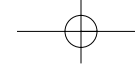


Landscape and Memory

Paintings and Selected Graphic works

Bernie Masterson

Draiocht



The publication of this catalogue coincides with the opening of *Landscape and Memory*, an exhibition of new work by Bernie Masterson at Draiocht, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15, December 2004.

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Lithography: Masterphoto, Dublin

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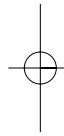
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Introduction

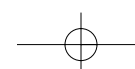
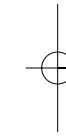
Winnie Ryan, Visual Arts Administrator, Draiocht

Draiocht is delighted and honoured to be hosting this solo exhibition by Bernie Masterson, one of Ireland's leading landscape artists. This exhibition entitled *Landscape and Memory* is a new body of paintings that explores the dramatic and romantic vistas of the Wicklow Mountains as well as detailed drawings of garden foliage.

Bernie's paintings emerge from a personal interaction with and reaction to the landscape, the environment, nature and with life. For Bernie, the "Total" experience of what is seen or felt becomes part of the human psyche. During the process of painting that essence is revisited and the emotionally of the subject matter becomes an expressed experience instead of being an internally exclusive one. In the end the finished painting becomes a testimony to a sense of an emotional personal connectedness to that original total experience.

Draiocht would like to express special thanks to the following for their generous support: Rory O'Byrne, Arts Officer, Fingal County Council; Mary Tuohey, Director, Hallward Gallery; and Carissa Farrell, Visual Arts Officer, Draiocht.

WR, November 2004





Living Landscape

A Sense of Time and Place in the Painting of Bernie Masterson
Marianne O'Kane

"The importance of landscape is probably the single most important element that distinguishes Irish art from the international mainstream."^{Frances Ruane}

Ruane's assertion of 1981 has not lost any truth in over twenty years and landscape remains the dominant genre in Irish painting today. Twentieth century Irish landscape practitioners such as Patrick Collins, Maurice MacGonigal, T.P. Flanagan, Camille Souter and George Campbell, have all engaged in a unique manner with the countryside to produce impressions of felt experience rather than topographical accounts. The involvement is essentially emotional and intuitive with paintings suggesting instead of asserting the artist's intentions. Traditionally there has always been a focus on the landscape itself with figurative aspects kept to a minimum. These preoccupations have endured in contemporary landscape painting and they are evident in the work of exponents such as Sean Fingleton, Bernadette Kiely, Sean Mac Sweeney and Bernie Masterson.

John Constable stated that 'Landscape is another word for feeling.' This belief is the impetus that drives Masterson's practice. For her, painting provides the opportunity to translate the natural world into a personal vision of subjective relevance. Yet this vision is one of universal appeal. Bernie Masterson was born in Ballymoney, Co. Antrim. Her father was a banker so his work brought him to a number of counties. The family moved from Antrim to Donegal and on to Carrick-on-Shannon where the artist spent her formative years. She is the first to admit that it was during her childhood that she cultivated an interest in the natural world. Taught to respect and celebrate the landscape, Masterson fondly remembers her youth as a time of nature walks, berry picking, and the sketching of found elements such as leaves.

Her talent and fidelity to the genre of landscape has established Masterson as a formidable presence in the Irish art scene. She is currently based in Dublin and takes full advantage of her proximity to the Dublin and Wicklow mountains. Through her paintings, the artist communicates her sensory experience of nature. The result is 'lived' landscapes in which we witness Masterson's deep appreciation of the Irish countryside, its shifting weather systems and the primacy of light. She observes, 'Landscape meanders, the light dips and dives and becomes saturated.' It is this tumultuous quality of her subject that fascinates the artist. The work is defined by movement with earthy tones and colours reflecting seasonal contexts. Until recently, the artist's skies have been sparsely treated to emphasise the characteristic Irish light. She treats the horizon as a dramatic intermediary. It is rarely a straight line but instead possesses a sense of undulating femininity. The fundamental preoccupation for Masterson is to capture the merging of observation, emotion and recollection.

Living Landscape

She endeavours to capture 'the essence of that 'total' experience, the moment when thinking and feeling come together to produce... a sense of belonging only to that place and time, when nothing else matters.' Engagement and understanding are thus complete.

