

THE BANGOR LITERARY JOURNAL

ASPECTS ISSUE 19



Featuring The Bangor Poetry Competition Winners; Writer Stephen Smythe; Artist John Rubery and Exceptional Poetry, Flash Fiction, Art and Photography from our Contributors.

Cover Image: 'Boxed Life' by John Rubery

Editors' Welcome

Welcome to our very special Aspects Literary Festival issue 19.

This issue is packed to the rafters with three distinctive features, plus exceptional poetry, flash fiction, art and photography.

Our first feature showcases the ten shortlisted poets in the 10th Annual Bangor Poetry Competition, who were selected from hundreds of entries on the theme of STRENGTH. These ten poems were then displayed in our online gallery and voted on by the public (this year we had just under 500 votes).

At Aspects Festival, in Bangor Castle, we were delighted to announce this year's winner: Maurice Devitt with his poem 'Clearing the House'. Maurice was presented with his certificate by the Mayor of North Down and Ards, Karen Douglas in the stunning chamber room. We would like to offer a huge congratulations to Maurice, and to every poet who was placed and shortlisted in the competition. We would also like to offer our thanks to everyone who entered the competition this year and to those who voted on their top three poems.

We are also thrilled to feature writer Stephen Smythe, who won the 2022 FORTY Words Competition. Stephen joined us in Bangor (the whole way from Manchester) and held the audience captive with his fiction shorts. In addition, John Rubery, our featured artist attended the event and sketched those on the stage and in the audience. You can read both Stephen and John's intriguing interviews in this issue.

We would like to take this opportunity to let you know that The Bangor Literary Journal will be taking a one-year break. This will mean that there will be no more issues published until 2024, nor will there be a FORTY Words or Bangor Poetry Competition next year. Both of us are taking time to concentrate on some of our own work and projects, but we cannot wait to come back refreshed with issue 20 after the interval.

Thank you to everyone who has supported us in the journey so far, we hope you enjoy this wonderful issue.

Amy and Paul



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FEATURE

THE 10th ANNUAL BANGOR POETRY COMPETITION



Winners

Winner

Maurice Devitt
Clearing the House

Runner Up

Ann-Marie Foster
Slammed

Third Prize

Pamela McNutt
Thran

Highly Commended

Ross Thompson
Field Of Fire

Commended

Lynda Hewitt
Parental physics at an inflatable water park

Shortlisted

Richard Lister
Wrapped

Shortlisted

Glen Wilson
Independence Square, Kyiv

Shortlisted

Shelley Tracey
Things with claws

Shortlisted

Meg McCleery
How did it ever come to this

Shortlisted

Kate Ennals
An Old Woman on the Deserted Prom at Hardelot Plage

Winner

Maurice Devitt

A past winner of the Trocaire/Poetry Ireland and Poems for Patience competitions, he published his debut collection, 'Growing Up in Colour', with Doire Press in 2018.

Curator of the Irish Centre for Poetry Studies site, his Pushcart-nominated poem, 'The Lion Tamer Dreams of Office Work', was the title poem of an anthology published by Hibernian Writers in 2015.



Clearing the House

for Matthew

You open the door,
stop in the hallway to listen,
a fuzzy silence surrounds you.

Pass through the rooms
as though for the first time –
everything looks different
without her:

ornaments, once a concatenation
of trophies from her vibrant life,
cower in their own dust,
nervous lights flicker, uncertain what to do

and family photographs
picked up and studied a hundred times,
are distant and unfamiliar,
reluctant to make eye contact.

You step into the kitchen,
hoping for respite,
to be met
by the tidiness of absence,
all the questions you never asked.

By Maurice Devitt

Runner Up

Ann-Marie Foster

Ann-Marie Foster is a radio journalist and broadcaster who has lived in Bangor all her life. She likes using adjectives – which she can't use in work. But her work does provide inspiration, as does her family. She's had some success with her poetry but it's a work in progress.



Slammed

The only time I heard my daddy swear
Was when he slid a man up a wall by his collar.

He heard the threat against my sister.

I was so astounded at the fuck off
That I didn't appreciate the adrenaline effort,
At sixty years of frustration
Of pushing sixteen stones of drunken gobshite flesh
A foot in the air.

I never heard him swear again.

By Ann-Marie Foster

Third Prize

Pamela McNutt

Pamela took up writing when she retired.

She joined the Bertha Writing group in East Belfast which encourages many forms of literary expression including comedy drama and has performed her work at open mic events.

She has had one piece of flash fiction published in Books Ireland magazine June 2022.



Thran

I'll just do another wee section of weeding,
Before I can call it a day.

Dandelions stealthily encroaching my flower beds,
Next stop is the composting bay.

It's easy to tell a weed from a flower,
The flowers pull up easily, the weeds have more power.

Maybe it's due to the tap roots' long length,
Or maybe just due to their thranness and strength.

By Pamela McNutt

Highly Commended

Ross Thompson

Ross Thompson is a writer and Arts Council award recipient from Bangor, Northern Ireland. His debut poetry collection *Threading The Light* is published by Dedalus Press. His work has appeared on television, radio, short films and in a wide range of publications. Most recently, he wrote and curated *A Silent War*, a collaborative audio response to the COVID-19 pandemic. He is currently preparing a second full-length book of poems.



Field Of Fire

It had not rained for weeks, and the wheat field
by the dual carriageway was huskdry, parched,
ready to go up at the slightest spark.

The crops flamed for hours. The blaze would not yield
to the pulsating reservoir relayed
by the fire brigade. The fight was hard won

and when done the land looked scorched by the sun,
battle-scarred, laid out like a tacky lake
of spilt tar. The wind smelled sharp like burnt beer.

A steaming haze hung like a startled flock
of birds pinned to the air, an action shot
of a disturbed cloud of dust that, when cleared,

revealed that all the trees survived. No leaf
was scathed and no trunk was charred though the ground
about hissed with residual heat. We found

a miracle just like the untouched fleece.
Sometimes gentle mercies can be observed
in this peculiar, mercurial world.

By Ross Thompson

Commended

Lynda Hewitt

Lynda Hewitt is usually found near words or children. A copywriter and communications manager by trade, she spends her spare time reading, writing, and picking up Lego.



Parental physics at an inflatable water park

Eventually I find you, dangling above the lake like someone has hooked you onto a coat-hanger and left you out to dry in a summer breeze

*childhood is seeing a trapeze
and heading straight for it*

Too small to reach the other side, you have run out of swing and now you lock me in with wide, panicked eyes

*fear brims like minnows in a hazel pool,
glinting amber beneath the surface*

Just hold on, I shout as I bounce nightmare slow across the obstacle course, each exaggerated step
a slippery test. I wrap one arm around a post and stretch out star-like into empty space

*determination is my soft and sagging body
pulling itself sinew taut to reach you*

Fully extended, my fingertips brush your lifejacket just enough to set in motion a gentle sway. You start to slip but momentum brings you back again

*motherhood is realising my centre of gravity will never
be located within my skin and bones again*

I grip tight and pull.

By Lynda Hewitt

Shortlisted

Richard Lister

Richard draws you into stories of intriguing characters, images and places. His work is carved into the Radius sculpture, published in nine international magazines (including Orbis and Sky Island) and is audio-exhibited at Watts Gallery. He draws on his experience of living and working in Cambodia, Malawi and England.



