



Power-Hose Murals

It's Tuesday 7th July, probably the hottest day we've seen this Summer and I thought this would be a good day to work outside. I have fair hair and freckles – it wasn't!

I'm just back from completing my new series of power-hose barn murals. Some people call it reverse graffiti and I suppose that's as good a name as any. What it involves is taking a power-hose to a dirty wall and 'cleaning' an image into it. We've all tried to draw a face or write our name as we grudgingly clean the yard for our mothers, don't deny it. Well, this is the same but with a little preparation.

Actually, a lot of preparation.

When planning a mural for this technique I have to think in black and white, or light and shade. There isn't much room for subtleties unless it's a really black wall, so broad brush strokes and definite edges are the golden rules. I draw my design on paper, wrap it in plastic to water-proof it and take it with me on location. This I use as a guide to keep me from straying when I'm hanging off a ladder in a field with water spraying round my face (it's more fun than it sounds).

I've been creating these murals alongside my more traditional painting work for about five years now. I do them in association with [Sliabh Beagh Arts](#), a fantastic group I was lucky enough to get involved with who have, in many ways, changed my life. The group's main aim is to bring art out of the galleries and make it accessible and available to everyone, particularly those who would never set foot in one. My barn murals sit perfectly into that way of thinking.

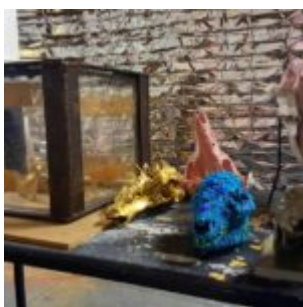
Although I've had several themes down the years I keep going back to wildlife which, funnily enough, I'd never choose to paint traditionally. I think it's the setting that points me in this direction; I want them to be part of the landscape and look like they have every right to be there. My favourite series so far has been my murals of animals that were once part of everyday life in Ireland when the forests were still here and we weren't. The brown bears, giant elk, wolves and wild boar that once again 'inhabit' the Sliabh Beagh area give me no end of pleasure when I drive past them.

What I love most about the murals I think is that you wouldn't even know they're there unless you happen to turn the right corner and look in the right direction at the right time. They're scattered widely and wildly over

Fermanagh and Tyrone, some beside main roads, others more secretive; and, as with all art, some people may look at them and think nothing of them or, more probably, "What idiot did that?" but some might see them and think that's cool.

That's enough for me.

Kevin McHugh lives and works in Lisnaskea and specialises in murals and acrylic on canvas. See more of his work at kevinmchughart.com.



[Pig Shop: Simon Fennessy Corcoran](#)

This week sees the opening of a new exhibition in the higher bridges art gallery, [Pig Shop: a collection of new works by artist Simon Fennessy Concoran](#). *Pig Shop* invites conversation on the concept of value bestowed upon different raw materials in our economy, lifestyles and art.

A Limerick native, Corcoran reaches deep into the rich history of his home, to its origins as a central hub of the pig farming industry in the early 1900's. These works remind us of a time gone by, an almost forgotten way of life, and shows it to us through symbols of the pig farming industry juxtaposed with symbols of the world that has replaced it over time. Rich, gaudy metal and mineral displayed alongside and even fused with pig bone fragments. The project originated with Simon's own keen interest in both the concept of value and anatomy.

Whilst most of the display consists of original material a small number of borrowed pieces open the tour of works in order to set the scene. Historical documents- photography and newspaper clippings develop a great sense of the origins of the work and show us a window into a bygone Limerick.

The main works running along the gallery's perimeter show us a mixture of anatomical parts and precious materials, both individually and layered on one another, with crystallised pigs toes and gold layered pig skulls on display. The back wall houses a step-like series of miniature collections deconstructing the main themes, with tiny jars of gold leaf flake and the broken down bones of a full pig's trotter. The centrepiece demands attention, with its display of full pig skulls each layered in a different precious

material. Ranging from chrome bronze leaf to gold resin and cobalt crystals the display is set to the backdrop of a huge and garish gold film curtain highlighting the modern obsession with gold.

