training you know.

Where is the border?
The undoing of sound
The place passes with me
Come through look around
It's only in silence that night passes by I'm always for stillness
Though rare it is boy.

That was an ending
To end or begin
Undoing or doing
I can't end or begin
Always unfolding
Between here and there
If I wanted to change it
I could not I don't care.

West Philadelphia
But no, I am east
The Gunpowder Falls
The light and the haze
The door and the nighttime
In front stillness too
And with me come backwards
With me come you.



Sunlight Spurned

Oil on Traditionally Gessoed Canvas Over Panel, 20"x16"
2019

Teacup

I broke my favourite teacup yesterday
And thought about loss
I wanted to write about it but then reconsidered
It wasn't until my dream last night that I realised I had to,
So here it is with English spelling and notes about home.
To say you liked tea is an understatement
You drank it the way I used to smoke Marlboro Lights
Now I drink this in memory of you
Sometimes Barry's but more often Benner's,
Aldi's off brand and share inappropriate jokes with friends
I know you would have appreciated them
I'll say no more.
Dreams are life's undercurrents
So I cry in dreams
When I awake
Sometimes I don't know how to start
I get up and keep getting ready
But in the dream
Denise glued the cup back together for me almost perfectly
Just missing one part
The bottom piece of the handle
Without you I can still have my tea
I'm just learning to hold what is precious a little more carefully
As our friends help us put the pieces back together.
You were both in the dream
As I hope you are now
Together.



Multiplicity's Two Sides
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 23"x28.5"
2021

Before and After

Before and after
Now the corner is empty
Nothing but pipes
Bricks
Peeling ceiling.

Add nothing for a while.
The last window with plastic
Spring is early
There are even flowers on the trees.



Welled Up Like Leaves in Children's Memories
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 6.5"x6"
2021

For Meaghan

What if all the stars above the Delaware Memorial Bridge
could resolve humanity's crises by revealing their distances
spanned in the unity of our collective glance?

This is what I thought as I drove home from New York
City last night, on the way back to the rest of our lives.

Meeting with friends and being in the city I so often
dreamed of caused me to imagine my life without you.

But what does that mean?

This warm November has brought me a sense of comfort
unimaginable even a month ago
I am making peace with my longing
For the road not taken.
We are constant on this path?
As we find our way
Through the story of our own commitment.

You've helped me to see discipline as its own reward
I write, I paint, you give me space for that.

A big part of my recovery has been overcoming myself.
In the absence of ego
There is more room for love.

Our youthful, even naïve glances were to span the Ocean
And settle, like the shimmering on her surface
Constant yet always in change.



Is Now Eternal?
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 11"x23.5"
2021

The Nest

Hive like a moon
The nest has settled
It's fixed
Won't move
Less likely to be broken.

Held on to
Woven with care, from leftovers
In the board a landscape with a river
It's neither here nor there.
Somewhere in-between
Something to focus on
Picked up
Dirty
Green.

No use beyond meaning

Conversation
A picture and an object
Two things at once
Maybe more.



Shadows on Soil
(Fall Irregardless)
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 6.5"x6.5"
2021

Unburdened

I

There are things not to touch inside the black box
Old power lines
Taped
Foreboding
Disused
Unaware but abandoned
Keep it
Follow two black pipes to the ceiling
A found drawing
In need of repair.

See in the stains what you like
An old way of looking
Composed by time and nature
But also by people
Its function is shelter
It's starting to strain.

II

That pipe's going nowhere
Come from above
The floor and the ceiling.

You can't see both at the same time
Not without help
A camera or a friend.

Help.

In each movement
A difference
A circle
A shift to the left.



We Found Our Beginning
(Broke from always asking)
Oil on panel, 28"x22"
2021

Further
A bit further
Now it hurts
It strains to look up
It's empty now
Cleared out
A quiet empty space
Still, plenty to see
To hear
Sounds of difference
Outside
Never the same
Infinite variations
Even the light changes
But we barely notice
It affects us
Habit
A move to connect

To see, to feel, to notice.

Alone in an empty space
A pause
A triangle
Two triangles
A sneeze
Another sneeze
From another room
Beyond the reassembled wall.



This Shallow Stream
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 10"x8"
2021

Maybe just paint the plastic
Impose a way of looking
Is that what we do?
Expose or impose
Pass by it, hardly noticed.
A place of my own
No one here
Nice for a while
An hour or two
Empty
Slow down.

Only in slowness will it work
Escape from repetition
Composed for pleasure
Well-rested
Peels, power, connection
Grab it,
Don't grab it.
Searching
To find the whole
It escapes
It slips
Looking
Listening
The slippage of meaning
Voices distract outside.

Writing
To uncover
Ways to know
That sounds better
It feels better
Unburdened
No need for them
Why hold on for years?
Even with nothing there's plenty.



