

Paul Lewin Islands and Ireland



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To Charlie, Rose and Holly
For the time I was away



Acknowledgements

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Clare Island
Inishturk

Bardsey

Ballinskelligs
Sneem

CORK
Ballymaloe House
The Old Head, Kinsale
Courtmacsherry Bay

SWANSEA

Isles of Scilly





Islands

Islands have played a significant part in my artistic development over the past twenty years. They are enclosed, isolated places that provide me with an intensely focused and uninterrupted opportunity to pursue landscape painting. More specifically, they give me a chance to explore that most dynamic and powerful of subjects; the meeting place between land and sea, something that is key to my work.

To paint successfully I need to immerse myself in a landscape and really get to know it before I feel I can start to meaningfully express something on paper or canvas. This makes islands perfect environments for my painting trips as they are finite, have a discernible boundary and therefore seem wholly knowable.

I have spent time painting on islands off the coast of North Wales; off the Eastern Seaboard of the USA; off North Devon; the far North of Scotland, the Scilly Isles and the west coast of Ireland. In fact West Penwith, where I now live, shares many characteristics with these islands, due to its exposed and isolated geography at the far south-western tip of Cornwall.

Whilst it is true that each of the islands I have visited is topographically unique and has its own distinct identity, what seems most striking is the similarities between them all. A deep-seated sense of community is something that I have encountered on all my trips to islands, the people being generally friendlier and more open

than on the mainland, with each member of the community being valued and cared for. Along with this strong community spirit the other great unifying factor for all islands is of course the sea and how the weather influences it.

Predicting the weather consequently becomes somewhat of an obsession for me during my visits and an important part of my time on an island is spent checking weather forecasts and looking at wind directions. This is so that I can plan to be on the leeward side of the island - there is nearly always some shelter to be had, even in high winds. For people that live on islands the weather affects day to day life to an even greater extent, determining whether or not there will be any contact with the mainland that day and also what fishing or farming can be undertaken.

I remember becoming acutely aware of this subservience to the elements when towards the end of my first stay on Bardsey Island in Autumn 1999, I suddenly got a knock on the door and was told with some urgency that the boat was leaving in two hours, and I needed to be on it. I was a bit taken aback as I had expected to be there a few days longer, but I dutifully packed up my belongings and wrapped up all the paintings I had done and got to the boat on time. It was only later I was told that it was perfectly possible to be stranded on the island for six weeks during the winter months, without a chance of a boat getting across to the mainland.



Ireland

I have been lucky enough to work in Ireland on several occasions and many of the paintings are reproduced in this book. The landscapes I have encountered are exceptional; from bogs and mountains with their weathered wildness to gentle lush farmland with rolling green fields and majestic trees.

As one would expect in Ireland, rain has been the greatest tester on many of my trips, but it is also an inspiration if one learns to work with it. Some of the pieces reproduced here have the tell-tale spotting from being done whilst the heavens opened. On one cold, clear February morning in Kerry I had ice form over the surface of a watercolour on which I was working. My brush skated over its slippery surface and it became impossible to continue. Frustrating as these weather challenges can be, they do lend an urgency and unpredictability to the process of painting which stops it from becoming formulaic.

The weather is such a major factor within my work that I prefer to see it as a participant in my creative process rather than an enemy to it - without the variety of weather and seasons that we experience here in the UK and Ireland, I doubt that landscape painting would hold the appeal that it does for me. It is the weather in all its guises that gives a painting its vibrancy and uniqueness.



Cork and Kerry

The Southwest of Ireland is where I have spent most time on my trips over there. I love its green lushness, its colourful towns and friendly people. The landscape has a familiar quality about it for me, the coastline of West Cork being especially like Cornwall. The Old Head near Kinsale is an extraordinary headland with its cliffs, caves and lighthouse jutting far out into the sea. In Kerry I have endured the harshest of painting conditions along with some of the most beautiful and dramatic settings. Painting at Ballymaloe in East Cork gave me the chance to experience the more gentle side of Ireland, something more akin to North Devon and the paintings of trees I have done there.