Whilst the main attraction is most visually prominent, it is some of the less visually striking works that seem to hold more weight, like the half skull topped with a crystal mould encased in glass. Presenting the idea that it is somehow more valuable than the other works simply due to its enclosure, it raises questions about the relative value of our art as much as our economy.

Simon's work certainly brings 'meta' to the fore with multiple messages and themes hidden throughout; perfect for those wishing to really get their teeth into the meaning behind it all, like the bone fragments on a limestone slab, one of Limerick's foundations atop another. That said, it may not be for the faint of heart.

There is a surprising sense of beauty in the work considering the combination of gaudy and sometimes grotesque material, with some of the displays seeming like they've come straight from a macabre Michelin star restaurant. A display well worth checking out, *Pig Shop* will be in the [Higher Bridges Art Gallery](#) from June 3rd– July 2nd.

Caiman O'Shea



[Art that Lingers Long in the Mind](#)

If there is a *leitmotif* running through contemporary art it is one of questioning, and in particular there is the omnipresent – *What is it trying to say?* When I look upon Alex Colville's seminal painting of *Horse and Train* (1954), it makes me want tell a story. It makes me want to tell more than one, in fact. I do not pretend to know what Colville intended with the painting, but that for me is the quintessential character of the work.

The stories that this painting tells are allegorical. One would find it hard to construct a feasible scenario where a stallion may seek to tackle a steam train head-on. Note the landscape depicted in the painting, it is barren and flat and in surreal hues, set with foreboding grey skies. Although there are vast plains in Colville's Canadian homeland, this landscape is a surreal representation. It would be familiar to his audience and yet alien and

perhaps apocalyptic. Also the perspective is somewhat unusual in that it presents the muscular posterior of the black stallion in the forefront and diminishes the more powerful steam locomotive into the distance.

The depiction of the diminishing railway track also significantly foreshortens the perspective, making the two characters in the play appear far closer than they actually are. This adds a tension in that a disaster appears imminent and gives the viewer an intimate and perhaps uncomfortable front-row seat.

It could be a representation of an inter-generational relationship, perhaps a father and a son in crisis, as the two seem hell-bent on going head to head – the older man, stubborn and headstrong, defying the rational convention against the blind, unthinking and unfeeling armour-plated determination of the young buck, ploughing on without consideration. It could be telling the story of a farm and the need to adapt to the changes brought about by emerging technology and consumer demand in the wider society. Another story takes in the wider context of the 1950's, where the world and its peoples emerged shattered and broken after the second world war, technology bringing unheralded change to how we live and ultimately how we are as people. The old certainties of the past being challenged by radical new thought, with little time taken, or so it seemed, for reflection and due consideration; those were worrisome times.

I believe that the stories implicit in the work have important lessons for today. We are once again going through times of great uncertainty, technological and societal changes conjugate once more to unsettle and unnerve, the questions that arose when Colville first produced the work are with us again.

John Llewellyn James is a poet and a member of Fermanagh Writers

Horse and Train is exhibited at the [Art Gallery of Hamilton](#) Ontario, Canada.

Image from the [official site](#) of Alex Colville

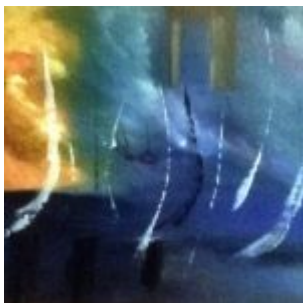


Life as an Artist

People often ask me how did you get started in art. Well it was pretty simple. About six years ago a friend told me he had an appointment with a gallery to show his art to a curator, so I asked if I might paint something and go along with him. He said OK. I painted that night for the first time. We arrived at the gallery, myself with one canvas, my friend with six. The curator laid them against the wall, picked up mine – laid it against another wall and studied it for about twenty minutes. He sat on the floor, so I sat beside him.