She has admired many artists including Monet, Cezanne and Turner and while their influence can be witnessed in the work, it is clear that her method of applying paint is more reminiscent of Frank Auerbach.

Masterson spends extended periods of time in the landscape. She has an excellent visual memory for all observed elements. She supplements this felt experience of observation with photographs that she takes while engaging with nature. Later in the studio the photography becomes the starting point of reference and acts as a visual prompt to reawaken the storehouse of imagery and emotion in her mind. The act of painting's cathartic aspect is emphasised. Through looking closely at landscape, the artist conducts a detached psychic evaluation in manipulating the paint on canvas. She hopes that, 'The end result is a testimony to a sense of an emotional and personal connectedness.' The paintings ultimately manifest an extension of Masterson's mental habitat. They are powerful and sensory and suggest a remarkable immediacy that belies typical studio origins. For this artist the studio becomes as dramatic a creative context as the outdoors and this is effected through Masterson's high level of dynamic engagement with every aspect of the work.

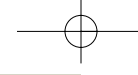
The artist begins with the physical process of constructing canvases and preparing her ground, and during this procedure she initiates the conception of her subject. She calls to mind the place and time, which is sometimes prompted by a snapshot but often merely recollected. It is paramount that Masterson is in control of the entire process from inception to completion and the final painting assumes a rudimentary personification because it has been brought to life in this way. Despite their immediacy and freshness, the paintings are not executed quickly and take a number of days to complete. The artist responds to a persistent compulsion to walk away from her painting in order to think. She will then come back, conduct a dialogue with the work and decide the way forward. She asserts; 'The end result is everything but the journey is as much.' The 'journey' has a number of constituent elements. It details the initial reconnaissance conducted outdoors in the landscape. It relates to the fabrication process, the making of canvases, the selecting of pigments and the mixing of paint, whether on the palette or the canvas itself. Finally and most intrinsically, the journey references the mental and emotional investigation that the artist conducts throughout her entire involvement with a particular painting or series. It becomes an extended mediation allowing her subject the time and space it deserves. Masterson has dedicated time for reflection and mental orchestration before launching into fervent expression.

