

In 1984, I left England for Ireland. In my early twenties I had little purpose other than to avoid a life to which I did not connect and to learn to paint out of sight (of whom I was not sure). I had no route to follow nor sense of allegiance, just an accumulated set of passionate delusions about art.

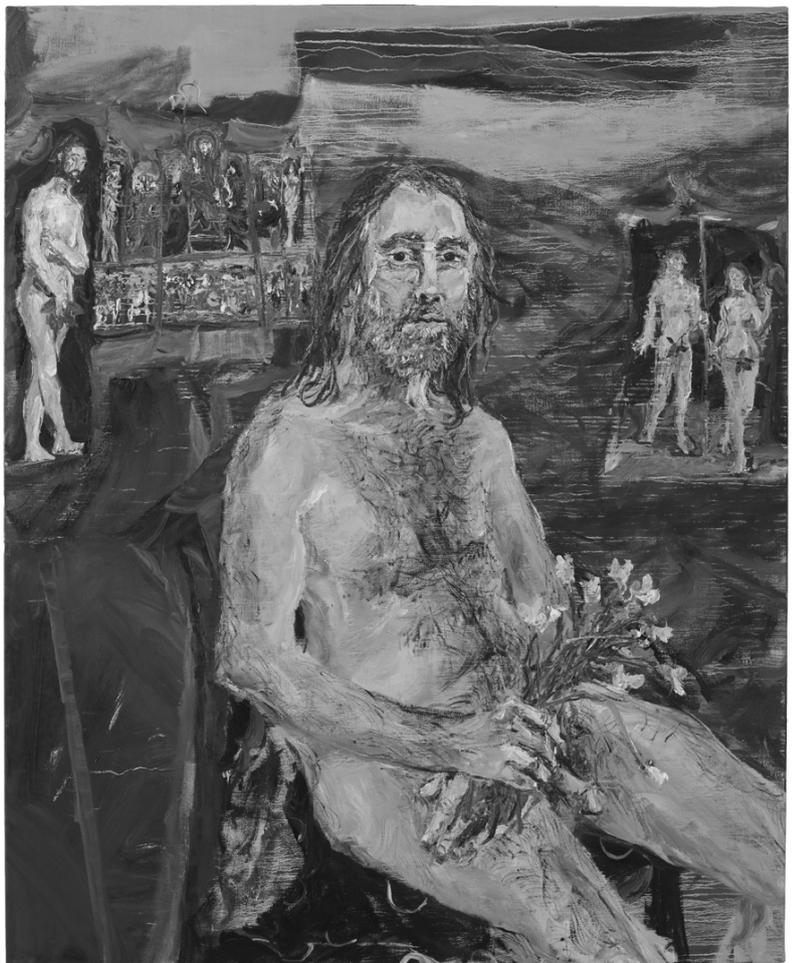
I never really related to academic traditions of painting, nor to the growing predominance of ideas based art that absorbs many. The latter however, did give some freedom; if “anything was art”, so maybe was this painting. Being untutored and resistant to advice can have some advantages; if you are lucky, your misunderstandings become your strengths, and you can evolve a singular vision. While I could appreciate qualities of art; light, colour, composition, etc. I did not consciously pursue them, they were never what drove me to the studio, to the meeting between self, material and subject.

In 1986 an Irish writer, a friend, lent me a book: “*I and Thou*” by Martin Buber (Berlin, 1922). There is no space here to do the contents justice, but in reduced terms it addresses the two principal ways we humans meet the world: There is the “I - It” familiar to us from much experience and activity, where we do not allow ourselves to be transformed by our meetings; and the less common ‘encounter’ of “I - You”. On those, rarer, occasions when the “You” is fully engaged with and met, we are changed. It is as if the entire universe exists and is apprehended through the “You”. We can enter into one of these “You” encounters with any thing that we experience: with inanimate objects, with animals, nature and with man. The book is not an abstract theoretical tome, but a quiet call to open the self and develop this second mode of engagement. By some alignment of temperament and circumstance, I took Buber’s call to heart and developed a practice in painting that centred on giving attention to the nature of ‘encounter’. When I am asked to explain my attempts to paint in the studio, Buber’s writing has been one strong reference point for the last 30 years.

The paintings are for me what remains of that practiced ‘encounter’. They are always made in the presence of the subject, whatever that may be; person, landscape, object or mind, and they are also made during the limited time in which that encounter occurs. Painting for me is an experimental kind of alchemy, transforming the material and energy that is present in a ‘meeting’ into a new form that has a necessity of its own. It may simply be an attempt to pay attention to reality with all the difficulties that entails, and I have learnt that while this approach can be consciously cultivated, it is best not to overthink, as ‘encounter’ is illusive and easily lost.



Steel Yard, studio view. Oil on linen. 42 x 48”.
Nick Miller 2013



Portrait of a journalist sitting: John Waters. Oil on linen. 60 x 48”
Nick Miller 2013