My first painting that day sold for a thousand euros. So the journey began, and it's taken me all around Ireland, teaching other people how to do it. When your eyes first encounter that blank white canvas it can be daunting, but smile; therein lies a great mystery of life and art to your life that's dead simple to explain. Here goes – some handy tips to maybe get you started.

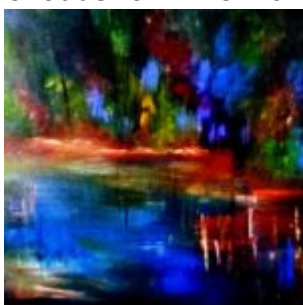
I knew nothing about art, so the first point I want to make is you don't have to know anything about art to begin with. Down through the last few years giving classes I would say to people who didn't even try to paint – let your heart dictate to the canvas. Yes, blend a load of colour and see what arrives. Don't restrict yourself by saying I can't paint – just hit the canvas and keep going.



The Tall Ships



Clouds on the Water



A Study in Light



Ballet Night

Use Vaseline to keep your hands supple and after painting it's easy to remove the paint. Some people like to use gloves but I find it restricts the movement in my hands. A couple of days before I begin a canvas I use tea and white spirits to clean my brushes thoroughly. On some canvases I use a wash of white spirits and beer. I find it gives a nice gleam to the surface with some linseed oil.

I like landscapes and abstracts. If you're into abstract art, remember – people buy more for colour rather than content. They see colour and think of the walls in their sitting rooms and halls and I bet they will like your colour so don't worry too much about content; the best thing is just hit the canvas. Don't try to paint, but let the brushes just roll on the canvas. Don't worry about copying someone else. A lot of people like Monet's paintings but if you study the master's works, JW Turner's style is much the same. As Monet was living in London I would say its a good bet he copied Turner.

OK, I hope you enjoy reading this. Have fun, and see where it goes.

Zeus Cooney is a self-taught artist based in Dublin

'71

It's not often that a French friend emails me about a film which, 'I must absolutely see'. She had just watched it at the 2015 Cannes Film Festival and wondered if I had already seen it; I hadn't. The film was the superb directorial debut by Yann Demange: **'71**. When presented at the Berlin Film Festival in 2014, it had five nominations and won him the award for Best Director.

Set in West Belfast in 1971, during early years of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the film is a behind-the-lines look at the impact of the conflict on both the civilians population and the British army. The plot is not new;

during action a young and inexperienced soldier, Gary Hook, becomes separated from his unit led by an equally inexperienced Lieutenant. Severely beaten, and after witnessing the killing of a comrade, he finds himself abandoned in enemy territory – the Falls Road – a British soldier in blood stained army fatigues.

There are echoes here of the 1948 James Mason thriller *Odd Man Out* in which an IRA gunman passes a night hiding from the British army in the same city. Hook navigates the nightscape of battle torn, rubble-strewn streets lit by the flames of burning cars. It could be any city at war.

His ordeal will lead him through loyalist strongholds and see him become a ploy in a nationalist plot. There is a heart-stopping chase sequence through alleys and demolished houses in war-torn Belfast in which he is hunted down by the IRA.

Where '71 excels is in its avoidance of the tone of tragic correctness which most dramas about the Troubles assume. It faces squarely the complexity of the 'enemy within' in a world where the UK authorities are running high-level informers, and the Provisionals are plotting against their own chiefs; bad blood and bad faith making it impossible to know who to trust. There are no heroes here, no redemption moment; only the tragic reality of human beings caught up in violent conflict. The re-creation of West Belfast in the early 1970's is the most realistic I have seen on film. Added to a sense of detachment with which the subject is presented, this makes '71 one of the most real and immediate films on the 30-year conflict.

With Black Taxi Tours of the area now making the world of '71 seem very far away, if not unreal, such films serve to remind us of what was 'lest we forget.'

Chris Campbell retired to her native Enniskillen after working and living in Belfast and Belgium for many years. The Brussels Cinema Museum stoked her love of the art form and she is a member of the [Fermanagh Film Club](#).