



Hunters in the Snow – A Perspective

Three hunters trudge wearily homewards through the snow: it is by far the most popular non-religious Christmas card image scene, and with good reason. Pieter Breugel the Elder painted it in 1565, yet we feel it is a world we can understand. Not long ago, men very like these hunted on Boxing Day, and wood was gathered for the fire, and the winter was cold enough to safely play on frozen ponds. You could easily imagine a local artist fifty or so years ago, painting such a scene from life or memory.

Despite the bitter cold and the hunters' evident lack of success, it seems a place well cared for and worth living in. No wonder the painting features as a symbol of Earth in the Science Fiction movie [Solaris](#)

But appearances can be deceiving. Breugel was no provincial; he was a famous and well-travelled artist. This is not some rural backwater, but the outskirts of Antwerp, then the richest city in Europe. The painting was one of six depicting the changing year, painted for Niclaes Jongelinck, a wealthy merchant banker of that city. It is a traditional theme, once common in illuminated manuscripts, but done painted for a new market, to be displayed in a suburban villa. In many ways, this picture marks the start of an era that we are now leaving. Phillip II of Spain was the new ruler of Antwerp, more profitable to him than all his possessions in the Americas. In England, his wife Mary Tudor was burning Cramer at the stake and preparing the first Plantation of Ireland.

The strong diagonal lines of trees and houses draw your eye over the busy village below to the fantastical mountains in the distance. There are no such mountains near Antwerp; they are a memory of the Swiss Alps through which Breugel passed on his way to Rome twelve years before. There Michaelangelo and Raphael were painting, but his work is very different from theirs. Some parts seem still medieval in their uniformity of scale for houses and trees, but he has succeeded better than them in conjuring up the overall shape of the landscape and its space. The winter of 1556 was the harshest in living memory, near the start of what is now called the Little Ice Age. You can almost feel the cold.

Look again. In perspective, the horizon is always at the observer's eye level, so we are looking down on the hunters as if from the upstairs window of a house across the way from the inn they have just passed. The family outside has lit a fire to take the bristles of a pig they have just killed or

are about to kill. The man who is carrying out the table on which it will be scraped is the only person in the whole painting whose face we can clearly see. He looks across at the hunters, but plainly no greeting has passed between them. Your eye is drawn to the mountains, and then back to the left. Behind the black trees, on a frozen yellow river, lies Antwerp.

The hunters are not going there, or to the mountains; otherwise, they would have taken the road on the other side of the inn. They can only be going one place; zigzagging down the steep slope in front of them, perhaps to the house across the bridge from the mill, where no fire is lit. Is the old woman carrying a bundle of sticks across the bridge going to prepare a fire for them? Perhaps. The pollarded trees show the importance of firewood, and on the road a full cart of wood is headed away, probably to light the fires of Antwerp. Yet the family up at the inn are burning straw, and what is the little man at the bottom right of the picture doing?

Look closer. All is not well in this seeming idyll. Axe marks on the tree next to the lead hunter and a bird trap set at the last house in the ridge show how well Breugel knows that every bit of this land is exploited. The nearest hunter bends to examine a track in the snow, but it is only that of a hopping crow. The pig-killers have built their fire very close to the inn. If you did not know what was happening, you would almost think they were looting it. The broken sign shows that it is dedicated to Saint Hubert – the patron saint of hunters. Strangest of all – look at the house in the middle distance, between the church and the bridge. Its chimney is clearly on fire. Someone has climbed on the roof and thrown a bucket of water to try to douse it.

What does it all mean? We can only guess how much of that detail was painted expressly for Jongelinck. As to what it meant to Breugel – that is another matter.

There is only one thing more to say: the year after Breugel finished this painting, religious riots broke out in Antwerp, the prelude to a general revolt which led to Dutch independence and the sacking of the city by the Spanish, in 1576. Not so very different from the first Christmas after all.

Jenny Brien

For a more detailed image of the painting, see [Google Arts and Culture](#).

[Collage Collective](#)

If you wish to see a veritable cornucopia of creative art in all its variety locally, just take a dander to the *Collage Collective* at The Buttermarket in Enniskillen. Actually, don't wish – just will yourself to go and look. On sale there most days of the week is the work of a range of local artists and

artisans.

The project began in May 2015 and was situated initially in Nugent's Entry, just off Church Street, in the town centre. The steering group that led to its foundation included Genevieve Murphy, her husband Jon, Jill Stronge, Tailie Maur, Wayne Hardman, his wife Louise, Jill Mullen and others... They worked together under the auspices of *The Hub* based in The Clinton Centre, from where they obtained the seeding money to hire exhibition, office and meeting venue premises.