A Sense of Time and Place in the Painting of Bernie Masterson

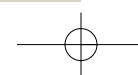
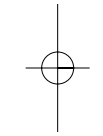
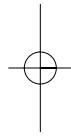
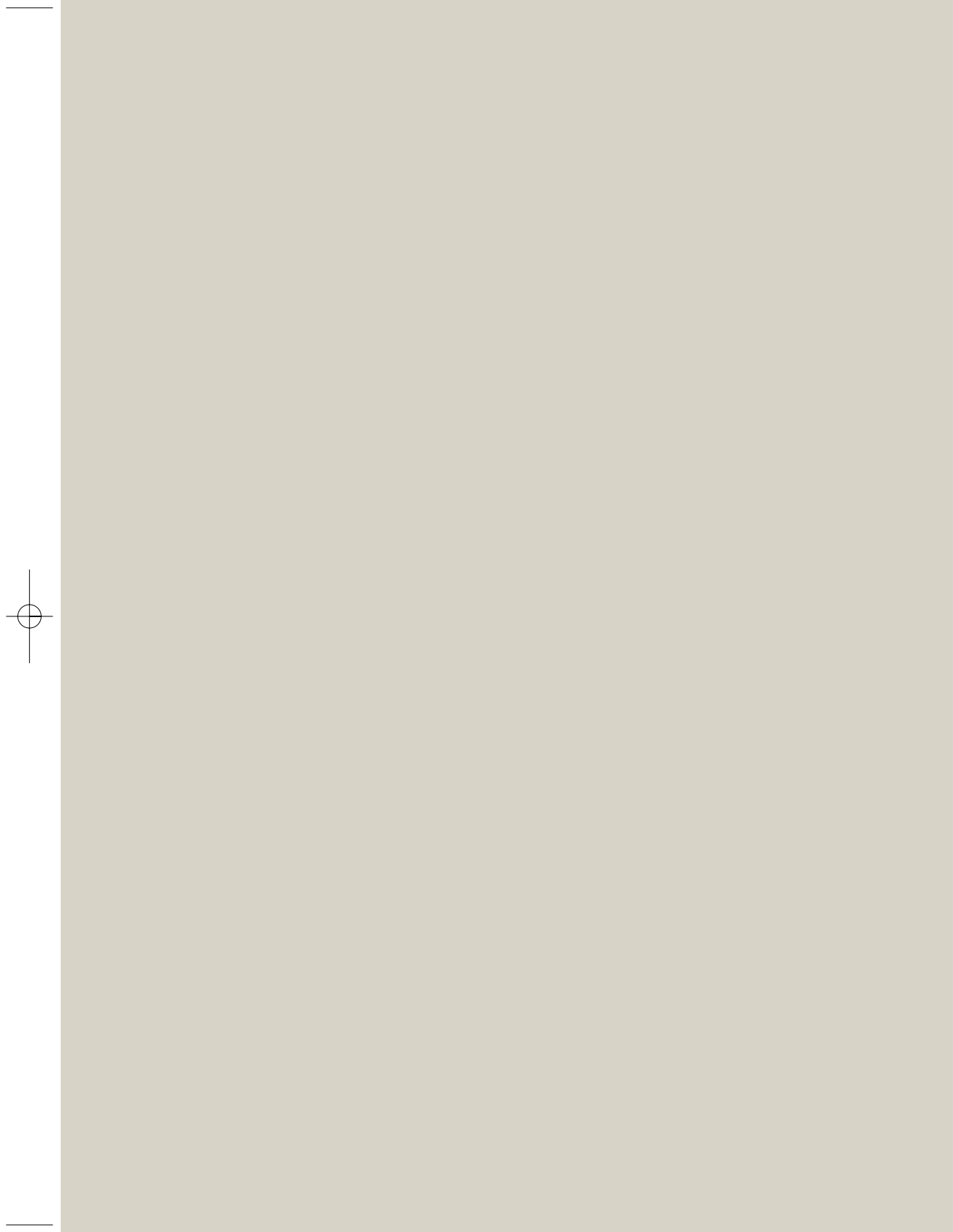
Bernie Masterson's conception of new work for the exhibition in Draiocht has been driven by site-specificity. She has appropriated the emotionality she applies to interpreting the outdoors, into this interior space and the result is a body of work that fully compliments its domain. The exhibition has been meticulously planned to have an intimate introduction to the work. A long wall follows the entrance and profiles a series of small observational pieces that are executed with graphite on board. The artist views these pieces as another branch of landscape because they hone in on natural subjects, flowers, seeds and leaves. She is very aware that the motivation for these studies began in childhood and has persisted ever since. This is the first time that Masterson has exhibited her paintings alongside her drawings and the dynamic tension has produced the desired complimentary effect.