Wrapped

A grid: haze of smoky shifting greys.
Beyond, below, sliced line, railway leads to a cluster of carbon black, smoke stacks,
factories to manufacture what? Target got for bomber just turned nineteen, Jack, cold as ice-
packed cod, pupils wide, nerves shot, each ack-ack blast judders Lancaster bolts, will be their
last, cannot see
for smoke and grit and tears, jerks the lever
and she drops
smooth,
steel
wrapped.

Swaddled.
The siren shrieks shredding
thought, caught in the hall, no shelter
in this part of town, Marlana dives
under stairs, squeezes up, scent-close
to the sweet stack of pine, her winter fuel,
jerks to try to close the door,
squeaks to a halt, will not budge,
cradles Uli between her knees,
her hands, her face,
holds tight.

An Afghan flight: a drone on 'seek',
tapered,
bleak,
no windows,
there's no one in but in a Houston room, Jack, just turned nineteen, ice cubes floating in his
coke,
a paler line and kicks of dust, militia men he thinks for sure, target won, button pressed,
Larmina rests,
against a wall,
head swathed,
missile sent,
baby Aina
held close,
time's up.
Shift
wrapped.

By Richard Lister

Shortlisted

Glen Wilson

Glen Wilson is a multi-award winning Poet from Portadown. He won the Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing (2017), the Jonathan Swift Creative Writing Award (2018), the Trim Poetry competition (2019), and Slipstream Open Poetry competition (2021). His collection *An Experience on the Tongue* is available now. Twitter @glenhswilson <https://www.doirepress.com/bookstore/poetry/>



Independence Square, Kyiv

Trails of smoke dissipate like poor rumours
as the sirens cease for the night,

and the statue of Berehynia
holds her flowers out,

not aloft to be unreachable
but high for all to see

its promises, as they halo
down to the Maidan.

For there is a gold that always
sits above the verdigris,

there is a sky no slogan can stain,
no matter what dark words loiter,

there are voices yet to form vowels
that already know how to sing.

The ghosts of old heroes brush shoulders
with the bruised awkward young,

catching breath behind the sandbags
across an empty market street,

the dust fans out wings in the beams
breaking curfew,

sunflowers rise from their prayers
to face the dawn.

By Glen Wilson

Shortlisted

Shelley Tracey

Shelley Tracey's first collection was *Elements of Distance* (2017). Poems have also been published in *Bloody Amazing*, *The Haibun Journal*, *Drifting Sands Journal*, *Artemis Poetry*, *Abridged*, *The Bangor Literary Journal*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *Skylight 47*, *The North*, *North West Words*, *The Bray Literary Journal* and on *Ink, Sweat and Tears*.



Things with claws

Hooks but not eyes. Lightning but not rain. Seagulls and eagles, but not hummingbirds or penguins. The bully girls, but not their younger selves. The ends of fishing lines, but not palpating mouths.

The fire that tore through all the albums. The crags that pierced the plane. An illness that will not let go. Gramophones that scratch and scar. Cranes and diggers. Chainsaws gashing trees. Skin diseases. Something someone never should have done to you. A rupture in your body that will last.

The scar you scored into your nephew's arm. The fear in Auntie Maggie's soft blue eyes. Sclerosis of your hands and feet. Your tight jawline in profile, your narrowed eyes. The grabber used for lifting things, for slashing at your little boys. The wardrobe where you hid their letters from their absent dad. The hangers with your coats and skirts that no one wants to rid us of.

By Shelley Tracey

Shortlisted

Meg McCleery

Meg studied at QUB and UUI and is a former College lecturer in English Literature and Media. She also ran Creative Writing classes in Belfast Community and Women's Centres. She was awarded third place in the seventh Bangor Poetry competition 2019 and has had poetry published in Poetry Now, Poetry Anthology, The Bangor Literary Journal, CAP Anthology, North Star, and other various anthologies. Originally from Belfast, Meg now lives in North Down and is working on her first novel.



How did it ever come to this?

Watching the light break
Breathing deeply and storing
Morning promises

We sit like robots, all four of us hooked up to our healing poison.
A ritual is beginning. First the intake of breath as the catheter goes in, then the slow dripping of hope as we are connected up to our umbilical cord.
The monitor beeps alarmingly sending panic at first, we've watched too many hospital dramas, but it is ok, just a temporary blockage freed by the ever-patient nurses.
So here we are, this exclusive band of warriors, strangers yet combatants together.
No one speaks. Privacy is guarded as we whisper the answers to the nurse's questions.
Magic radio sounds out, an irritating distraction from the stillness in the room. Cheery tunes incongruous with our worried thoughts.
Then we are disconnected. Serviced for another short while until the ritual begins all over again. Back home it all seems surreal, how did it ever come to this?

Sunset

Amber glow shining
Illuminating the room
Catching evening hope

By Meg McCleery

Shortlisted

Kate Ennals

Kate Ennals is a poet and writer and has published poems and short stories in a range of literary and on-line journals (Crannog, Skylight 47, Honest Ulsterman, Boyne Berries, North West Words, Crossways, The Blue Nib, Dodging the Rain, The Ogham Stone, plus many more). Her first collection of poetry **At The Edge (Lapwing)** was published in 2015. Her second collection, **Threads (Lapwing)**, was published in April 2018. Her third collection, **Elsewhere (Vole Imprint)**, in November 21. Her fourth, **Practically A Wake, will be published next year (Salmon Poetry)**.



An Old Woman on the Deserted Prom at Hardelot Plage

At midday she steps into concrete sunshine
Gnarled hip tipping her sideways
Coiffured silver hair holds her upright
a puppet on a string.
A black stick and cream crocodile handbag
provide her ballast against decay and age.
A thin coiled belt rests on a body of flesh
that presumes a waist on a polka dot dress.
She wears thick beige stockings and grey heeled shoes
to pick her way through the granite and grains.

To her right, a deserted sable beach
leaches into a hint of a distant blue.
Beyond her, the promenade yields
a shimmering, silver brick road.
Shuttered residences
Eight stories tall, watch her blindfold.
She stops at a wooden bench, rests
gathers strength. Her chignon collapses,
strands of hair tumble loose. She doesn't notice
takes a new ginger step, onward, to the end
Stares into the future, nods, then turns.

By Kate Ennals



"The Blue Hour over Galloon"

"The Blue Hour over Galloon" was taken over the Fermanagh lakeland just after the sun had set. The delicate palette of pink clouds against the blue background never ceases to inspire me.



"Storm Coming"

"Storm Coming" shows the onset of a heavy rain as clouds threaten above Carlingford Lough, County Down.

Biography

John Winder is a creative photographer working in both colour and black and white. He began photography 40 years ago and enjoys trudging around outdoors, hauling camera gear, and spending time behind the tripod. He has art work previously published in The Bangor Literary Journal, The Fly on the Wall Press, The Abergavenny Small Press and Fevers of the Mind. He enjoys walking and the cinema.

Poetry

Angela Graham

Angela Graham is from Belfast. A fluent Welsh-speaker, she is an award-winning tv producer and film maker. Seren Books published her poetry collection *Sanctuary: There Must Be Somewhere* in May 2022 and her debut collection of short stories *A City Burning* in 2020. It was longlisted for this year's Edge Hill Prize. Her poetry is widely published. She won first prize for poetry in this year's Linen Hall Ulster-Scots Writing Competition.