Within six months an opportunity presented itself for more suitable premises in the Buttermarket, and Collage Collective has grafted smoothly onto a traditional range of studios, ateliers and an adjoining coffee house. Merchandise on sale embraces textiles, photography, jewellery, pottery, papier-mâché figures, designer clothes and decorative pieces where taste originality and refinement is the appeal to customers.

From the outset of Collage Collective I have participated as an active supporter, participant and purchaser of items suitable for wedding presents and gifts for specific occasions. From time to time I have staffed the payment point and dealt directly with customer's enquiries. Nowadays few people ask directions from a policeman, but many passers-by call in to ask guidance to local touristic points of interest. There is no 'hard sell' business approach; the continuous emphasis is on attractive display and projecting a welcoming, comfortable retail environment.



For a monthly stipend of £50.00 to the Collective I maintain a niche for the display of books by local writers. I call it *Tobias-books*. By calling myself a promoter, rather than a seller, I avoid the attentions of the Inland Revenue. Once a month, I am informed of what titles have been sold and the income is passed to the author. There is no charge to the exhibitor. Shall I reveal a personal secret? I fancy myself as a kind of modest Guggenheim/Saatchi. Scratch me and you will find inscribed skin deep: 'Aspiring Art Patron'.

I appeal to all who read this contribution to Corncrake, please do seriously consider offering some – once a month – dedicated time in Collage Collective

as a sales assistant, meet and greeter.

Go On... You can do it...

I do: despite all the pressures that daily crowd in on me. If you (or a young person you know of) are looking to gain retail experience you will find highly satisfactory – though unpaid – employment.

Tony Brady

Fox Power!



The she-fox

*Walking in the nearly full moonlight
This evening
A shooting star falls
Into my mouth*

*A vixen screams
across the navy blue of the
night*

*Venus slow dances with Orion
And in an instant
the world is put to right*

Recently when Theresa May informed us that she would look again at the Fox Hunting Ban in England with a view to lifting it, I found this indicative of the entire Tory project: the cruelty involved in tearing apart a beautiful innocent defenceless wild animal, a beautiful wild creature which speaks of wildness and wilderness – is symbolic of the cold-heartedness and callousness

at the core of Toryism, and Theresa Mayism. This painting I hope conveys some of that wildness and wilderness and fighting spirit too which is so essential for us to maintain our wholeness and sanity in this increasingly mad Alt-Right world. This fox will not give in easily. He and or She will be a force to be reckoned with!

The accompanying poem says it all for me.

Kathy May



[A Star Wars Story](#)

A long time ago – not in a galaxy far, far away, but right here on Earth – a little boy stared up in wonder at the big screen at the incredible story that George Lucas put up there: *Star Wars*. In hindsight, one can perhaps see some of the cracks in that original story, but for that little boy it offered the belief that there is something greater than the individual self – something that even death cannot defeat – and that anyone, no matter how low and base their origins, can aspire to greatness. That was a powerful message that he could not yet articulate, but it inspired him nonetheless.

This belief strengthened with the second and third films released, despite the Ewoks – one of Lucas' commercial indulgences. It survived the introduction of Jar Jar Binks in the second trilogy, the most risible of all creations, because the films started to explore more of the background of that original political philosophy and to pose important moral questions.

I was sceptical when a third trilogy was launched with the portentous title, *The Force Awakens*. That film did tend to trip itself up with the amount of self-referencing that went on. It was trying to appeal to two separate generations and I felt it suffered because of that. Maybe it was time for my generation of original Star Wars fans to step aside, our battle done, to leave Star Wars for the younger generation.

I did go to see the spin-off *Rogue One* purely out of curiosity; how did the Rebels get those vital blueprints? The film brought in an entirely new set of characters that fitted seamlessly into the Lucas universe and – more importantly – it brought back the unifying political philosophy and placed it centre stage.

It was also a character-led story; despite the explosions, laser-fire and other special effects. Its characters were not born to greatness – far from it – but they became great. The awesome personal sacrifices they made displayed their importance; yet in the original Star Wars film they were only referenced, namelessly, in a single line. The story was beautifully and artfully told, the tension was maintained, even though you knew they would succeed in the end. History is littered with such ‘hidden figures.’

