

Pat Harris

*The Weight of
Light*

For Seán

Two Moons

*The moon above Sligo
Is not
The moon above Mayo.*

Dermot Healy





















































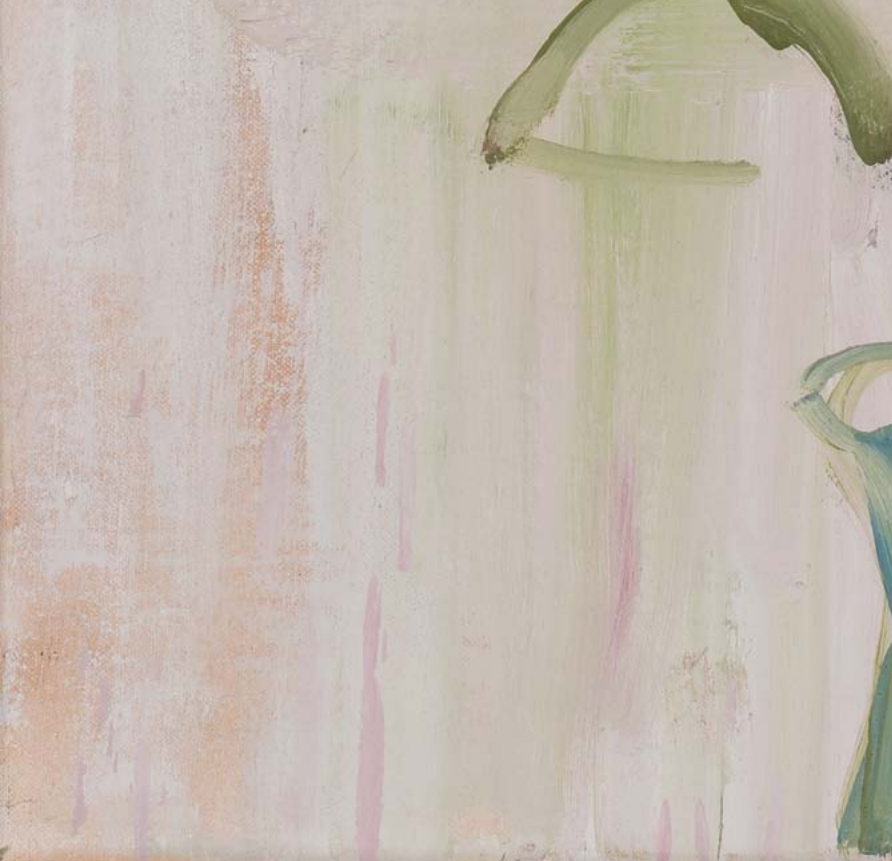
















*'The man who does not realise the difficulty of art never does anything worthwhile,
The man who realises it too soon does nothing at all.'*

When I was a student at the NCAD in 1975, I stumbled upon this quote, attributed to Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin. I wrote it down and carried it with me for the rest of my painting life.

It pins down the essential complexity of art making in general and of painting in particular. What I believe Chardin is saying, is that there is more happening in a painting than the narrative or the material or the surface alone. There is something quiet, almost secret, and mysterious going on between these players: between the image and the paint, between one mark and another, between the painting's first tentative beginnings and its conclusion; sometimes months, if not years later.

I once had the pleasure of visiting the Museum of Fine Art in Antwerp with the late Stephen McKenna and when I drew Stephen's attention to a beautiful Frans Snyder painting, he replied: 'Yes, it's having a good day today'. Until then I hadn't realised that a painting could have good or bad days, but this too is true.

And this is why painting is sometimes impossible, and why it's best not to discover this too early. But to never discover this, would be to never do anything worthwhile.

I had been painting for many years and yet, one fine day, I suddenly realised that my favourite Rembrandt paintings are just a load of paint on a surface, nothing less, but also nothing more.

While there have been all sorts of theories about his technique and the secret mediums he did or did not use, they are chiefly pigment mixed with stand oil on linen. It is this acceptance that makes them so magical.

If these things are just paint on linen, now about 350 years old, and are still reaching out to people all over the world, causing them to look, to stare, to wonder, sometimes even to cry, then this in its self is a testament to the power of paint. Of its ability to absorb, retain and convey content and emotion, and this in the texture of its surface, be it thin, thick, transparent or opaque.