Photograph taken at the Lammas Fair, Ballycastle, 1963

His right hand holds my left hand fast. I'm six years old.
Behind us, a tilt-scape of farmers' caps
(they all in gabardine against the August coolth)
and the awnings of stalls, angled against rain, and
stark, declamatory, a trader's arm, thrust out towards the crowd,
his canvas-on-poles booth potent as any stage
to frame *The Mystery!* and its unravelling:
the elixir, cure-all, guarantee.
The credulous, the sceptical, are held alike by his authority.

My father didn't hold himself of much account,
was used to taking orders, had been made to know his place
but here I feel he felt himself to be
grounded; here in the Fair Days' jostling human sea,
swirling, eddying, breaking up and moving on,
with his mother's homeplace down anent Fair Hill
and his compass points The Diamond and the Chapel Brae.

Decades on cargo ships: 'When the waves break across deck
in an Atlantic storm, then you feel alive. Then. You know
you are.' So when it came to his gravestone's words
(a second chance, at my mother's burial), I added these:
A Belfast man with Ballycastle roots.
I know he's nothing now but since his grave is on that Brae,
I think of him as looking out to sea.

By Angela Graham

Poetry

Peter Adair

Peter Adair's poems have appeared in *The Honest Ulsterman*, *PN Review*, *The Bangor Literary Journal*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *A New Ulster* and elsewhere. He has been shortlisted for the *Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing*. E-pamphlet *Calling Card* is available from Rancid Idol Productions and Amazon. He lives in Bangor, Co Down.



Tweed

Downings, the hilly shop.
I run my fingers down the sleeves
of tweed jackets, their smooth weave;
you stroke the scarves and cardigans,
an eternal browse
between the rain and sun.
Let's stay for a cup of tea.

A month or more before I bundled
your clothes down to *Marie Curie*, the dump –
and those heaps, those heaps of shoes –
keeping only your green cardigan
Made in Donegal,
weaved with rain and sun.
Now I want to sleep.

By Peter Adair

Kayleigh Kitt lives in South Shropshire, with her husband and a disgracefully ageing tabby cat. She started writing in the pandemic and found that it was delightfully addictive and hasn't stopped since. She's had work published in Flash Fiction North.



Nothing works unless you do—A few moments of magic

The hall was laid out in readiness, chairs in a circular sweep, a lectern front centre line.

Around the perimeter of the room, those ensembled trilled amongst themselves in twos, or bantering threes from their cadence, opening cases, clutching sheaves of paper. One of the harsh artificial lights jiggled to its own vibrato, amidst discontented grumbling. The lights were switched off and then back on, while upturned faces waited impatiently to see if this rectified the problem.

Chairs scraped on the parquet flooring, establishing boundary issues, where elbows brushed or worse clashed with neighbours, dynamics being evaluated.

The flat smell of mildew still lingered, mostly overpowered by floor polish and disinfectant, mingled with the sharp odour of anti-bacterial hand gel.

A figure stepped up to the lectern. He nodded, arms spread wide with intonation and a baritone welcome. The seated shifted and shuffled in agreement, tentative smiles on faces. It had been so long.

The bar was not set high after so many months in isolation.

Nonetheless, the scale of its significance could not be overlooked.

The baton rose, instruments were lifted to lips, metal glinting from elbow grease.

A harmonious symphony of noise rose.

Band practice was in session.

By Kayleigh Kitt



Not Jasmine

Israel is a wondrous land. Its fauna are amazing. Its flora are breath-taking. These two photos sample a tiny bit of the many gorgeous blossoms that grow in the Holy Land.



Geraniums and Ivy

Biography

KJ Hannah Greenberg tilts at social ills and encourages personal evolutions via poetry, prose, and visual art. Her images have appeared as interior art in many places, including *Foliate Oak Literary Magazine*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *Les Femmes Folles*, *Mused*, *Piker Press*, *The Academy of the Heart and Mind*, *The Front Porch Review*, and *Yellow Mama* and as cover art in many places, including *Angime*, *Black Petals*, *Door is A Jar Literary Magazine* [sic], *Impspired* [sic], *Pithead Chapel*, *Red Flag Poetry*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Smoky Blue Literary and Arts Magazine*, *The Broken City*, *Torah Tidbits* and *Yellow Mama*. Additionally, some of her digital paintings are featured alongside of her poetry in *One-Handed Pianist* (Hekate Publishing, 2021).

FEATURED WRITER

STEPHEN SMYTHE



Stephen Smythe is a Mancunian writer of short fiction. He achieved an MA in Creative Writing from Salford University in 2018. He has been longlisted, shortlisted and placed in several competitions, including the Bridport Prize and Bath Flash Fiction Award. In September 2022, he won the Bangor Literary Journal FORTY WORDS Competition.

Steve, we are delighted to feature you in issue 19. Where and when did your writing journey begin?

Thanks, it's such an honour to be featured. I started writing fiction and poetry (well, the odd poem) about ten years ago. My marriage had broken down and my kids were still young (thirteen and ten). On the nights they didn't stay with me in my flat, there was a big hole. I lived across the road from the last pub standing in the area, and it was a choice of either drowning my sorrows or finding something to do. I'd worked in PR and had written in one way or another for years, so I started writing a novel: what you'd call autofiction, or fictionalised autobiography. Some of it was too whiney but some parts were decent. After a while, I put it away, joined a couple of writing groups, read books about the art of writing and started to learn the craft. In 2017, I completed an MA in Creative Writing at Salford University. It was great to sit and learn with a roomful of writers. It still is.

What subject matters do you enjoy writing about the most?

I draw a lot of inspiration from places I've worked, namely the characters and the culture. I worked in local government for twenty-five years and currently work in a car park. The former used to have a 'job for life' thread running through the place, while the latter is much more gig economy.



The characters I now work with in the car park are a writer's dream. Only the other day, a colleague (Echo Two) was showing me a photo of his new house. I squinted at it and said, 'I thought you said it was detached.' He frowned and replied, 'It is on one side.'

I reached the Bath Flash Fiction longlist in 2018 with a story based on a real conversation I had with a colleague who was leaving the car park job that very day after ten years. I called it 'Leaving Do' because he didn't have one. At the Council, there'd be a whip round and a glass of dry sherry in the Town Hall Tavern to wave him off. On his last day on the car park, I think somebody pinched his custard creams from the brew room.

I love writing about my dad as well. He's eighty-eight and hilarious in a dry way and sometimes unintentional. Since Mum died in 2010 he's got to talk to me when I visit. He's a cure for writer's block, alright. And finally, I have a friend (a university lecturer I'd have you know) who tells me her dating stories. They make great copy. She deserves to meet somebody who'll make her happy, although in one way I hope she doesn't because that will maintain a source of inspiration for me. Is that selfish?



You have been published widely. What advice do you have to writers who are sending work off to journals for consideration?

Pay attention to details such as the deadline, the format, themes, genre, word count. I think this applies whether you're submitting a piece of work for consideration, or to a competition. I've been published several times because of competition success and it's a good way into getting your work published.

I also think it's crucial to seek some kind of quality control on your work via a workshop, critical friend(s), even pay somebody, especially with bigger pieces (there are some affordable, professional reviewers). I am part of a small fiction workshop which meets regularly and I also have a critical friend and we review each other's work. You don't have to

take on board all feedback, but you should consider some of it. I'm always thankful somebody has taken the time to look at my work and comment on it.