My enthusiasm for the franchise lifted by *Rogue One*, I eagerly awaited the release of *The Last Jedi*.

I could talk about the amazing set-pieces, the balletic fight-sequences, both human and machine, the nice moments of humour and some more of those self-references. However, what was most exciting was the development of the key characters introduced in the previous film. Through their individual journeys of self-discovery, in the context of some truly momentous challenges, they face difficult choices, on which, perhaps, the fate of the universe rests. It is not so much what they get right, but what they get wrong and yet, their failures are crucial in their own personal development and in the fates of others. (It is hard here to avoid slipping into Yoda-speech. Try I must.)

I came away from the film, my head whirling with the ideas presented before me – the moral conundrums that got my synapses spinning. What choices would I have made? I don’t have the answers to many of the questions, but that is what makes it even more exciting. I look forward to the next instalment with bated breath.

Such stories have the power to move one emotionally and to fill an eager mind with inspiring ideas. Of course, not everyone will be so touched by one single story, they need other stories, told in a different fashion, to effect change in them. Through our literature, our art, our human endeavour and through the silver screen, these stories will continue to be told.

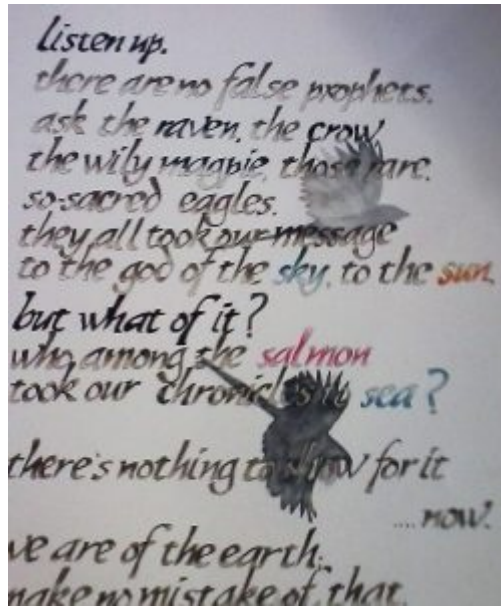
The little boy who looked up at the screen with wonder, all those years ago, became the man who still looks up at the screen with wonder and probably, always will.

May the Force be with you.

John Llewellyn James

Image: Time Inc. U.K.

[Cirque des Oiseaux: Artists & Augurs](#)



Are Artists Augurs? asks the exhibition which opened in the *Higher Bridges Gallery* on the 7th of April and runs to the 29th. *Cirque des Oiseaux* is French for *Circus of Birds* or rather the circling of birds in flight, something we notice particularly at this time of year as new migrants begin to arrive.

Just as we look for signs of Spring, the Augurs of Ancient Rome used to interpret the will of the Gods through observing the flight and the calls of birds. The association of birds and poets is even older than that; it goes right back to the origins of writing itself. According to legend, Palamedes invented eleven letters of the Greek alphabet from the shapes that migrating cranes make in flight.

The exhibition is based around the closely-observed bird poems of Enniskillen-born poet Maria McManus, two of which – [Peregrinations](#) and [Corncrakes](#) are reproduced with permission elsewhere in this issue. They are re-interpreted and complemented through the work of eight other artists in photographs, paintings, sound, video, and sculpture. This gives the whole a pleasing unity, and a diversity that is not normally seen in one-person shows. The works speak to each other, sometimes using the same words and images, but none dominates. There is no predetermined path through, an effect heightened by excellent exhibition notes which, though they number each piece sequentially and map them clearly, do not list them in numerical order but by artist.

The connection with augury is perhaps most plainly seen in the work of Helen Sharp. What at first sight appeared to be silhouettes of birds in flight *The Jackdaws of the Newtown Butler Spar* are seen on closer inspection as shapes pierced in white cloth – literal rendings of the veil. The same image is used on a set of 'Oracle Cards' laid out like a Tarot reading on a table in the middle of the room.

Others are more oblique. Catherine Gaston's mysterious oil paintings contain no birds at all (one is even titled *No Birds Here, Winter, Lough Erne*) except for the one titled *Murmuration for Maria*. Bernarde Lynn's photographs *Caged Birds of Hong Kong 1-6* and *People of Hong Kong* invite comparisons between the brightly coloured soft-focus close-up of the birds and the invisible people –

represented by several floors of the facade of a massive block of flats – as neat and regular as a repeating pattern, yet no two exactly alike.