November, Ballinskelligs

Mixed Media on Paper

558 x 750mm



Ballinskelligs Rain

Mixed Media on Paper
560 x 743mm



Rain, Sheeps Head, Co. Cork

Mixed Media on Paper
570 x 760mm



**Looking towards the Slieve Miskish
Mountains from Ballingskelligs**

Mixed Media on Paper

558 x 750mm



Carrigsheehan from Beenarourke, Kerry

Mixed Media on Paper

149 x 405mm



The Old Head Lighthouse

Mixed Media on Paper
560 x 760mm



East Cliffs, The Old Head

Mixed Media on Paper
555 x 740mm



West Cliffs, The Old Head
Mixed Media on Paper
555 x 740mm



Sheer Cliff Headland, The Old Head
Mixed Media on Paper
555 x 740mm



Coast Study, The Old Head

Mixed Media on Paper
313 x 337mm



Galley Head Cliffs

Mixed Media on Paper
325 x 560mm



Courtmacsherry Bay
Mixed Media on Paper
180 x 570mm



Winter Barley Field, Ballymaloe
Mixed Media on Paper
281 x 330mm



The Walled Vegetable Garden at Ballymaloe
Oil on Canvas
313 x 313mm



May, Ballymaloe
Mixed Media on Paper
560 x 750mm



Isles of Scilly

The Isles of Scilly are a group of low lying islands situated 28 miles southwest of Cornwall. Thrust out into the Atlantic like this they feel vulnerable to the worst conditions that the sea can offer. However, the notoriously dangerous reefs that surround the islands take much of the energy out of the waves, making the water between them much calmer than expected. They are also able to benefit from near frost free winters due to the gulf stream bringing its warmth to their shores and creating a climate that seems to have more in common with the Canary Islands than mainland England.

My first responses to the whole ‘island experience’ were in the form of charcoal drawings made on a visit to the Scillies in 1989 and I have visited the Scillies almost every year since. Each time I return I gain more from their familiarity. Of all the islands of Scilly, Tresco is the one that I have come to know best, remarkable for its sub-tropical gardens, white sandy beaches and wild North End, making it an exciting and diverse place to paint.

My continued relationship with Scilly over the years has led to a large body of work and an ingrained knowledge of the islands. This means that I now feel an affinity to its landscape that goes beyond almost anywhere else I know.



Afternoon Light, Monterey Pines, Rushy Porth

Oil on Canvas
1000 x 1000mm



Into the Setting Sun, Pentle

Mixed Media on Paper
1000 x 1200mm



**Lizard Point
Afternoon Light**
Mixed Media on Paper
300 x 570mm



Rushy Porth from Lizard Point, Morning Light

Mixed Media on Paper

433 x 570mm



Daffodils at Parting Carn

Mixed Media on Paper

555 x 410mm



Autumn Sunset across to Bryher

Mixed Media on Paper
220 x 570mm



Ynys Enlli (Bardsey)

Bardsey stands just west of the Llyn Peninsula in North Wales and is a much smaller island than Clare with only one farming family staying all year round. It is an ancient place of pilgrimage with a ruined Abbey and is said to be the “Island of Twenty Thousand Saints” a place that many in a state of religious fervour would go for their final days.

The landscape is again dominated by a large hill (Mynydd Enlli) and being on the eastern flanks it keeps the agricultural land and its few houses hidden from the mainland. This lends the island an air of mystery, its secrets only being revealed once you have crossed the rough currents of Bardsey Sound. From the top of the hill you can look back to the mainland and see Snowdonia in the distance and then turn 180 degrees to see the Wicklow mountains of Ireland breaking the horizon to the West. On a clear night one can even see the lights of Dublin glowing orange across the Irish Sea.

I felt very exposed on Bardsey and endured all sorts of weather, however, whilst there, I managed to work on some of the largest paintings I have ever done en plein air. I had to enlist the farmers help with his tractor and trailer to move the huge boards that I needed to work on. During my second visit in June 2000 there were carpets of thrift everywhere and I sat amongst it, painting the acres of pink, looking out to the sea beyond.



Out to Sea from Bardsey
Mixed Media on Paper
550 x 750mm



Thrift Headland
Mixed Media on Paper
890 x 1350mm



The Lighthouse from Carreg Y Honwy
Mixed Media on Paper
500 x 700mm



Thrift and Calm Sea

Mixed Media on Paper
500 x 700mm



The Cove and Lighthouse from Mynydd Enlli

Mixed Media on Paper
1000 x 800mm



Pools of Light from amongst the Thrift, Ynys Enlli
Mixed Media on Paper
550 x 755mm



Carreg Bach and Mynydd Enlli (The house I stayed in)
Mixed Media on Paper
525 x 750mm



Inishturk

Despite being only a short journey from Clare, Turk felt like a very different island. There is a picturesque sandy harbour on Turk, but the island itself is smaller and much less suited to agriculture due to there being a great deal of bare rock and very little level ground. Catching the boat over in the hot, late May, sunshine was almost like taking a ferry across the Aegean to a Greek Isle. The sunlight was so intense it gave the water an extraordinary clarity and colour, whilst the island glowed with the light bouncing off the sea and pale rocks.

