

setting suns close horizons

Selected dip-pen and ink drawings from lockdown walks in 2020

PRESS RELEASE

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ONLINE EXHIBITION

Studio Viewing Room

www.nickmiller.ie

12th November 2020 - 31st January 2021



Ink drawings, studio wall, Co Sligo, August 2020



RP : Setting sun 1-6-20

Pen & ink on Arches paper, 20 x 20 cm

[Studio Viewing Room](#) | An online only exhibition of drawings

I often make series of works on paper to nurture my own energetic relationship with painting, experimental tangents for their own sake. In normal times, when planned exhibitions occupy me, these works fill up storage draws and are rarely, if ever seen. Responding to the existential impact of Covid 19 in the context of cancellations and indefinite delays to real world projects at home and abroad, I began to have the urge to open those draws and see could that work have a life in the world. With restrictions in place, the choice to do it on my own website in a DIY Studio Viewing Room is an attempt to adapt to the current limitations and see if I could find my own way to exhibit and communicate more directly from the life I inhabit as a painter on the outer coastal edge of Europe in the North west of Ireland.

Social media & instagram work for many artists, but, despite their usefulness in connecting widely in the world, they also can breed anxiety, alongside a platform dominance and behaviour that does not always appeal. At the risk of furthering obscurity, I prefer to try present work as cohesively as possible in a personal digital space, in the same way I would attempt to imagine a show for a physical gallery.

I decided to open the Studio Viewing Room with – [setting suns | close horizons](#) – partly because I like the way that smaller ink drawings reproduce online, and because it seemed appropriate to show some works from the recent months of the pandemic that has affected us all. The setting sun connecting with the deeper rhythms of time and our place in the world, while the horizon calls us to reach out, dream and imagine.

setting suns I close horizons : Drawing though a pandemic

The impulse to draw again grew strong soon after Ireland went into its first pandemic lockdown in March 2020. Like most people, I began walking off some of the Covid 19 stress within a two kilometre radius of home. I recognise my good fortune in living in a small coastal village just outside Sligo in the North west of Ireland where we are surrounded by the Atlantic on three sides and an endlessly changing world of weather, sky, sea and land. The spring and early summer had some freakishly good weather that sandwiched the first lockdown, almost to the hour.

In April, as my mind and body began to stabilise in the face of the endless Covid news cycle, I began pausing during walks, to sit and draw. Over the previous two years I had started experimenting with dip pens, nibs and ink, attracted to the difficulty and awkwardness of using those traditional tools with a medium that is extremely unforgiving of uncertainty in action.

In coming to terms with realities of our shrinking world, I sat near the dilapidated Elsinore House where the Yeats family used to spend their summers in Rosses Point. I was lamenting amongst other cancelled exhibitions, the loss of a major show and catalogue being produced by the Museum de Buitenplaats, a small museum, in the north of Holland, focusing on relationships to landscape and Co Sligo in the work of Jack B Yeats and in my own earlier Truckscapes. The autumn of 2020 was due to have been an outward, exhibiting phase of my work cycle, the culmination of 2 years of planning for the Yeats, and another solo project in New York. Not physically afflicted by the virus, the impacts on life were difficult, but also offered a unique kind of pivot to freedom from obligations or expectations over career and life.

I began drawing; unconsciously channelling something of Jack as I looked towards Coney Island and “The Metal Man” (a painted steel figure whose pointing finger and flashing lights guide sea traffic safely into Sligo Bay). I slowly began to release myself from fears, thoughts and lost opportunities, to encounter the close horizons of Rosses Point, the same views that had filled his childhood memory bank more than one hundred and thirty years ago, giving him subjects for early graphic work and the embedded atmospheric landscape forms that populated many of his iconic late paintings

The walks and drawings became another way to inhabit lockdown days, they were something urgent and direct, separate from the paintings and the uncertain future projects that proceed at their own pace in the studio. I often walked at the end of the day to the spectacle of setting suns, which became golden magnets for attention. The sun is a moving target, and drawing its descending arc completed the circle of my own days that start in the sea, swimming at sunrise. I managed to release some fear about the world and the materials I was using, to use the nibs and ink with the necessary commitment to have a chance of a reasonable drawing. The relief of starting to find a new subject and approach was huge, it felt like the return of possibility, and of life energy itself. I continued to draw as movement restrictions began to lift, straying to other locations, on the coast, around the studio and during a brief ‘staycation’ in Donegal before the second national lockdown took effect.

Nick Miller,
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RP : Setting sun - Deadman's Point 24-9-20
Pen & ink on Waterford paper
26 x 36 cm (unframed)