The National Gallery in London houses two of my favourite paintings: Margaretha De Geer by Rembrandt and The Entombment by Dirk Bouts. The Rembrandt is an oil painting, while the Bouts is one of the last surviving examples of a glue tempera painting. The Bouts is fragile, marked by age, in places transparent and beautifully delicate, its linen support now not only visible but also contributing to the painting's overall presence. The Rembrandt is a painting of an old woman: Margaretha de Geer, she's robust, hands like shovels, and very present; she may be 350 years old, but she knows she'll outlive me and every spectator that visits her. I once cried while looking at her, realising what could be done in paint, what presence could be created and, more to the point, what I couldn't do but what I so much wanted to do.

Painting has brought me through many genres: portraits, nudes, still life, and of late, landscapes based on the North Mayo Coastline. It's a coastline of continuous change, of light that makes all visible and then at a whim dissolves rocks, stacks and headland before your very eyes.

The west coast of Ireland has attracted many generations of artists. Ludwig Wittgenstein, having spent some time in Roscoe at Killary Harbour, described it as 'the last pool of darkness' and maybe it is this mystery that attracts artists. Or just the feeling that you are on the edge, the edge of Europe and maybe the edge of the artistic world.

My neighbours and friends in North Mayo are sheep farmers, people I love and respect. But it wasn't a sheep farmer that brought us: my wife and fellow artist Linda Ruttelynck, and I, to this neck of the woods. It was Seán McSweeney and the Ballinglen Arts Foundation. Seán was a dear friend and lover of the western shore. He wanted, maybe needed, to share its beauty, and over the years he coaxed many friends and artists to his part of Ireland.

His late paintings were all based on the Sligo shoreline and bog pools. His painting *The Poet's House* is an iconic image, a painting of Dermot Healy's house in Ballyconnell, Sligo. While Seán walked, drew and painted this landscape, Dermot wrote, wrote about its colour, its smell, its sound but also its people; their shared neighbours.

His poem *Two Moons* has three lines, ten words, but it's a poem I've read and reread and each time I've read it

differently, have heard something new, something I hadn't heard before.

It tells me of time and place, of things particular and of things universal.

The paintings that this small publication accompanies are also about the particular and the universal. They draw their inspiration from the coastline of Carrowteige and Kilgalligan in North Mayo, from its rocks, stacks and headland. But also from small flowers that I brought into my studio. They are built up in layers, over time, in some cases weeks, in others months, in a few cases a year or more.

They are an attempt not just to paint a rock, a stack or flower but also the space and time they occupy, the light that makes them visible.

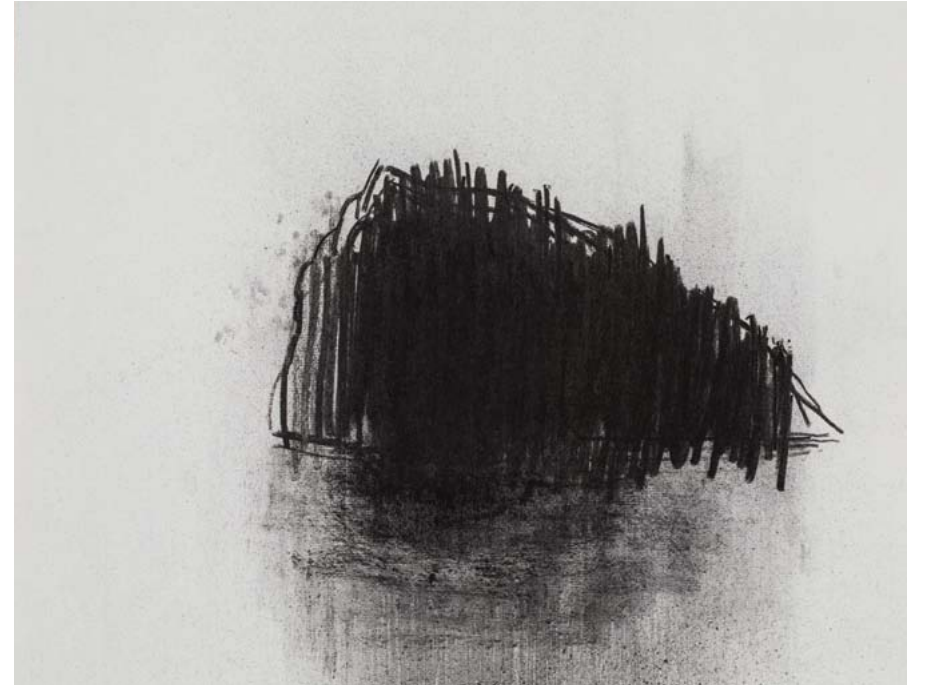
The motifs: the players, are needed to make the space, the time and the light that lies between what is, visible.

With paint, with marks, I've tried to make space, light and time visible.

But maybe painting has always been about this. About how we observe space and light, the space we move through, the time and place we occupy. I use paint as a blind man uses a white stick to find his way, in his case maybe through a dark unknown, in my case, through a light unknown, but a light that has weight and is tangible.