After exploring part of the island I retreated in the heat of the day and found one of the most spectacular beaches I have ever seen, thus completing the illusion of the Greek Island. The rest of my time on Turk was spent painting on this beach and some neighbouring sandy coves. I suppose this was the flipside to a winter painting in the wild weather of Kerry!



Inishturk Harbour
Sketch



Tranaun Beach, Inishturk
Mixed Media on Paper
290 x 420mm



Hot and hazy, Inishturk
Mixed Media on Paper
275 x 420mm



Inishturk
Oil
315 x 580mm



Clare Island

I spent a month painting on Clare Island in Clew Bay, Co Mayo, and the results of this experience form a large part of this book; a testament to the islands powerful beauty. I was treated to spectacular late spring weather, a landscape of warm olive greens, with the winter bracken still showing through. Dominated by its two hills Knocknaveen (The Small Hill) and Knockmore (The Big Hill), Clare sits as a sentinel to the entrance of Clew Bay, its shape immediately recognisable to anyone who has ever visited.

Knockmore, at over 1500 feet high with sheer 1000 foot cliffs on its north side, has an inescapable presence on the island and its great hulk is felt wherever you are. More like a mountain than a hill, I climbed it on my second day to see if I could get a good overview of the whole island, I was not disappointed. On top of that fiercely windblown hill there is an unrivalled vista of not only Clare, but also the other islands in Clew Bay. Turk, Caher and Boffin lie to the South, and over to the east is the mainland, with Croagh Patrick and the mountains of Galway dominating. Looking north, Achill Island and the wild, rugged land of Mayo and Sligo stretch far off into the distance. To the west there is simply the unbroken horizon of the Atlantic, its vastness reaching out towards America.

Clare is sparsely populated with the grazing sheep greatly outnumbering people. The most obvious signs of human habitation are on the southern and eastern flanks of the island. To the higher ground of the north and west, the land is rougher and more natural, with large areas of heather, gorse and bog land. The villages and agricultural land mostly keep to the lowland shores, but all across the island there are places that you can see the remains of Lazy Beds, used in pre-famine times to grow the potatoes when Clare had to feed nearly 3,000 people. Some of these areas of striped mounds beautifully follow the contours of the land and can be seen reaching halfway up Knockmore and Knocknaveen, places that would seem to be hopeless for growing anything. I found there was a moving paradox in the beautiful patterns and ridges formed in low raking light by these scars and by the hardships that obviously necessitated them being built.

Painting on Clare led me all across the island from vertiginous cliffs that are similar to some of the subjects I paint in Cornwall, to other very different types of landscapes that I rarely get an opportunity to tackle. This type of painting experience helps me to get out of the “comfort zone” and to push some of my artistic boundaries.



The Quay from Kinnacorra
Mixed Media on Paper
149 x 409mm



Over to the Mainland from Kinnacorra
Mixed Media on Paper
565 x 750mm



Croagh Patrick from Portruckagh, Clare Island
Mixed Media on Paper
288 x 566mm



Over to Mulrany and Rosturk from Kinnacorra, Clare Island
Mixed Media on Paper
565 x 750mm