You recently won the FORTY Words Competition. Tell us a bit about that. What other highlights have you had so far in your writing career?

It was such a buzz winning this year's FORTY Words Competition. I came second in 2019, the first year I entered it, with a story about my dad. The following year I was Highly Commended with a story featuring a character with a nickname (I love nicknames), and last year I was shortlisted. I was going backwards so it was great to arrest the slide by winning. Of course, it's really great getting shortlisted because you know you're up against some fine mini-fiction writing. I've fallen in love with the FORTY Words format and the competition. I usually enter four stories each year and I've never yet correctly second-guessed the judges. I like that. It goes to show you're not always the best judge of your own work.

I was shortlisted for the Bridport Prize in 2017 for a 250 word story. It was the first time I'd submitted anything and it encouraged me greatly. I've also been placed four times in an Indian writing competition. I've won a few dollars but by the time it's converted into Sterling and PayPal take a bite there's not much left. It's about the glory: the fact my name appears among a group of placed writers from around the world and that there's a wide audience for my particular brand of North of England writing and humour.



How would you describe the writing scene/ community in Manchester?

It's a big scene. The two Universities put on events, there's city-wide and local festivals, workshops real-life and virtual, spoken word nights (I'm a founder member of Speak Easy in Chorlton and still compere some of the monthly events).

Lastly Steve, what's on the horizon for you in regards to your writing?

Funny you should ask because Red Ceiling Press, an independent publisher from The Peak District, has agreed to publish 40 x Forty Word stories in A6 format, in the New Year. They've got a good stable of writers, including my Salford University professor, and are experimental in style. They love my work and I think the Forty Word format is sufficiently experimental for them. I've also recently completed an 8000 word novella-in-flash (flash fictions linked by a narrative arc) called The Night Shift about four security guards. Just need to find a home for it.

Follow Steve on Twitter: @smooth2go

Al Pacino of the Welsh Valleys

Al Pacino was arguing with the check-out guy at the Llanedeyrn Co-op, claiming he'd been short-changed. He'd lost his hair and carried an extra stone or four, but it was unmistakably him. He spotted me while I was queuing, told the check-out guy it wasn't over, and lifted me off my feet. 'Jimmy,' he said, squeezing the breath out of me, 'alright or wha?'

We stood on the pavement outside the store and he lit up a giant spliff. My carrier bag contained the staples of the single man: a thick white sliced, a dozen fish fingers and a six-pack of *Stella*. It was Saturday, still sunny at seven, the kind of evening which promised so much when me and Al used to knock about as teenagers.

The top three buttons of his sweat-stained shirt were undone, revealing salt 'n' pepper hairs and a chunky gold chain. Mirrored sunglasses stuck out of his top pocket and he had a large sovereign ring on his pinkie. The stench of Al's dope competed with the rotten smell of an overflowing bin and his cheap aftershave.

Me and the other lads called him Al Pacino after we'd seen *The Godfather* half-a-dozen times. We'd pretended to be eighteen so we could get into *The Rialto*, the local flea-pit. Al's moniker stuck, even though his real name was Owen. He had black hair, slicked back, and saucer-like brown eyes, mournful and mysterious, as though he knew something we didn't. When he started going with Suzie Thomas, he boasted he'd made her an offer she couldn't refuse.

He held out his spliff.

'Not anymore.'

He shrugged. 'It's up to you, it is.'

His family was from the South Wales Valleys and moved to our Cardiff estate forty-odd years ago when me and Al were both ten. He was different from us city boys with his sing-song accent and the way he spoke, repeating his words. We'd lost touch after I crossed the border to go to university. I had a new life, made different friends.

He took a deep drag and exhaled. 'What's occurring?'

'Got a flat on Fenway Street.'

'Bit of a come down for you, Jimmy,' he said, 'moving back here.'

'Needs must.'

A police car flashed by on blue, siren blazing. Al didn't even glance at it, just kept talking.

'Heard you had a big house in Bristol.'

'Wasn't that big.' I was light-headed from his smoke. 'I'm going through a divorce.'

'Nasty,' he said. 'I heard you had kids.'

'One of each. Grown up.'

'Tidy.' He squinted and put on his sunglasses. 'I wanted kids. Mind you, I'm a *Bampi* seven times over.'

'A grandad?' I frowned. 'How come?'

'Suzie's boys all have kids,' he said. 'Love 'em like they're my own.'

'You and Suzie finally got together? That's worth drinking to.' I took two *Stellas* from my bag and passed him one. We clinked cans. 'Cheers.'

'We say *iechyd da* round here. You've been in England too long, you have.'

'I meant to keep in touch—'

'Have I changed much, Jimmy?' He turned sideways and breathed in.

'No.'

'Wish I could say the same for you, boyo.' He roared with laughter.

I grimaced. 'The divorce is putting years on me.'

'We're not with each other anymore,' he said. 'Me and Suzie. She kicked me out last month.'

'Really?'

'Trust issues,' he said. 'Hers, not mine.'

'My marriage ended unexpectedly,' I said, 'for one of us.'

'The trouble was her first husband,' he said. 'Long distance lorry driver. A wench in every village.'

'What's that got do with you?'

'Everything,' he said, swigging his beer. 'I paid for another man's sins.'

'I'm sorry to hear that, Al.'

'Suzie broke my heart. She blamed my job.'

'Oh?'

‘Surrounded by women all dolled up for a night on the town. Necking Prosecco from the bottle – randy as hell.’ He belched. ‘I feel them undressing me with their eyes, I do.’

‘What’s your job?’

He pointed across the road to a white Toyota with *Dragon Cars* in red on the door.

‘A cabbie?’

‘Toughest job in the world,’ he said.

‘I was made redundant,’ I said. ‘Company downsized.’

‘Bet you got a big pay-out, Jimmy.’

‘It’s going fast,’ I said ‘With the divorce lawyer– ’

‘Single and minted. Lush.’ He grinned. ‘You got a bit of skirt on the go?’

I looked at the ground. ‘I’m finding it hard to– ’

‘You need a good woman, you do,’ he said, biffing me on the arm. I winced. I’d be bruised later. I reached into my carrier bag. ‘Fancy another?’

‘Best not,’ he said, flicking away the spliff butt. ‘Lisa will have my tea on the table.’

‘Who’s Lisa?’

‘My girlfriend. We’re shacked up.’

‘I thought Suzie broke your heart?’

‘We all need somebody, Jimmy. Especially at our age.’

‘I’ve got a cat.’

‘Come on,’ he said, clapping me on the back. ‘I’ll give you a lift to this new flat of yours.’

‘No need,’ I said, ‘it’s only down the road.’

He lobbed his empty beer can. It bounced off the bin and clattered onto the pavement. ‘No problem, I’m going that way.’

The inside his car was like an oven. He wound down the windows and told me to fasten my seat belt. ‘Don’t want to get into trouble with the law again.’

‘Again?’

His tyres screeched. We’d no sooner set off than we pulled up outside my flat.

'Thanks, Al.'

'Two-fifty,' he said.

'Eh?'

'Two pounds fifty. Minimum fare.'

I laughed nervously, waiting for him to smile.

'Call it three with a tip.'

'Seriously?'

He took off his shades and looked at me with those saucer-like eyes. 'It's nothing personal,' he said. 'It's strictly business.'