There was indeed a woman called Margaretha de Geer, she was born in Liège, Belgium, in 1583 and died in Dordrecht in 1672. The woman hanging in the National Gallery in London was made in paint by Rembrandt van Rijn in 1661.

Pat Harris
October 2018

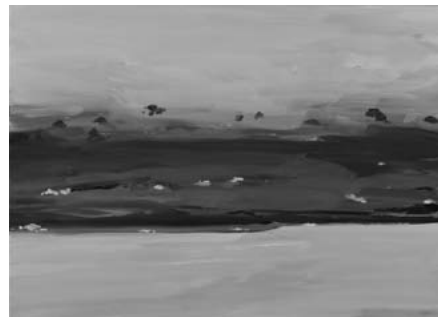


14 *Charraig Mhòr*
2018, charcoal on paper,
43 x 53 cm



01

03



05

06



08

09

01 *Sunset for Howard II*
2017, oil on linen,
80 x 100 cm

03 *Stack Vancouver Island*
2018, oil on linen,
80 x 110 cm

05 *Stags summer*
2018, oil on linen,
60 x 80 cm

06 *The other side*
2018, oil on linen,
80 x 110 cm

08 *From Portacloy*
2018, oil on linen,
80 x 110 cm

09 *Mist summer*
2018, oil on linen,
60 x 80 cm

10 *Sunset for Howard*
2017, oil on linen,
80 x 100 cm

11 *For Basil*
2016, oil on linen,
50 x 65 cm

12 *Island for a painter*
2018, oil on linen,
60 x 80 cm



10



11



12



02



04



07



13

02 *White rose*
2018, oil on linen,
50 x 40 cm

04 *Pink rose*
2018, oil on linen,
50 x 40 cm

07 *Rose*
2018, oil on linen,
50 x 40 cm

13 *Red flower*
2018, oil on linen,
60 x 50 cm

Pat Harris
Born in Dublin

Studies:

1973 - 1978 The National College of Art & Design Dublin

1978 - 1981 The National Higher Institute of Fine Arts Antwerp

2007 Elected a member of Aosdána - aosdana.artsCouncil.ie

2008 Awarded a PhD in Fine Art, University of Antwerp

2015 Elected an Associate Member of the Royal Hibernian
Academy - rhagallery.ie

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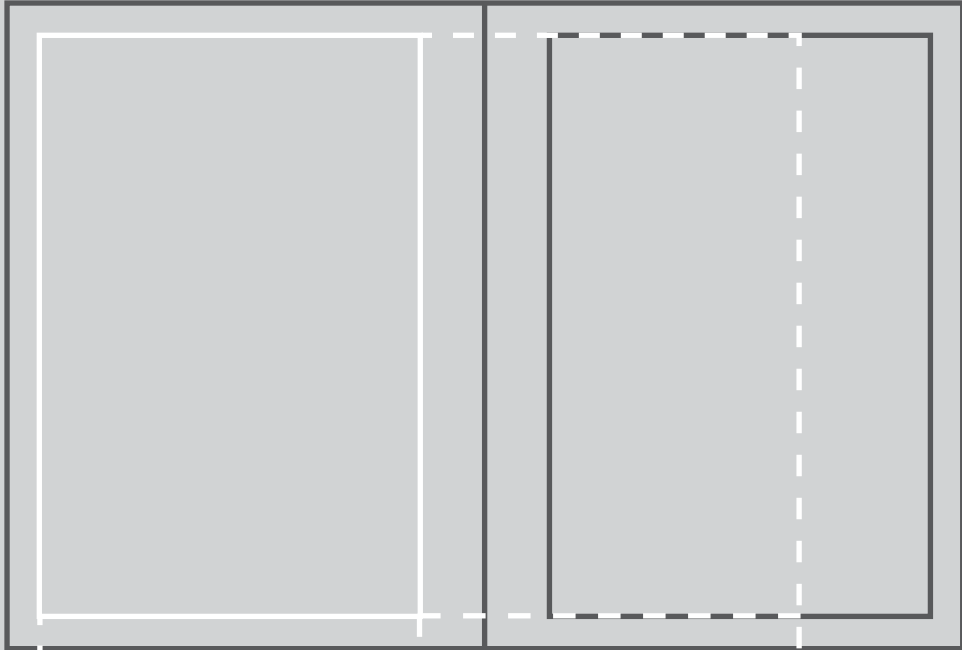
Linda Ruttelynck, my partner and fellow artist,
for loving, as much I do, 'the last pool of darkness'.

Taylor Galleries Dublin

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