Croagh Patrick from Kinnacorra, Morning Light
Mixed Media on Paper
460 x 565mm



**Across to the Mainland
from the Loughs**
Mixed Media on Paper
228 x 486mm



Croagh Patrick from near Toormore
Mixed Media on Paper
405 x 612mm



Caher Island from Portnakilly
Mixed Media on Paper
312 x 379mm



Capnagower from Kinnacorra
Mixed Media on Paper
425 x 568mm



Hannahs House and Croaghmore, Clare Island
Mixed Media on Paper
560 x 750mm



The Abbey at Kille, Clare Island

Oil on Canvas
330 x 588mm



Looking out to Sea from Marguerite and Dermots, Kille

Oil on Canvas
290 x 490mm



Connemara Skyline from Portnakilly

Oil
295 x 918mm



Passing Showers looking over to Connemara

Oil
253 x 927mm



Mist Lifting, Kille Fields

Mixed Media on Paper
271 x 350mm



Low Cloud over Inishturk

Mixed Media on Paper
307 x 495mm



**Mweelrea from Knocknaveen,
Clare Island**
Mixed Media on Paper
294 x 510mm



Sea Study, Portnakilly
Mixed Media on Paper
285 x 750mm



Portnakilly, Low Tide
Mixed Media on Paper
304 x 565mm



Murrisk Mountains and Killadoon from Clare Island

Mixed Media on Paper

149 x 403mm



**Mist Lifting from
Knocknaveen**
Mixed Media on Paper
211 x 407mm



Croaghmore Reflected in a Lough near the North Road

Mixed Media on Paper

590 x 1530mm



Croaghmore and Portlea from Leckascannalmore

Mixed Media on Paper
546 x 565mm



Cliffs near the Lighthouse, Clare Island

Mixed Media on Paper
565 x 755mm



Benilra by Clare Island Lighthouse Cliffs

Oil on Canvas
1400 x 1100mm



Lazy Beds and Low cloud on Croaghmore from Porteen Finoish

Mixed Media on Paper
290 x 750mm



Budawanny
Mixed Media on Paper
760 x 565mm



Lazybeds and the Green Road, Clare Island
Mixed Media on Paper
565 x 760mm



Budawanny 2

Mixed Media on Paper
565 x 455mm



Achill Beg, Mulrany and the Lighthouse Cliffs from the Slopes of Croaghmore

Mixed Media on Paper
455 x 565mm



Cliffs near Beetle Head, Clare Island
Mixed Media on Paper
560 x 745mm



North Cliffs from near the Lighthouse
Mixed Media on Paper
760 x 565mm



Doonalia Island, Clare

Oil on Canvas

1400 x 1100mm



Sketchbook

When I visit a new location for painting I spend the first few days walking with my sketchbook making quick studies and notes of the landscape around me. This is a very spontaneous and un-selfconscious approach that gives me an instant connection to a place and allows me to build up a relationship with it. I am learning through these drawings not only about the landscapes shape and structure but also - and importantly - how the play of light effects it. These drawings then provide me with vital information on where to return with my paints and what time of day will be best. The drawings reproduced here are chosen from the many, many I have done on my travels through Ireland and Clare Island. They give a sense of my working method and some idea of my initial inspirations for Islands and Ireland.