Some of the poems are presented in handwritten form. *Emigrés* is written in a tiny book perched on a swallow's nest and protected by a bell jar, *Corncrakes* on an accordion-fold set upright so that only a few lines are visible from any one position. It is accompanied by Simon Walters sound installation in which two recordings of the poem weave together in a sort of fugue, reflecting the tenuous lives of the birds themselves.

Others are meant to be handled (white gloves are provided) most notably Irene Uhlemann's massive handmade book *In Principio Erat Verbum* (In the Beginning was the Word) which with its illustrated excerpts stands somewhat in the tradition of the *Book of Kells* and evokes some of its reverence. *Home* is a collage of handwritten letters and poems contained within a folded map, as if remembering the journeys for which it was consulted, and *Peregrinations* is typewritten on luggage labels, one per line – a device that McManus also uses in her [Label Lit](#) project.

It is strange and somewhat delightful to experience poetry in such an indirect fashion, but does that mean that poets and artists are akin to augurs? Perhaps. As with all forms of divination, augurs relied on observations that were somewhat predictable (with a good knowledge of natural history you know what to expect expect from birds)

but never entirely so. They wove a story out of commonplace and overlooked details, always keeping a eye open for the extraordinary moments that give them special significance.

And so do these artists: go see for yourselves.

The Artists:

[Maria McManus](#) [Tom Hughes](#) [Pearl Kinnear](#)

[Helen Sharp](#) [Simon Waters](#) [Irene Uhlemann](#)

[Bernarde Lynn](#) [Catherine Gaston](#) [Rosie McGurran](#)

[Poems and Places](#)

An Impermanent Path



a place of enforced solitude

a temporary surface
a washboard for a man's fortitude
a horizontal horizon drawn neatly
between the curve of the sea and the sky
two halves of a broken eggshell
brought together
to form a vista
to compel those eyes
toward a flat
featureless void
 a place where footfalls are silent
 transient
 quenched by inevitabilities
where priests and pagans
 and poets
traipse
in-between the flow and ebb
of a pitiless tide

The Naked King



Proleek Tomb

Four millennia has stripped more than
a pound of flesh from your bones
the naked king is exposed to all
 wanderers and weather
well-wishers and the wicked alike
bask in your ancient silhouette
 unmoved
by modernia
 unhindered
by the creep of crass chronologies
created by curious caretakers of faiths

The naked king reigns
the metaphoric monarch of imaginations
imagines all of us
our fleeting lives like dragonflies around
a stagnant pool
 still
as he has stayed and will stay
until the wanderers and weather
wear his form from bone to stone
from stone to memory
from memory to
 nothingness

[Steve Downes](#), photographer and poet, was born in Country Louth in 1973 and educated in NUI Maynooth. He holds a Degree in Classical History and a Masters in Anthropology, and is a published poet since 1996. These two paired poems and photos are from his most recent project.

ComicFest 2017



After last year's very successful launch the Enniskillen ComicFest returns on 5th and 6th May 2017, bigger and better, to celebrate all aspects of storytelling and sequential art. *ComicFest 2016* proved that there was a great demand for an event of this type in the Enniskillen area.

Comics currently enjoy a very high profile with many titles regularly topping literary sales charts, and both television shows and films based on comics growing ever more successful. Related subjects like animation and computer games are booming industries.

Our schools programme last year was very popular as *Moving Image and Creative Media* attract more and more students who want to pursue a career in these industries and want first hand information in storyboarding, storytelling, digital art and character design. Primary schools and Enniskillen library also saw comics as a fun way of engaging children and encouraging them to read. The Library now has a special section for graphic novels and comic collections.

Over twenty Writers and Artists from across the UK and Ireland will be attending ComicFest 2017 and guests of honour include John Wagner and Carlos Ezquerra, the creators of Judge Dredd; Steve MacManus, legendary editor of *2000AD*; and Marvel and DC artist Yanick Paquette. Also among the guests is Nigel Parkinson who draws Dennis The Menace and Minnie The Minx for the *Beano*.

The highly regarded British comic *2000AD* is celebrating its 40th Anniversary this year. We are very proud to announce that the Enniskillen ComicFest has been awarded Official Status by *2000AD* publishers *Rebellion* and the Fermanagh Film Club will be having a special screening of the acclaimed documentary *Future Shock!: The Story Of 2000AD* on Wednesday 3rd May in Fermanagh House. Tickets will be available on the door. Friday 5th May features our Schools Programme with the attending professionals presenting a range of talks and running workshops in Enniskillen Library. Then on Friday evening ComicFest is proud to present *A Celebration of 40 Years Of 2000AD* in the Ardhowen Theatre where all our guest creators will be interviewed and video material screened.