'I've no cash, Al.'

'You can owe it me, you can.'

I got out.

He called through the window, 'I know where you live!'

As I watched Al Pacino drive away, I realised I'd left my carrier bag in his taxi.

<https://strandspublishers.weebly.com/lit-sphere/al-pacino-of-the-welsh-valleys>

Granny

Granny mimicked James Cagney, danced to Boy George, borrowed money from herself, slipped me ten bob on my birthday and drank eleven mugs of tea every day, never leaving one unfinished no matter how cold it got. When she'd smoked all her Park Drive, she used the empty packet for her weekly budget. Her columns of pounds, shillings and pence were barely visible to the naked eye, yet they were crystal clear to her. She didn't need specs until she was way into her sixties, so didn't have to remove any the time she punched a skinhead.

[Granny \(weebly.com\)](#)

By Stephen Smythe



The Queen's Swans

This photograph was taken the weekend before the Queen's State Funeral, in London. Many things once named after the Queen had already been converted to the King and I wondered if 'ownership' of the swans had already transferred.

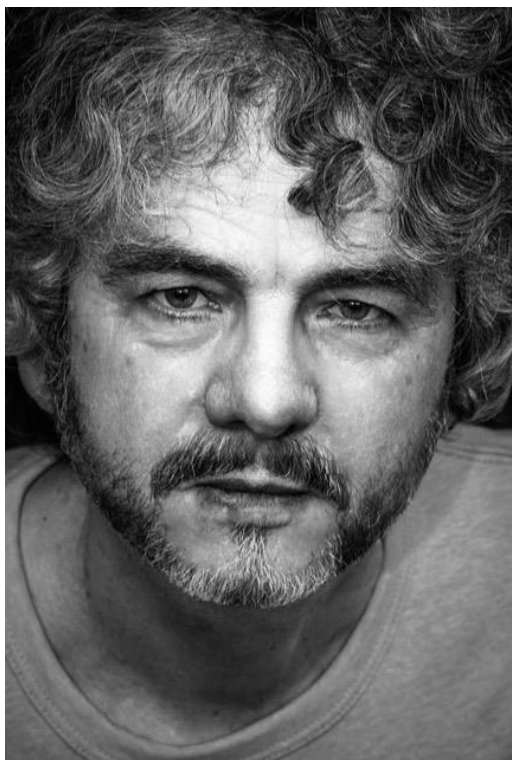
Biography

Gaynor Kane is a photographer and award-winning poet from Northern Ireland and has had her photography published in a range of international journals.

Poetry

Peter A.

Peter A. is a Scottish writer who is also proud to hold Irish citizenship. In 2016 he won first prize in the Paisley Spree Fringe Poetry Competition. Since 2017 his poetry has been published online, in film poems and paper publications. His debut chapbook *Art of Insomnia* was released by Hedgehog Poetry Press (May 2021), nominated for the Michael Marks Pamphlet Award 2021, with one of its poems nominated for a 2022 Pushcart Prize. He continues to contribute poetry, short fiction and creative non-fiction to anthologies while working on his first full collection.



North and South

Through primary days and many onward years, a winter babe
I was proud to be. An early memory of ice-baking an outdoor birthday cake,
my tiny blue hands compressing wet mounds of snowflake
upon wellyboot-trodden snow-grass, an effort to replicate
by frozen facsimile the happy celebration treat.
A memory too of the inordinate delight
we took constructing downhill slalom slides;
the careful addition of just the right amount of water
to increase the slip, increase the speed -
to increase the peril and excitement level
of children young enough to still feel immortal.
Learning later of my Irish lineage
simply confirmed that the Celtic Cross, peat and heather
the phlegm and the rheum, all made this my hemisphere —
a feeling fortified by the awe-inspiring majesty of mountains, the greens,
the beauty of lochs and beaches, idyllic when intermittently sun-blessed;
sights you may dwell upon dependant on the sudden fall of mist,
or how the smirr develops — or your chosen clothing.

Yet, as I grew from winter to summer and beyond, I was Southerly drawn,
seduced by warm breezes blown over various shades of turquoise sea,
began to feel at home where ice is most often found in alcoholic drinks and tea,
where the sun's intensity should really be too much for me
and other pale-skins like me.

Where ice is *il ghiaccio, el hielo, págos or la glace,*
or sometimes *cubetto di ghiaccio, cubo de hielo, pagáki or glaçon*
other fun times *il gelato, el helado, pagotó or la crème glacée*

Where ice may be used to chill gazpacho, or café frappé.

Where food has sunlit colour and is never overcooked -
marinated gently, extra virgin'd, spiced,
herbed, caressed lovingly and given life.

Where a walk on the beach is about bare feet
massaged in grains of sand. Where clothes are almost optional,
temperatures usually reliable, where local wines inebriate
but not as much as the balmy star-filled night,
the Mediterranean or Aegean daylight skies
which in some inspire romance or the desire to create.

By Peter A.

Poetry

Colin Dardis

Colin Dardis is a neurodivergent poet, editor and sound artist from Northern Ireland. His work, largely influenced by his experiences with depression and Asperger's, has been published widely throughout Ireland, the UK and USA. His books include *All This Light In Which To See The Dead: Pandemic Journals 2020-21* (Rancid Idols Productions, 2022), *Endless Flower* (Rancid Idols Productions, 2021) and *The Dogs of Humanity* (Fly on the Wall Press, 2019, shortlisted for Best Poetry Pamphlet, Saboteur Awards 2020). A new collection, *Apocrypha: Collected Early Poems*, will be published in late 2022.



Sudden Houses

Mother is 'downloading', her new muddle
for downsizing: where mantle and shelf
and unit and cabinet will not fit
through the eye of widowhood.

She offloads ahead of a new home,
items ticked from the inventory of a marriage:
two figurines, as slim as their price,
salvaged charity shop finds;

a sea-breeze Venetian vase
hand-blown from the air
of an ancient holiday,
one of the few items I covet;

two wooden busts of philosophers
only my father could identify,
purchased from his study,
Schrödingers of forgotten names;

a fender reared from the neighbour
of a grandmother, fixed since childhood
its metal surround promising
Doric imitations of gold.

My sister and I, often perched
our faux leather plimsoles
onto that frame, in order to gain
a few extra inches into the mirror,

a fireplace the honour
of many an Eighties home.
But once, it belonged
to Lily Boyd, the women

who basically reared by father,
him perhaps testing his own weight,
a childhood resting
on a spinster's frame.

By Colin Dardis

Poetry

Sanjyokta Deshmukh

Sanjyokta 'Yukta' Deshmukh is a Welsh-Indian writer and performer. Her writing explores a variety of themes such as immigration, memory, and language. She is trying to write more about joy and the things she finds beautiful. You can follow her on twitter: @sanjdeskh.



the moment after leaving

everything is quiet.
a quiet glance from a window,
a quiet wave in the distance,
a quiet lump in my throat.
and the clouds move softly.
like I do, almost still, holding water,
barely even there. people grow up,
grow out, and see each other less.
I know this and yet
that does not stop my bottom lip
from becoming a crumbling coastline.
it does not stop the goosebumps
on my arms standing like sheep in a faraway field.
it does not stop the breeze
filling the air I swear you were just standing in.
the moment after leaving is quiet.
and you and I are okay,
or at least we will be.