Ballinskelligs
Graphite



Kerry Field Study
Graphite



Kerry Headland
Graphite



Kerry Mountain
Watercolour



Bog Lane
Graphite and Peat



Peat Drawing
Graphite and Peat



Stacked Pete, Kerry
Watercolour, Ink and Graphite



Study
Graphite



Coast Study, The Old Head

Graphite



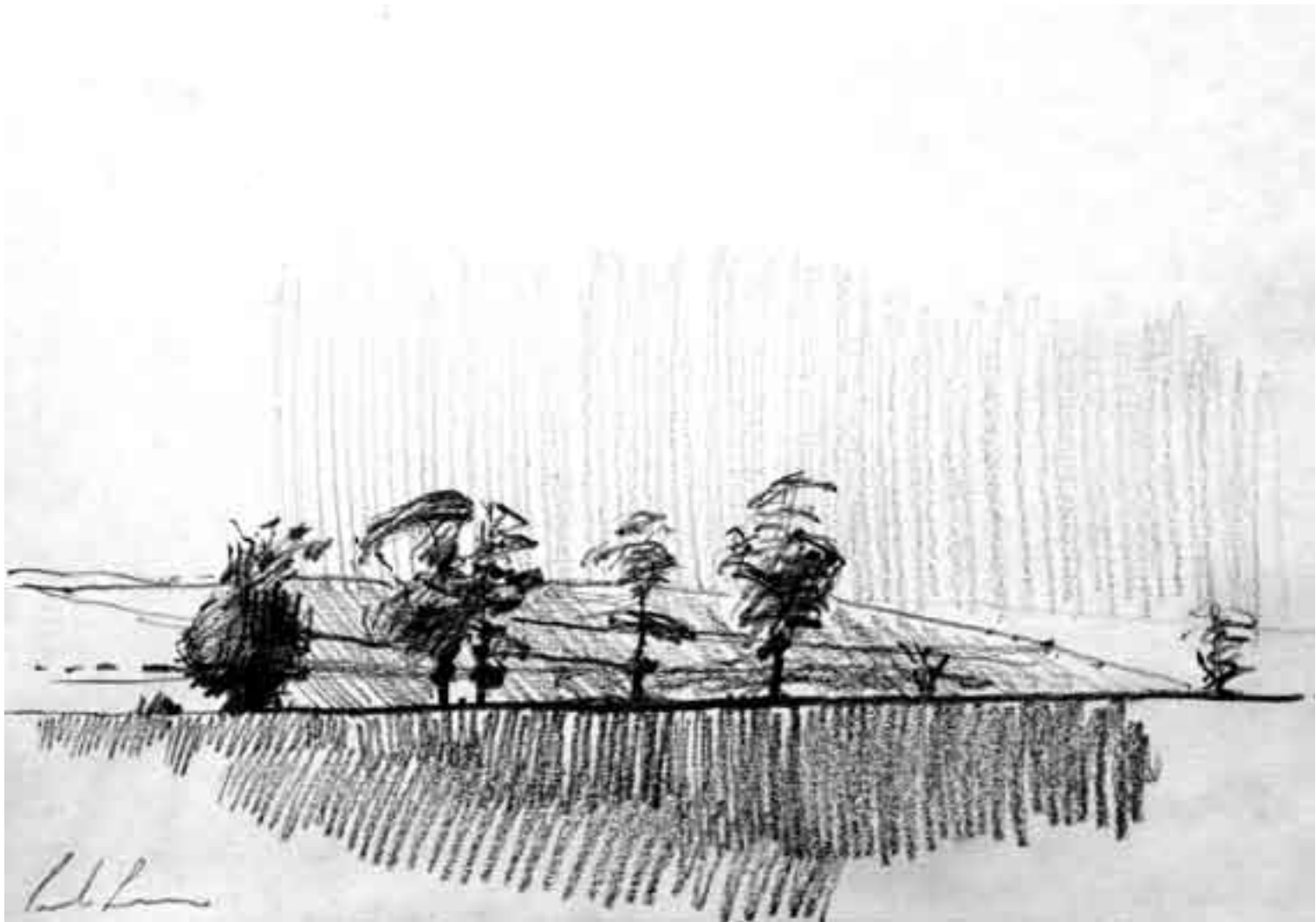
Coolmain Beach

Graphite, Chalk, Sand and Body Colour