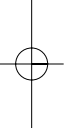
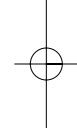
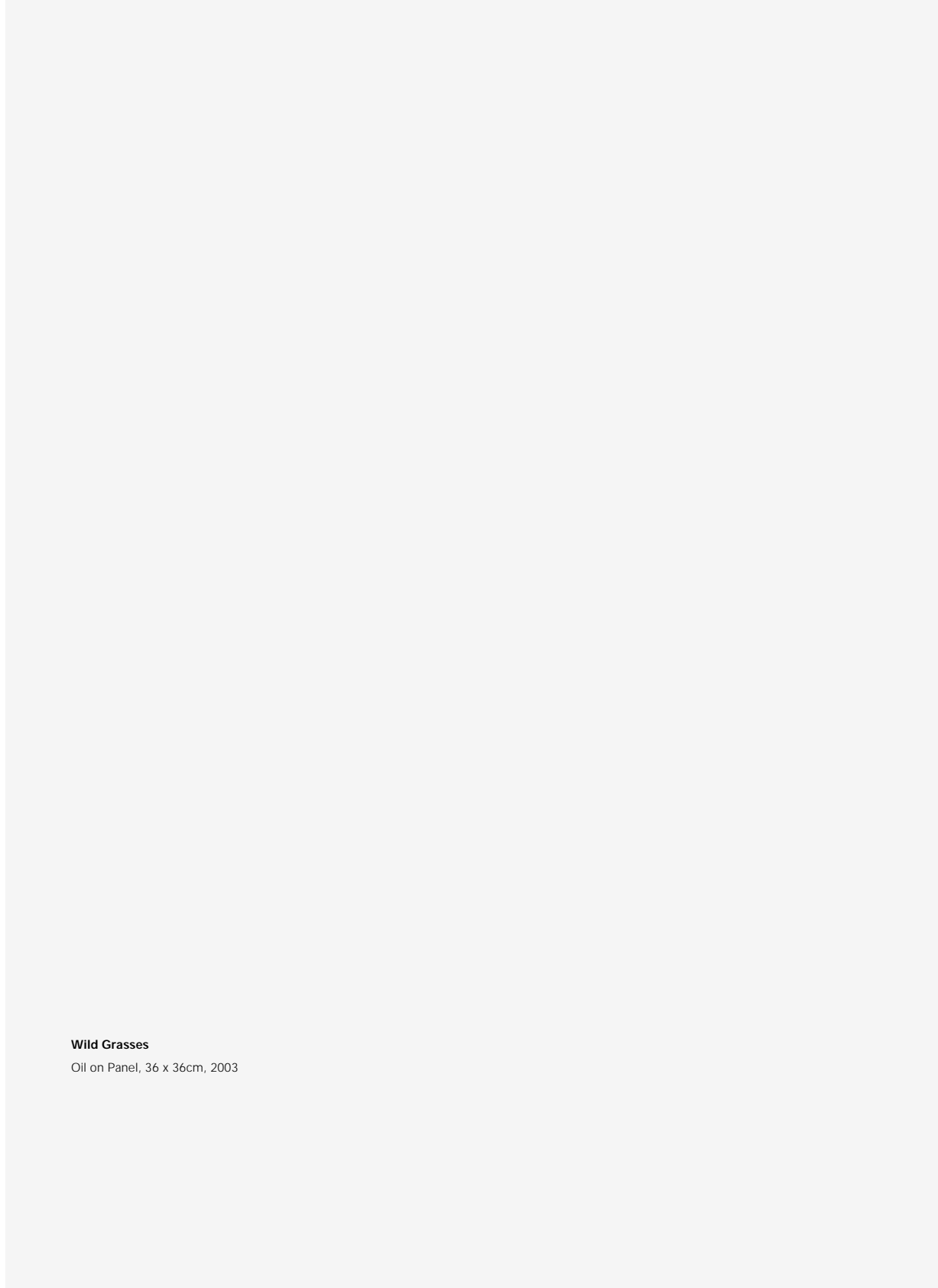
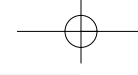
Landscape is investigated from a number of angles in this exhibition. The drawings are small scale detailed vignettes, the majority of the paintings focus on the land itself with its attendant drama and magic, yet there is a third focus and this is on the formerly subordinate sky. Here, the largest wall (over twenty three feet square), of the gallery is occupied by a large diptych that celebrates the sky in the way the artist has always championed the land. She has shifted her perspective, adopted a low viewpoint, and invested the atmosphere with a monumental presence.

Bernie Masterson approaches her practice with an almost spiritual zeal. The work documents a journey of self-awareness and introspection but this is not the prime motivation for production nor does the artist dwell on this dimension. She is committed to imparting a veracious impression of nature's power to affect the senses. This is a subjective vision but the paintings produced as a result retain universal significance. The artist's preoccupation with her subject illustrates her ardent devotion to painting as she pays homage to the land. Due to the creative combination of integrity, passion and timelessness, this work will endure. MK



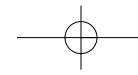
Drawings I

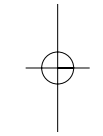
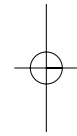
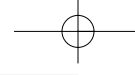




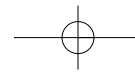
Wild Grasses

Oil on Panel, 36 x 36cm, 2003





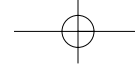
Susan's hosta (leaves)
Graphite on Panel, 36 x 36cm, 2004



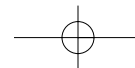
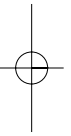
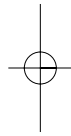


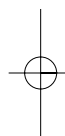
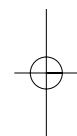
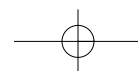
Shuttlecock Fern
Graphite on Panel, 36 x 36cm, 2004





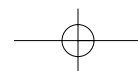
Paintings

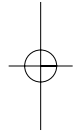
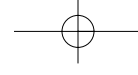