I'm Staying Under Breezes
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 7"x5"
2021

Nothing Ever is Always
(Hold on)

I

Thank-you cards and propane tanks are on my mind
As I walk up the basement steps
After searching for a hard drive with the music of La Monte Young
It occurs to me
The basement drawers where I look, are like the mind
A place where one can hold on to things for too long.

Sifting through my own nostalgia
I look at a young boy playing basketball on the street
One day, this cold November Friday after Thanksgiving will be his
The place where he grew up
I'm grilling chicken with a wind chill of 28 degrees Fahrenheit, that's
-2.2 degrees Celsius
For now, today forms both of our present moments
The similarities pretty much end there
Our relationships to November 26th 2021 are entirely different
We live in different worlds
He may not remember this day and neither may I
But if we both live to see 20 years from now
He will fondly recall the street where he used to play ball
Will I coldly complain?
No, warmed by the fire of the grill and despite the state of the world
I will remember this time fondly
There is beauty in my family of four despite the trials of being alive at
this time.

Sure
Hold on.

He grips the ball
I drop my phone.



Solitary
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 11"x8"
2021

II

Around this time of year we find ourselves with a little more
time to sort through things
Meaghan found a photo from 1978 when I was part of
another family of four
The photo was taken in Ardamine in County Wexford
Mum looks stunning
Dad looks thin
He is younger in that photo than I am now
The things we only glimpse as children often seem permanent
As if they have always been there
Like Dad's truck yard
But when I called my aunts to tell them about this picture
They told me today
That I went with them to the bank to get the loan for the yard
I was three
About the same age I was in that photograph
I thought it was always owned by our family
But nothing ever is

Always,
Nothing ever is always.



Stretched Like a Band Around Time
(Daubed Bails, Taught Wattled)
Acrylic on Raw Canvas, 8"x7"
2021

The History and Objects of an Imaginary Shed

I

A tree, from a place made up
Found and not forgotten
Dry but still a tree
An exterior like our interior
Bones
Paint them grey
Were you there like him in his imagined shed?
Beneath the tree with no leaves.
Not quite that was his space.

What would suffice beyond only grey?
Or even in front of it
In the silence at the end
Unpacking
A box of things from before
Open it up but wait
A jar of stolen rocks for drawing.

Let's do that again and paint in new shadows
There's a difference between us
Moving towards light
White
Fade
Wait
Stay...



Through Trees
Oil on Canvas Over Panel, 11"x14"
2019

II

And then gone in the nighttime they told me you were
Once I was over
You were not there
On I will wander
Without you I'll go
A gem through and through
That much I know
A fall and a fading
Early this time
You looked at the sunrise with fear in your eyes.

That was the last time between you and I
I know I can go on
Your strength brings be near
Or so went the brave words
Now they don't seem so clear
But I am not ready
Not ready for dawn
Not ready for song
Without you it's wrong
Inside it's all scattered
In need of repair
Pieces and fragments
From back here and there.

Pick through and find them
Pick through them again
A provisional shuffle
A way to an end
And what of worm's grey?
Absolute at both ends.

The darkness of void
The small and the dim.
Why have you left me?
We haven't gotten in.



October's Falling
Oil on Traditionally Gessoed Panel, 24"x32"
2020

Dessie

I was standing by your graveside
They had just lowered you into the ground when Dessie McCudden
reminded me of something I will now never forget
He's good like that, you always loved the bit of craic with him.

Bart, says Dessie, you were down in the truck yard many years ago
and I said to you, one day all of this will be yours and do you know
what you said?

I hate this place

That's what you said

Then I remembered.

It was one of those cold Saturday mornings when I was hungover
washing the trucks. I had more than likely spent the money the
previous night in the boozier with the lads and I was doing this in
return for the sub or advance as they call it over here.

I did hate it, I was not lying. I was just a typical 18-year-old trying
to distance himself from his father.

Now I think of that place often, how you built the shed out of
corrugated metal, the heater inside, the oil-covered wooden shelves,
You worked in oil too.

I have always felt attached to place, but it's rare that we notice the
attachment to where we are from whilst we are young and living
there. This comes only with loss. Now I love it because

I love you.



Photo: Elena Volkova

BART O'REILLY is an Irish artist living in Maryland. He makes interdisciplinary work including painting, drawing, poetry and video. He teaches at The Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) and Harford Community College and has shown in Baltimore, New York, Washington DC, Philadelphia and Kentucky as well as in Ireland and Northern Ireland. In 2000 he received his BFA from the National College of Art and Design in Dublin. He received his MFA from MICA in 2012. He has received grants from The Baltimore Social Innovation Journal and an Individual Artists Award from The Baltimore Office of Promotions of the Arts. His work has been published in Woven Tale Press Magazine and Cinesonica. He also received recognition of scholarly and creative work from Harford Community College and the MICA MFAST award.

Cover Image: Wrapped in a Time of Longing
Oil on Traditionally Gessoed Panel, 48"x24" 2020