

Cúram

AMY McGOVERN

Amy McGovern is a mixed-media visual artist. Her work is wide-ranging across drawing, watercolour, acrylic and gouache, and has been shown in numerous exhibitions in the North West. Unforgettable in its poignancy and beauty was her drawing *'Darkness Descends'* in response to the Yeats Poem *'The Cloak, the Boat and the Shoes'* at the 2013 Tread Softly invited artists' exhibition *'A Perfect Beauty'*. Similarly, the desolate and derelict buildings drawn in such a fine and evocative style for an exhibition named *'Unknown'* and *'Whale'* - the beached blue whale painted in oils below an icy Polar moon which featured in *'Finally We are No-One'* are images that remain in the consciousness.

Amy has also worked in schools and health care settings. For the last five years she has been connected to a rural health centre catering for older people with varying health needs. During that time, Amy has come to know several of the participants very well. She brings new art experiences to the group, linked to their locality, history and interests, and admires their willingness to consider and attempt all of the visual arts exercises she suggests to them, even if they initially find them strange and unfamiliar...

"the participants are often a little sceptical at first, being presented with something that is very new to them, but they are very good at engaging and giving new artforms a try".

In order to connect with participants in a way that has meaning for them, Amy has found the book of images *"Ghosts of the Faithful Departed"* to be very useful as a trigger to making work. It also provides a uniting element in terms of a common memory bank, in that it illustrates in coloured photographs the interiors of abandoned houses which still retain the vestiges of habitation. Often clothes, food, and culinary and work implements remain in the wardrobes and on the shelves and tables they would have occupied when people lived and worked in those homes. What remains tells a poignant story.

Amy's own eclectic collection of vintage items includes lace tablecloths, flowered and geometric wallpaper samples and remnants, and an ochre photocopy of the Gleaners, identified by her own grandmother as a familiar scene in old houses.

She has found that the abandoned interiors revealed in *"Ghosts of the Faithful Departed"* resonate with clients, and some of the group have made art based on the objects which feature in the photographs, often on pieces of patterned wallpaper and plasterboard from that era which lends its own texture and depth to the finished pieces. The tracing of wallpaper patterns seemed to serve as a calming and mindful exercise, helpful where agitation and stress were evident.

Work Created for the Exhibition

For the exhibition, Amy has based many of her own works on and around these patterns and textures, painting onto them the religious and political icons most commonly found hanging in the kitchens and living rooms of that era.

John F. Kennedy's face is immediately recognisable in a minimal line drawing on thick textured wallpaper;

the Virgin Mary appears in another piece, more detailed lines enclosing her in a grotto-like surround upon waves and swirls of blue cloud and lace patterns;

the graceful ferns from a wallpaper remnant appear in another painting;

a Child of Prague is painted in lustrous red and gold on layers of peeling wallpaper pasted to a discarded piece of plasterboard.....

"I've always been interested in how nature has been brought into the home in the past, through patterns in wallpaper and textiles and also in how these seemingly delicate and feminine patterns sat side by side with images of violence, like the Crucifixion, and to a lesser extent, the Sacred Heart".

In a further image of the Child of Prague, a black ink line-drawing brushes shoulders with a panel of the 'beauty board' used so commonly to disguise the old irregular damp walls of cottages and farmhouses.

The collection of line drawings continues with

St. Patrick standing, sceptre in hand, banishing from Ireland the snakes at his feet;

The Sacred Heart image benignly blesses its home, a strip of beauty board running by its side;

And more political icons are represented by Amy too -

Constance Markievicz emerges out of the flowered wallpaper of the time, a wide strip of unadorned blue paint at her left appearing to signify the solemnity of her role;

James Connolly also peers out of floral wallpaper, given however an unadorned lilac corner similarly appearing to signify responsibility;

and finally there is Pádraig Pearse, his famous profile drawn on wallpaper-like pale terracotta ferns that whirl about his head and hint perhaps at the mind of the academic, dreamer and poet...

Surprisingly among the aforementioned and familiar cottage icons, Jean Françoise Millet's 'The Gleaners' was identified as an image found hanging in many rural homes, its agrarian essence universally transferable.

Amy has found her Arts in Health experience a rewarding one. She loves the centre she works in and feels she is loved by the clients. The group work spills over to inform her own art practice which is currently infused with elements of Irish rural life past and present.

As a young artist continually exploring past in the present, she is struck by the notion that the altar of former country houses with its wildflowers and religious imagery, is today represented by the television as a focal point.

Maura Gilligan,

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