By Sanjyokta Deshmukh

FEATURED ARTIST

JOHN RUBERY



An Englishman, John is a graduate in sculpture and holds a MBA in International Business from the University of Ulster, Belfast. He studied internationally at UCLA, California and at the Academie Royale des Beaux Arts in Brussels, while working for the European Commission. Having spent most of his working life in a suit, at home and abroad, in 2013 John finally hung up his pinstripes and tie to focus on his family: wife Agnes, his three children and five grandchildren, alongside his artwork.

John's practice primarily involves studies from life – including portraits, caricatures, or sometimes "drawing a crowd". He often sketches in cafés, music venues, airports, at the beach or wherever he can observe and record the characteristics of individuals, or better still, the actions and interactions of people enjoying life together. John's work extends into a variety of different media from pastels and oils to mixed media, ceramics and conceptual art.



Thanks so much for agreeing to chat with us John. Can you tell the readers a little about your initial pathway into the art world?

Like any other child I loved to draw people and even illustrated my own stories. I loved Art galleries, where I sought out the paintings of the Flemish masters, and the Impressionists. But, as an Engineer, from a poor working-class background my father discouraged my artistic leanings, because "art won't get you a job".

My childhood was spent in Singapore, Malta and wherever in England Dad's Naval Dockyard took us, so my schooling was unsettled. After obtaining a good grade in Art at GCE O level, while in Singapore, I was sent home to boarding school

in Plymouth, to study sciences and Maths, and to get me away from a precocious interest in drink and drugs. But, in the middle of my A levels at Plymouth College, after threatening to drop out, I switched from Sciences to Art and again gained a top A level grade. Unimpressed, Dad refused to support me through Art School saying, "you will end up sweeping the streets." So, I effectively left home at 18, to undertake a Foundation at Scarborough Tech under the tutorship of Malcolm Burn. (Who is still honoured by his past students at an Annual Malcolm Memorial life-drawing day).

Arriving in Belfast at the age of 19, to study Fine Art, I hadn't lived anywhere for more than three years at a time. I planned to stay for three years, but never quite got away again, living initially in Jordanstown, then around the Botanic area, then East Belfast and now in Newtownards. Coming from England to study in York Street, at the height of the Troubles in 1973, my mindset was reflected in my contemporary sketchbooks, giving a clue to the turmoil under the chirpy exterior, mirroring the chaos on the streets at that time.

My most memorable artwork at the time was a life-sized, fully articulated fibreglass doll – a model of myself which included my own hair on its head, fingers and toes – with which I hitch-hiked around the UK. (Critics please note: this work predates Tony Hawks travels with a

fridge by 23 years, and its halter-neck Y-Fronts also predate Borat's mankini by 32 years). This piece was a serious, but doomed, attempt to change myself for the better, by shedding my past and living by my own moral code. In practice, I couldn't.

Forced to choose between painting and sculpture in second year, I pleaded that I wanted to make painted sculptures and sculptured paintings. That plea fell on deaf ears and my certificate today says BA (Hons) Sculpture. I again came close to dropping out more than once but managed to stay the course long enough to complete my end of year show and a dissertation on a South American Indian Shaman and his use of psychedelic drugs.

More importantly, after a Pauline/Damascus Road conversion to Christ at Christmas 1975, my life changed direction completely. And so, I settled here in Belfast.

Why didn't you pursue a career as an artist?

For the graduating Class of 76, the job market was very tough! The only work I could find on graduating in Fine Art was as a road-sweeper (it did have brushes, but oh how I hated proving my father right). With no time, funds, or space to make art, my artistic aspirations crashed to a halt. Abandoning hope of ever making a living as an artist and stuck in a one-room bedsit in East Belfast, I got on my bike and joined the civil service in January 1977. I did not draw again for the next 30 years. Instead, I built a career in a pinstriped suit based on continuous study and hard work. I met and married Agnes in 1978 and we had three



children; life revolved around my job, my lovely family, and my church.

What began as an average civil service career in the Departments of Manpower Services, Economic Development, and Finance and Personnel, soon developed into something more unusual. Through part-time study I obtained an HNC a CIPFA finance qualification and then began an Executive MBA, while in

parallel gaining various promotions. Soon after I was recruited by the Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland (IDB) onto a full time MBA programme in International Business. This provided a unique opportunity to interact with senior politicians and businessmen, meet with UN bodies, study in Belgium, conduct market research in Thailand, and undertake an internship in the USA, while studying at the University of California (UCLA). My Career then took me to four continents, working on Economic issues with IDB, Invest NI and DETI. Posts included Director of IDB Korea and Taiwan, Director of the Textile and Clothing Trade Association in Belfast and Director of Product Development with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. I also spent two spells in Brussels with the European Commission, firstly to research Climate change and later to negotiate international Trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand.

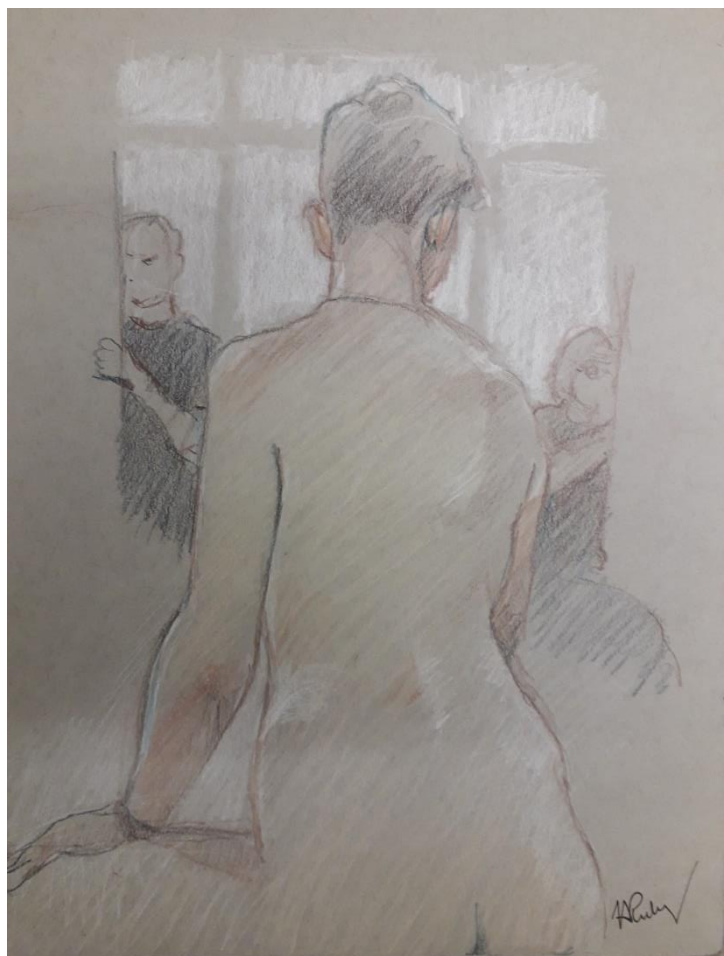
Having spent most of my youth and six years of my working life overseas I gained a love for different cultures, and a smattering of a number of languages. Whilst fluent in English I still struggle occasionally to understand "Norn Irish"; but I can get by reasonably well in French, can read the Korean alphabet and have spent several years studying Chinese, on top of the smattering of Italian, Spanish and Malay gained during my childhood. However, while my languages developed my art did not.