Glanaphuca near Skibereen

Graphite



Ballymaloe 2

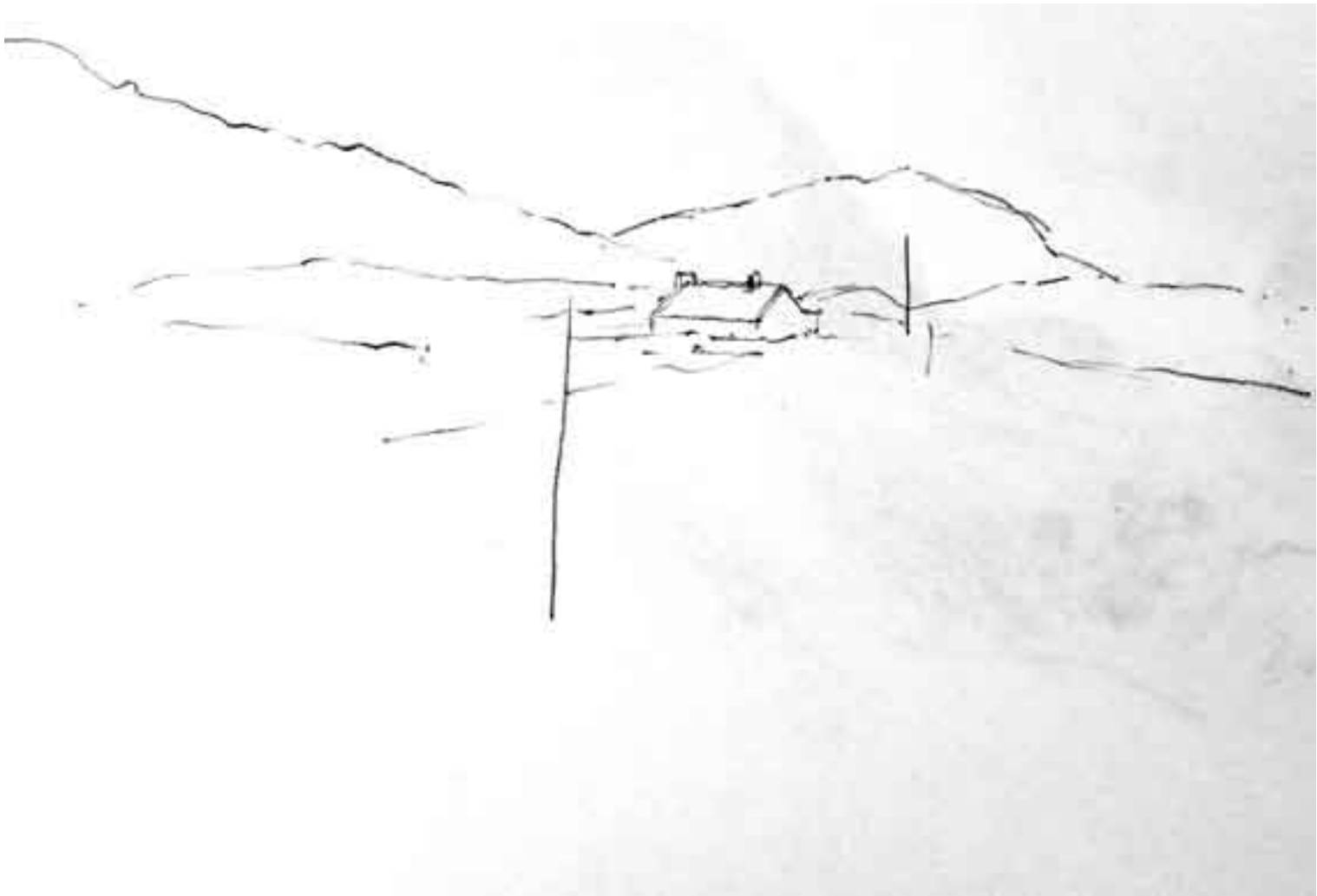
Graphite



Croagh Patrick Study
Graphite and water soluble pencil



The Quay from Knocknaveen
Graphite



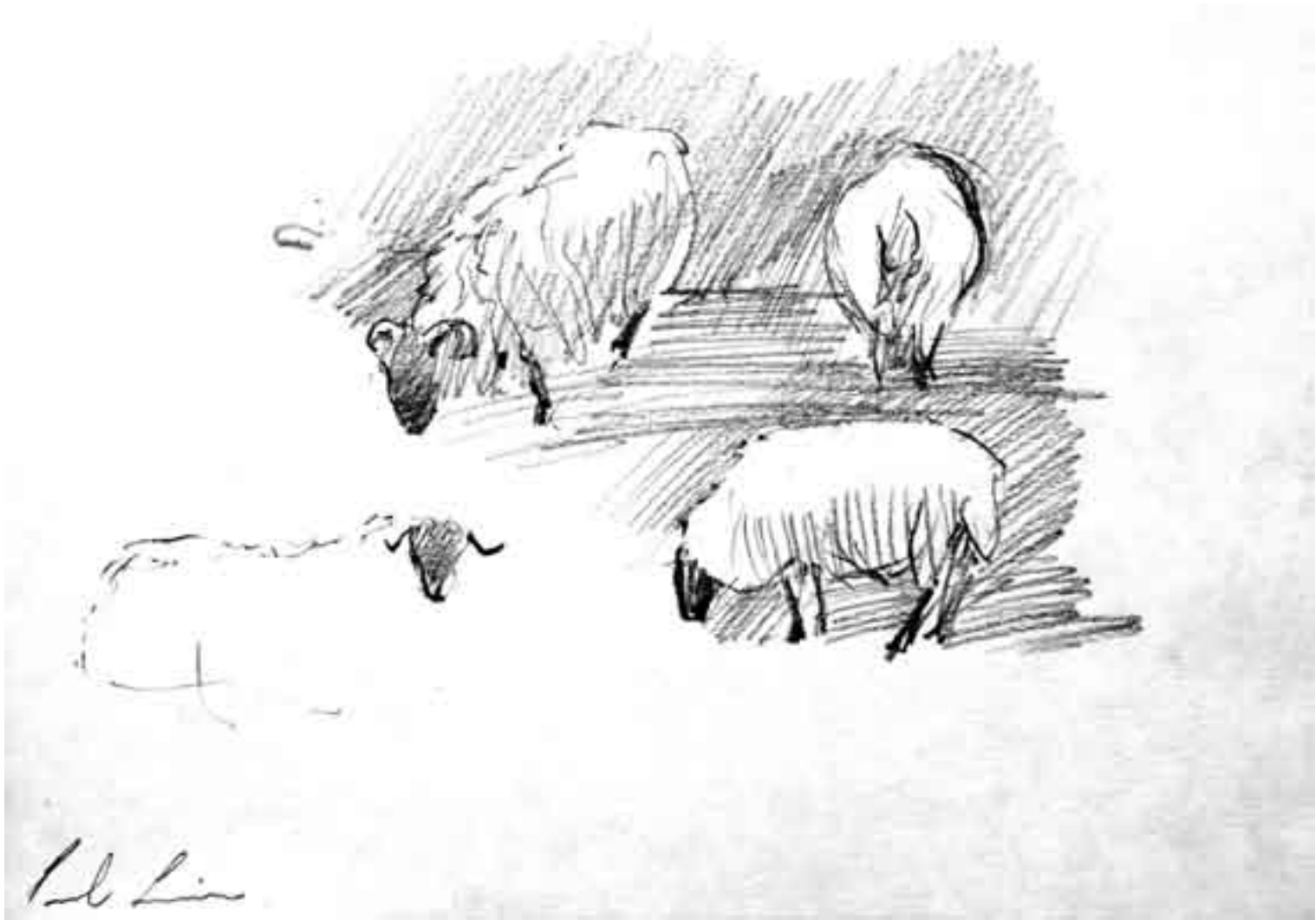
House at Fawnglass

Graphite



Ewens House and Lazy Beds

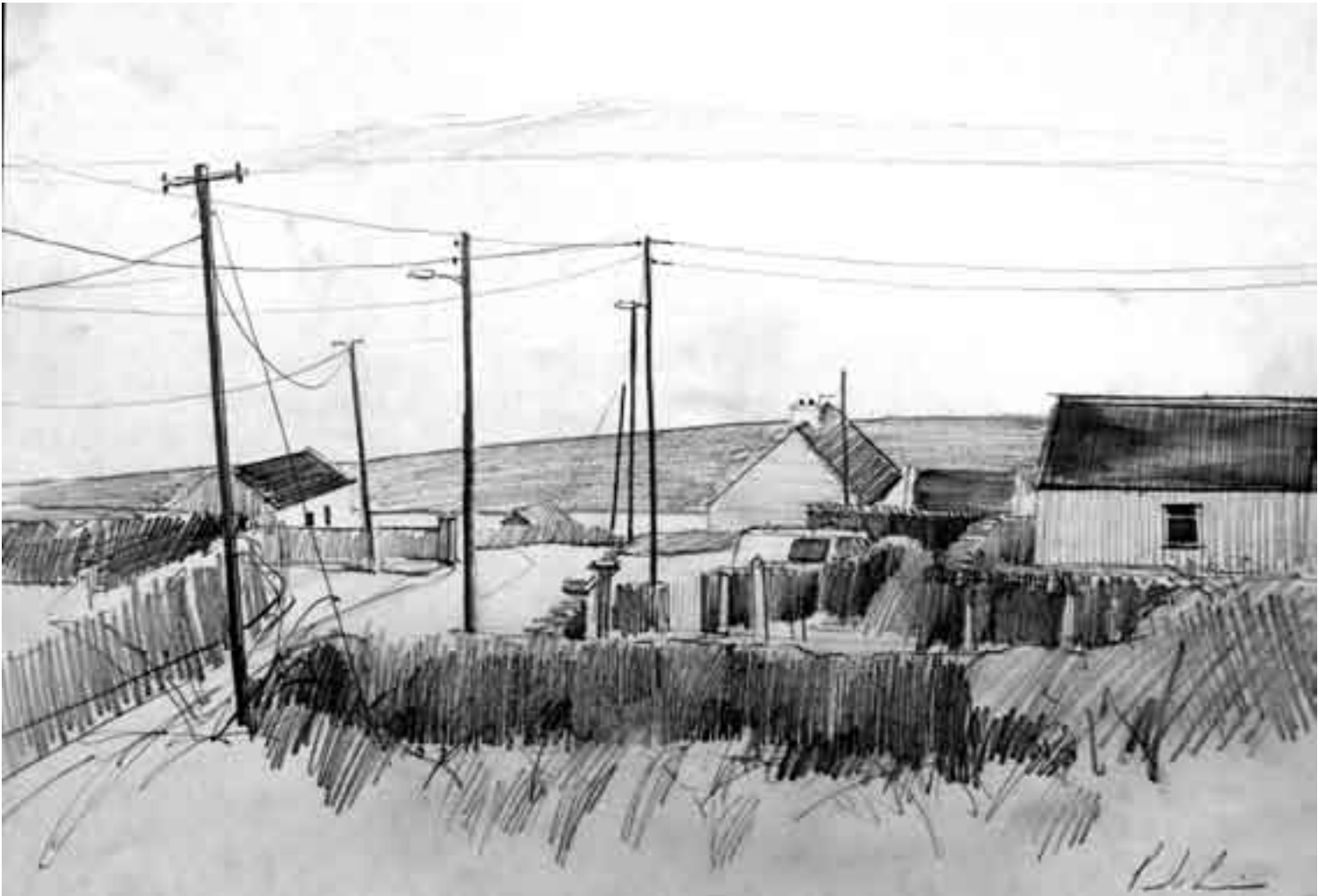
Graphite



Sheep 1
Graphite



Kille Village
Graphite



Bernies House