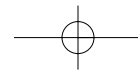
Broken Mist

Oil on Panel, 76 x 76cm, 2004



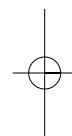
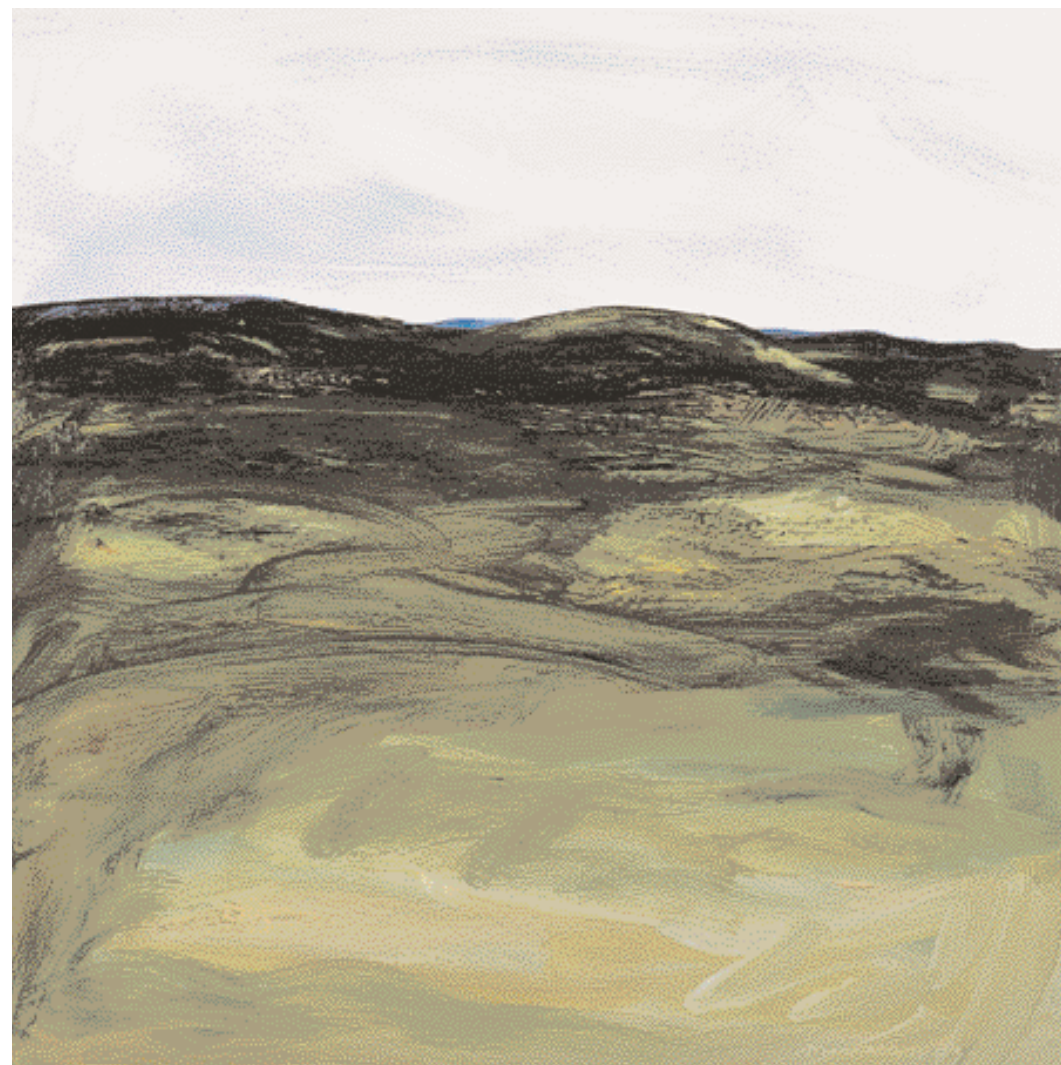
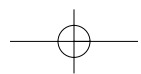


Cloud Light
Oil on Panel, 51 x 51cm, 2004

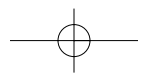


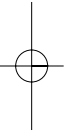
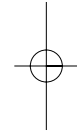
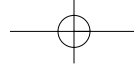


The Woods of the Dripping Trees
Oil on Panel, 51 x 51cm, 2004

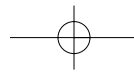


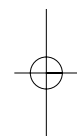
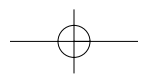
Morning Sunshine on Mountain and Tree
Oil on Panel, 76 x 76cm, 2003