The audience will also be able to put questions to our 2000AD Guests. Tickets cost £8 and are available from the Ardhowen.

Our main event is taking place on Saturday 6th May and this year our venue will be Enniskillen Castle. Yes, a Comic Convention in a Castle! The event will run from 10am until 6pm and no ticket is required. All our guests will be signing and sketching everything from Dennis The Menace to Batman throughout the day and there will be a programme of panel discussions and interviews. This is also Free Comic Book Day and free comics will be available, one per visitor. There will also be costumed characters in attendance for photo opportunities, as well as independent comic creators, exhibitors, merchandise and back issue dealers. As a special treat for our younger visitors we will periodically be running a Hero Academy and a Princess Academy, where any young apprentice hero or princess can receive training through fun activities and games.

ComicFest 2017 will conclude with a charity auction with all proceeds going to the *Horizon West Children's Hospice*. Last year we raised £2100 for this very important charity and we hope to increase on that this year.

Enniskillen ComicFest thanks the *Arts Council For Northern Ireland, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, Fermanagh Lakelands Tourism, Enniskillen Castle and Enniskillen Library* for their support.

The Enniskillen ComicFest Team:

Chairman: Paul Trimble

Secretary: Aaron McVitty

Treasurer: Matthew Gault

Logistics: Chris Fawcett

Social Media Co-Ordinator: Stephen Trimble

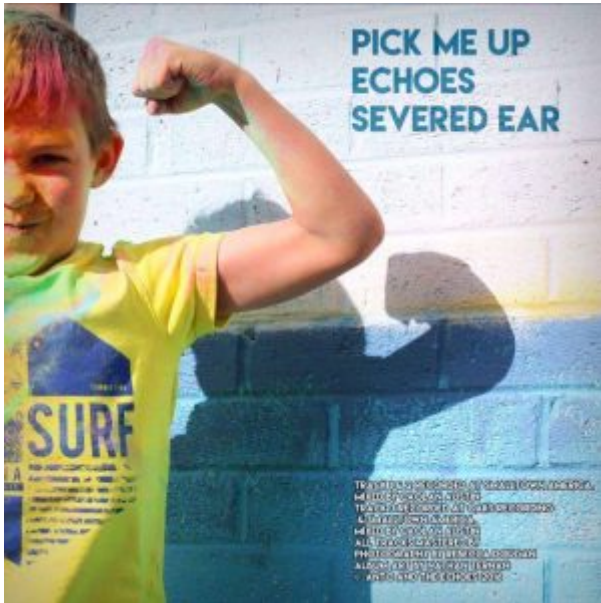
Media Production: James Eames



[A Colourful Debut](#)

2016 may have been a tough year for music, but that certainly wasn't the case for emerging Fermanagh band [Anto & the Echoes](#). After only a few short months of forming and honing their sound, they took on their debut gig in July. Punters were turned away from *Charlie's bar* as the crowd reached maximum capacity early in the night. A series of well-received gigs around Northern

Ireland followed, and the band returned to *Charlie's* to close the year with another sell-out show.



This year has built further on their success, after spending some time in the studio, they have returned with a short Irish tour to promote a new three-track EP titled [Youth](#). February saw the Echoes playing Dublin, Omagh, Portrush and *The Empire Bar* Belfast, finishing their tour with the release of an accompanying music video for their track *Severed Ear*.

The EP is a collection of three songs, with a vivid and engaging stadium rock sound. The first track, *Pick Me Up*, is a chaotic upbeat number, with punk & surf-rock guitar sound juxtaposed with flamboyant saloon piano reminiscent of *Mungo Jerry's Summertime*, overladen with rich harmonies and a vocal line with hints of *Queen* and *Kate Bush*.

The second track, *Echoes*, is a sentimental and nostalgic party anthem, falling in line with a more familiar stadium rock sound akin to *The Killers* and *U2*, with powerful crescendos and rich layered vocals carrying a strong sense of emotion.

Severed Ear is a love song through the eyes of a tortured painter, with a huge dynamic guitar sound played over a host of colourful lyrical metaphors. The accompanying music video perfectly captures the colourful essence of the song, with the location and cast used as a literal blank canvas for a rainbow of expression.

