

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.