So what got you back into making and showing your artwork?

Graduating with the class of '76, I had no desire to teach – which is where most of my friends headed, so I simply gave up on art.

But after a 30-year hiatus in my creativity I finally returned to the life-studio in around 2005. Encouraged to draw and paint, both by Ray Duncan at Castlereagh, and Sharon Kelly at the Crescent Arts Centre, my interest in painting in Acrylics began to revive, and I made my first tentative steps at keeping a sketchbook again.

But it was three years in Brussels with the European Commission,



that restored my passion. Following in the footsteps of Rene Magritte and Van Gogh I attended 12 hours per week of evening classes in “academic life-drawing” at the 300-year-old Académie Royale de Beaux arts de Bruxelles, painting large pastels on toned paper under the critical eye of Marcel Vandeberghe.

Outside of the Academy, and my very demanding EC job, (seconded out from the NI Civil Service as a National Expert) I grasped every spare moment to draw – lunch, evenings, weekends - in cafes, parks, dance studios, festivals, on trams or metro, in and around Brussels. I also began to exhibit and sell my work there and even wrote a number of songs inspired by life in Belgium.



Returning to Belfast in 2012, I tried to draw in public places but initially found it impossible: Belfast people seemed so hostile and suspicious – a “why are ye looking at me” syndrome. Again, I stopped drawing.

Your work is wide-ranging and explorative. How would you describe your style/s and what draws you to capture a particular subject matter?

My work was always more about content than being constrained by any one style or medium. I am still happy to produce sculptured paintings and painted sculptures, and projects where the idea is more important than the aesthetics. I look for a narrative, ideas that I can share, relationships and behaviour I can observe, and human beings. For me thoughts and projects coalesce in scribbled notes scratchy drawings.

I finally hung up my pinstripes in 2013, to become a full-time grandad, on my family, my art and on establishing a home, garden and studio in Newtownards. The mojo still gone from my sketching, I returned to life drawing with Bill Gatt at Crescent Arts. Then a breakthrough came in 2014 when Donovan came to Belfast to perform at the “Belnash” Festival. To satisfy my rush of nostalgia I bought an expensive, all-events pass and then, determined to get full value for money I attended and sketched at every event. That did the trick – not only did I enjoy a quite intimate masterclass in song writing from this folk icon, obtaining his autograph on my sketches of him - but more importantly I regained the practice of “drawing from life”, particularly “portraits of a crowd”.

This practice was cemented the following month when I took off to Leith school of Art in Edinburgh for an excellent intensive Oil painting course run by Kenneth Le Riche. Every waking moment in the city was spent sketching and painting.

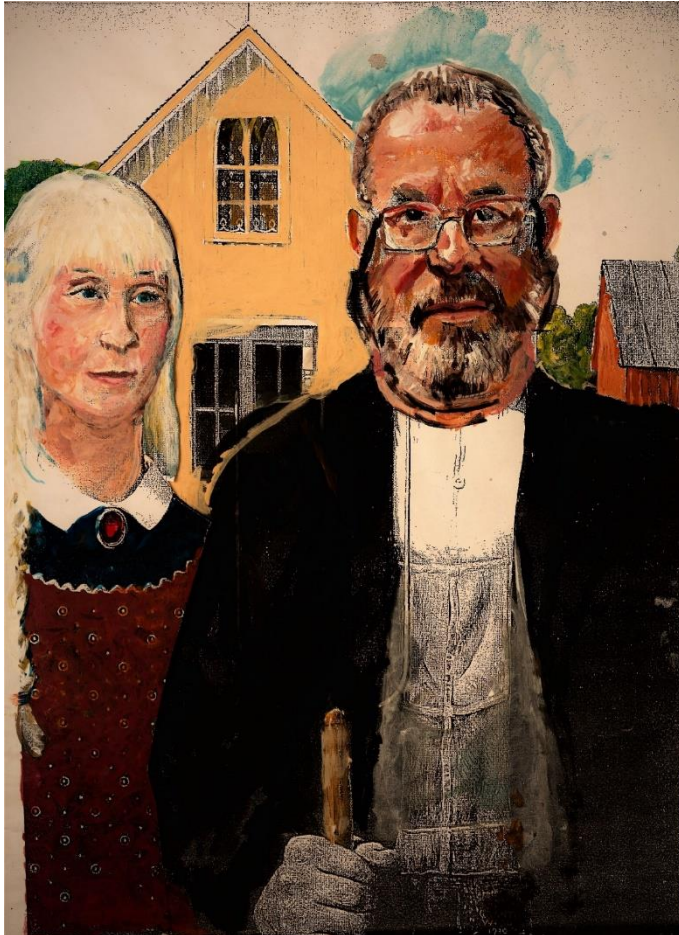


Since then I have worked steadily at life-drawing and portraiture in oils, but the bedrock has been my sketchbooks where I often combine my love of art and of music. For three years I drew singer-songwriters as a resident artist at the Belfast Empire; many still use my images on social media today. I could also often be found sketching the multinational, vegan crowd at Giro's Cafe in the Belfast "Warzone" centre. Other favourite spots for me are cafes and bars everywhere, the beaches and public events such music in the Park, Bangor, or Belfast's culture night. Perhaps following in the steps of William Conor, (in subject matter rather than quality) I find a great deal of pleasure observing and recording the antics of ordinary folks going about their daily lives.

Didn't you lose some sketchbooks or is that an urban Myth?

In 2015 just after completing a French A level at Belfast Met, an unfortunate event occurred as I was leaving the building: the tailgate of my car opened whilst driving and I lost ten sketchbooks – about 2 years drawing work.

Whilst devastating at the time, that incident spurred me on to become more productive and although battling arthritis, to grasp every spare moment to sketch and to find ways to display my sketchbooks alongside more "finished works".



Do you have any major inspirations?

The list of Artists who inspire me in different ways endless: Vincent, van Gogh for his passion and colour, Wm Heath-Robinson and Heinrich Kley for their superb draughtsmanship and wit (the latter inspiring Disney) Bruegel, and William Conor for their observations of the lives of their contemporaries; Hieronymus Bosch, Paula Rego and Rita Duffy for embroidering such ordinary life with folk tales and imagination; Holbein and Rembrandt for their wonderful portraits; Lucien Freud, Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele for their renderings of the human form.. I am equally inspired by much artwork of the "Ancients" too. All of the above and more encourage and inspire my work daily.

More than the Great Artists, I have been blessed to have had many inspiring tutors and mentors, many mentioned already: David (Duchy) Holland in Plymouth, Malcolm Burn, Austen Sleightholme, Eddie Nolan in Scarborough, David Winter at York Street, Ray Duncan, Sharon Kelly and Bill Gatt, in Belfast, Neal Johnston, Marty McClure, Carina, Nichol and Vicky Stone in SERC, Bangor and Kenneth Le Riche, all taught me techniques and showed me how to use materials and equipment effectively for which I am greatly indebted to each one.

You have displayed your artwork widely. What do you enjoy most about exhibiting your artwork? Where has been the most exciting place to exhibit?

I was delighted in 2021 to have a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with 10 of the diaspora of the UU Fine Art Class of 76 and to exhibit our work together in a tribute to one of friends and contemporaries, Brian Campbell, who died earlier in the year. We will have our second exhibition together in Lisburn Library for the month of November 2022 When some 15 or

more of us will show over 70 artworks. For any visual artist these opportunities to showcase and discuss your work are very precious and the opportunity of doing so amongst old friends has been a real treat.