Graphite



Hannahs House, Inishturk and Caher Island
Graphite



Rain Study 1
Watercolour and Graphite



Rain Study 2
Watercolour and Graphite



Setting Sun and Rain
Watercolour and Graphite



Corrachs at Portnakilly
Graphite



Cliffs near the Gannets, Knockmore

Graphite



Sheep 2

Graphite



Knockmore and Lazy Beds
Graphite



Knockmore from Ballytoohy Beg
Graphite



Beetle Head from Knockmore

Graphite

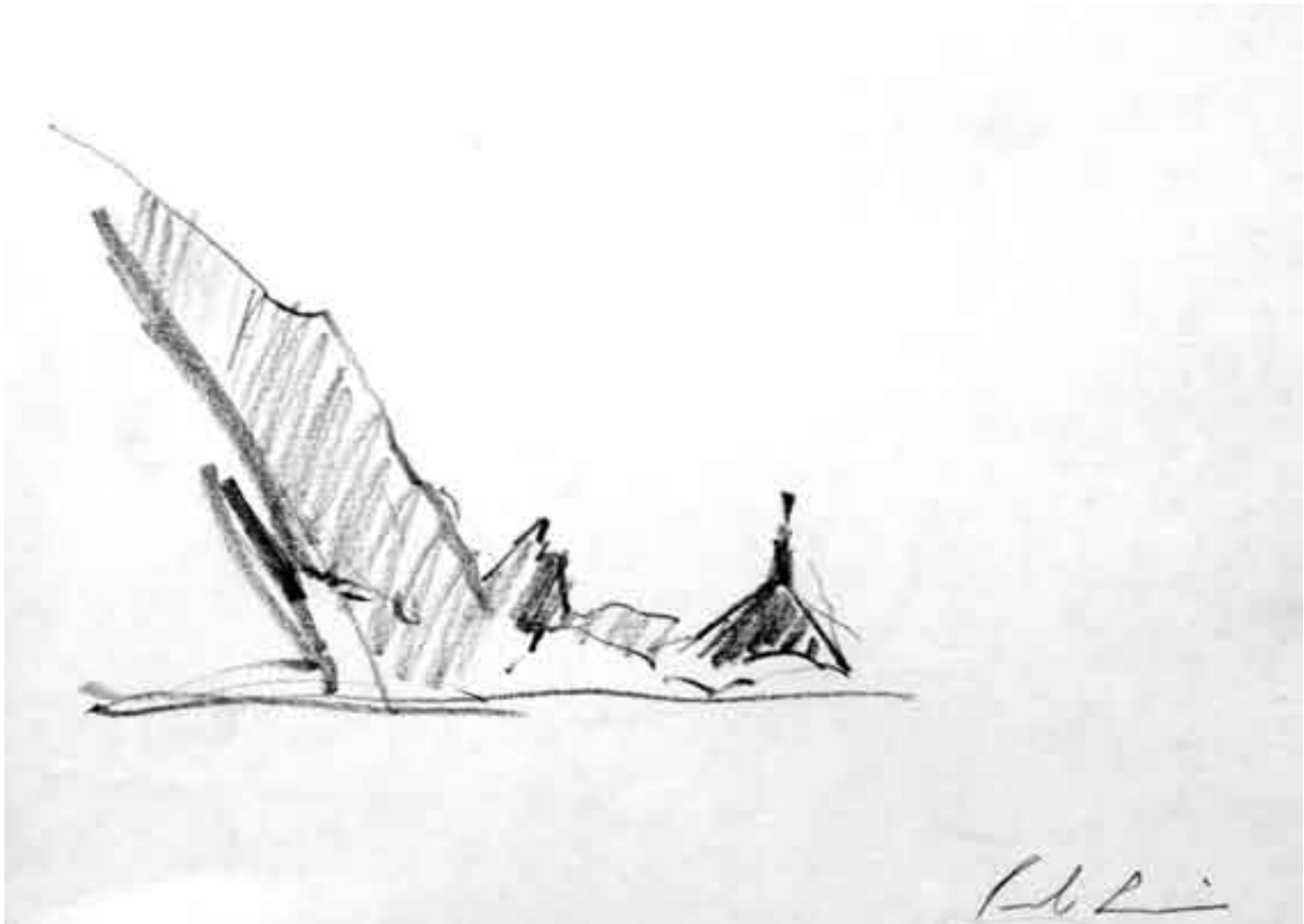


High Cliff from Knockmore

Graphite



Sheep 3
Graphite



Buddawanny from the Sea
Graphite



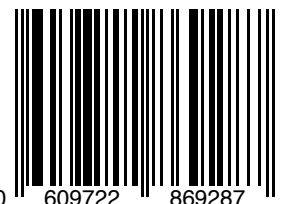


ARTISTIC ALLIANCE

Artistic Alliance is an organisation which partners artists from Ireland and abroad and facilitates their interests.

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