Frontman and songwriter Anthony Breen has worked in the film industry on *Game Of Thrones*, *Line Of Duty* and various feature films, and used his experience to envision the video and bring it to life with great help from his cinematographer Declan O'Granaah.

Caiman O'Shea is a poet and singer-songwriter, and the driving force behind [The Thing Itself](#).

Older Than the Rocks



He has her still before his eyes,
the day she sat, fresh and alert.
It seemed so easy then to paint
her face. She was not proud:
though of old family, she'd married down.
But he was good to her, she said.
Three children then
(Six now, he'd heard).

And Giacondo's well?
The Count says so.
*My friend, he says, my loyal friend
released from jail. His wife, you painted her
ten years ago?*

It seems much longer, though.
I've done too much and seen too much
between that time and now,
and grown too old.

I have the painting still.
The face, the hands
Are mine – and hers
The rest? So many schemes took me away. I let
my pupils do what I could not.
When Giacondo called
he would not have it – so
now all men know
that Leonardo never ends what he's begun.

Paint her again. For me. For him.

You owe him still.

And will she come to Rome
To sit for me? I cannot ask for that.
But I have grown too old.
She's older too. Her face
is not the face I knew.

*Then let this be your task, old man
who knows so much
of faces and of time.
Paint her again, though not
as you remember her
but how you know she is,
these ten years on.*

*You say you paint the souls
of women and of men.
So finish now what you began
And paint hers, if you can.*

The old man gives a sigh, and smiles.
Tomorrow he'll begin
to paint again.

Jenny Brien

Nothing is certain in Renaissance art, but the history of the Isleworth Mona Lisa, and the argument that it is an earlier version by Da Vinci himself, can be found at monalisa.org.

From Russia with Calf



In keeping with the time of year, many of our articles this issue have to do with heritage and tradition – memories and ghosts. Respect for tradition is not always inward-looking: it can lead to the most surprising connections, as in the case of how this drawing came to me.

It begins with a young Russian who was writing a story set in Ireland, and was seeking a suitable placename for the home town of her hero. The name that caught her eye was – Ballinamallard.

For a writer, the name alone is not enough. She wanted to know its meaning, and what she found led her to send a speculative email to the village website:

My name is Anastasiia, I am very interested in Irish history and culture. According to the site [Place Names NI](#) St Columcille placed a curse on the roosters in Ballinamallard in the sixth century. I was very intrigued but could not find any further information. Could you please tell me what was the case if it is known?

In a roundabout way that such things happen in villages, the email came to me.

There is no further information, but that never stops a writer. (By chance, Columcille also features in two other stories in this issue – in the curach that inspired [Row the Erne](#), and in a stained glass window by [Wilhelmina Geddes](#)). I replied with some background on the Saint's legend. Much as I do with the Brontë's [grandfather](#), I imagined the Saint passing upriver in a currach towards the headwaters of the Strule, on his way into exile on Iona, and perhaps grounding on a gravel bank at cock-crow.

Anastasiia is a graphic artist, working under the name of Lea Daniel. Her [portfolio](#) shows influences of Beardsley, Rackham, and Morris yet is distinctively Russian. (William Morris has his own tenuous connection to Ballinamallard through the family of Rudyard Kipling, but that's another story).

The conversation continued:

Thank you for your wonderful letter! History is full of rumours and unproven tales, maybe that is what makes it so charming and captivating.

...

Thank you for your kind words about my art. I dream about illustrating Irish folktales and fairytales (Ireland makes my heart melt though I'm Russian and don't speak or understand Irish Gaelige). I would like to illustrate something. Maybe a series of stories about local saints or heroes? I'm new to all this, I'm at the beginning of my artistic path (I hope, it'll be successful) so if you have any ideas, I'd be glad to discuss them!

In return I set her my story of *The Old Woman and the Calf* which I gave at the Lisnaskea Islander Festival two years ago, and this is the result. My story was an imaginative fusion the name of the Lough in which the Erne rises (Lough Gowna, or Calf Lough) with the the legend of its overflowing from a magical well. A similar legend of the origin of Lough Neagh is found in [Lady Jane Wilde's](#) book of 1888 [Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms & Superstitions of Ireland](#)

Such stories may seem insignificant. They are not facts or even history, but they are the reason why this drawing exists. Thanks to Saint Columbcille and people like Oscar Wilde's mother and countless others who listened to such tales and passed them on, you have now been introduced to the work of a young Saint Petersburg artist.

Every story has an echo that defies time and space. If you follow it, who knows where it may lead?

Jenny Brien Editor