One of my most exciting experiences of exhibiting my artwork was in my own apartment in Brussels, as part of the Parours d'Artistes St Gilles (an artists trail through the city, very well promoted by the municipality) which over 5 weekends attracted coachloads of visitors from as far away as Lille in Northern France.. The high-ceilinged Art-Nouveau building provided an excellent location to show a wide range of my Pastel work, both large and small, and I was very happy with the level of sales. Best of all though was the opportunity to show a selection of my sketchbooks and to offer prints of my drawings, signed by the artist, for sale. I had the opportunity to chat (mostly in French) with each visitor and to tell the stories behind the prints. As a result, the overwhelming majority of visitors bought at least one postcard, and by the end of 5 weekends I had sold some!



What words of advice would you have for anyone wanting to explore their artistic side?

Simple. Keep and carry a sketchbook! Use it to sketch whenever you get a moment, So many folks say they don't have time but by carrying a sketchbook with you enables you to grab

those spare minutes when waiting or drinking a coffee or travelling on a bus. Sketch mundane, unimportant things, trivia, starting with simple shapes, rather than waiting for the grand inspiration because you “thought I had something more to say”. Work in pen so you don’t have the ability to erase. Take notes. Record ideas. Scribble, scrawl. Try very quick sketches – 30 seconds, 1 minute, three, five, to try and catch the essence of a fleeting observation. Sketch plants, people, animals from observation. Don’t try to produce art, or finished work. This is just for yourself and will enable you both to hone your skills, record your thoughts and in doing so set you up wonderfully for that moment when inspiration floats by.

For those interested I plan to give a talk on Urban Sketching as part of our Exhibition in November. It will be free and your readers are welcome to join us. Anyone interested can contact me via my Website for more details . The address is <https://jrubery.wixsite.com/john-rs-place/home>

Finally John, what do you have in the pipeline?

Forever a student, I have been working on various projects at SERC, Bangor, since 2016 and am currently finishing a large Ceramics Sculpture on the Biblical theme of Daniel and the Walls of Babylon, based on the 5000-year-old Babylonian Warka Vase. The sculpture incorporates LOGO Bricks, a cleaning lady from Prague. Sprigs of dancing Bruegel Peasants, and Biblical Graffiti - the words of the prophets written on the Walls. Here is a taster



Poetry

Attracta Fahy

Attracta Fahy, Psychotherapist, MAW NUIG '17. Winner of Trócaire Poetry Ireland Poetry Competition 2021. Irish Times; New Irish Writing 2019, Pushcart & Best of Web nominee, shortlisted for: Fish International Poetry Competition 2022, Write By The Sea Writing Competition 2021, Allingham Poetry competition both 2019 & '20 OTE New Writer 2018. Dedalus Press Mentoring Programme 2021. Her poems have been published in many magazines and anthologies at home and abroad. Fly on the Wall Poetry published her best selling debut chapbook collection *Dinner in the Fields*, in March '20. She is presently working towards a full collection.



Samhain

After picking apples for weeks,
under the crunch of fallen leaves,
evenings grown dim.
We ready for winter.

Living next to the church we were first
to hear the bell, six o'clock,
on our knees, hands joined in prayer.
Elbows on chairs.

After the Angelus, on our knees again,
hands this time behind backs we took turns
trying to be first to get a bite of an apple
bobbing in water,

first to bite the one tied to a string
hanging from the ceiling,
first to get the ring in the barm brack.
First to gather the pennies
for the long dark nights.

Outside the animals whimpered
at our screams, air laden with spirit,
green eyes peer from the turf shed
where our cats became witches,
and our dogs barking in excitement.

The veil thin, graves behind our land
rose up, tombs opened, and the wind
carried the souls of our dead to our house.

By Attracta Fahy



Portstewart coastal rocks, Donegal in distance.

I was walking along the cliff path by Dominican College down towards Portstewart Strand. It was the blue of the sky that caught my eye and then the configuration of the rocks and the sea with the reflectiveness of the calm water.

Biography

Yvonne Boyle has had a range of poems published in a variety of magazines, books and anthologies. She enjoys taking photographs and has had a number published in local papers and in the online Bangor Literary Journal. She is a Causeway Coast and Glens Councillor.

Poetry

Kenneth Hickey

Kenneth Hickey was born in 1975 in Cobh, Co. Cork Ireland. He served in the Irish Naval Service between 1993 and 2000. His poetry and prose has been published in various literary journals in Ireland, the UK and the United States including *Southword*, *Crannoig*, *THE SHOp*, *A New Ulster*, *Aesthetica Magazine* and *The Great American Poetry show*. His writing for theatre has been performed in Ireland, the UK, New York and Paris. He has won the Eamon Keane Full Length Play Award as well as being shortlisted for The PJ O'Connor Award and the Tony Doyle Bursary. His work in film has been screened at the Cork and Foyle Film Festivals. He holds a BA and MA in English Literature both from University College Cork. His debut collection 'The Unicycle Paradox' was published by Revival Press in November 2021. He still resides in Cork. www.kenhickeypoetry.wordpress.com



Exit

The world moves slowly within these strange currents
A melting glacier sliding to death
Homicide in the gulf stream
Swedish children cry foul
 Duck duck goose

Fire dances in the stove
Licking fuel to flame
A dragon awakening from slumber
Fafnir risen
Ready to stalk the land
A pursuing bear
Skin tingles as the rain rattles the window pane
Draughts scratching at the frame
A banshee's clawed fingers
Eager to be in

Winter has arrived
The land is dying
Decay in every drop
Every word spoken in whisper
Our little triangle hums harmonically.
With each frosted breath
the divine in the ordinary
becomes clearer
 The God of Coffee Cups
We slumber
We hibernate
We wait

Children sing soft songs that nobody hears
Burning the hours of a stale stillborn year

By Kenneth Hickey

Poetry

Carole Farnan

Carole Farnan's work has appeared in anthologies & journals including A New Ulster, Corncrake, The Bangor Literary Journal and The Honest Ulsterman. Stephen Hawking's Party featured on Belfast's Poetry Jukebox (2021) and House of the Spirits won the An Culturlann Poetry Prize (2021). A poem of hers features in Washing Windows Too (Arlen Press, 2022)).



Haibun (Night Shift)

Dusk. Gloaming. Twilight.

before the dog star comes to bite the foot of day, before Diana overtakes and obscures
Apollo, before the night pulls noose-tight around the loose and liminal, before the shape-
shifting dark steals in on soft-soled shoes

red-eyed fox mother
rubbish bin tipped over
street lights sparking amber

Evenfall. Sunset. Wolf-light.

By Carole Farnan



White Dove

Recycled Board Acrylic both painted in 2022. Some Ideas for the painting came from Terry's visits to Fort Hall Reservation in Idaho.

Biography

Terry Brinkman started painting in junior high school. He has had painting shows at the Eccles Art Center and paintings published in the Literary home girl volume 9 & 10, Healing Muse volume 19, (2019), SLCC Anthology (2020), and in the book Wingless Dreamer: Love of Art. Detour and meat for tea; The Bangor literary journal Issue 13 and 15, 16 Barzakh 2022, Cacosia Magazine and The New Ulster.