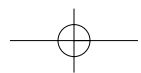


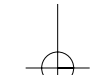
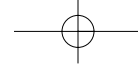
Wind Swept Mountain Heather
Oil on Panel, 76 x 76cm, 2004



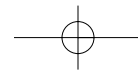


Hill on Fields I
Oil on Panel, 51 x 51cm, 2004





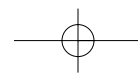
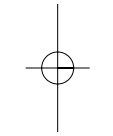
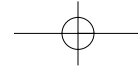
Hill on Fields II
Oil on Panel, 51 x 51cm, 2004

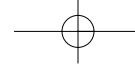




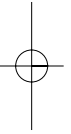
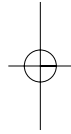
Hill of Fields III

Oil on Panel, 51 x 51cm, 2004

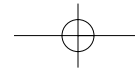




Drawings II



previous **Nightfalling (Diptych)**
Oil on Panel, 244 x 305cm, 2004





Crushed Grass
Graphite on Panel, 76 x 76cm, 2004





Clematis Seed Head (Bill MacKenzie)
Graphite on Panel, 36 x 36cm, 2004





Last Summer's Hydrangea
Graphite on Panel, 36 x 36cm, 2004



Bernie Masterson
Biographical Details and Selected Exhibitions

**Bernie Masterson was born in Ballymoney, Co. Antrim in 1958.
She is currently living and working in Dublin.**

Art Education

1975 – 1979 Limerick School of Art and Design
1981 – 1982 Limerick School of Art and Design, PTA

Selected Group Exhibitions.

1992 Riverrun Gallery, Dublin
1993 Hallward Gallery, Dublin
1993 Monaghan Open Exhibition, Ireland
1994 Ashling Exhibition, Patheon Gallery, Dublin
1994 Boyle Arts Festival, Co Roscommon
1994 Claremorris Open Exhibition, Ireland
1994 Cork Arts Festival, Ireland
1994 *High Season*, Hallward Gallery, Dublin
1994 International Watercolour Exhibition, *Treg'Aquarelle*, Tregastel, France
1994 United Arts Club, Ireland
1995 *Aer Rianta Gateway to Art*, Dublin Airport
1995 Art '95, New York International Art Exhibition, New York, USA.
1995 Boyle Arts Festival, Boyle, Co. Roscommon.
1995 Fe-mail Art Expo, Old Library Gallery, Cardiff, Wales.
1995 International Crossroads Symposium, Roscommon
1995 International Watercolour Exhibition, *Treg'Aquarelle*, Tregastel, France
1995 *Iontas* National Small Works Exhibition, Ireland.
1995 The Second International Female Artist's Art Biennial, Stockholm, Sweden.
1995 Monaghan Open Exhibition, Co. Mayo
1995 The 165th Royal Hibernian Academy Annual Exhibition, Dublin
1995 The Portobello Open Exhibition, Tabernacle Gallery London, England
1995 Women's Art Festival, Old Library Gallery Cardiff, Wales.
1996 *Aer Rianta Gateway to Art*, Dublin Airport
1996 *Iontas* National Small Works, Ireland
1996 SIPTU Inaugural Exhibition, Ireland
1996 The Dillon Gallery, Barnes London, England
1996 *The Oireachtais* Art Exhibition
1997 Invited Artists, the Hallward Gallery Summer Exhibition, Dublin
1997 *Aer Rianta Gateway to Art*, Dublin Airport
1997 The Blackcombe Gallery, Cork
1997 *Green Thoughts*, the Hallward Gallery, Dublin
1998 Boyle Arts Festival, Boyle, Co. Roscommon

1998 *Iontas* National Small Works, Ireland
1998 Microsoft Exhibition, Dublin
1998 Omagh Art Auction, National Concert Hall, Dublin
1998 The Hunt Museum, Limerick
1998 *The Oireachtais* Art Exhibition, (Invited Artist)
1998 *Set Pieces*, Hallward Gallery, Dublin
1999 *Aer Rianta Gateway to Art*, Dublin Airport
1999 Hallward Gallery Summer Exhibition, Dublin
2000 *Aer Rianta Gateway to Art*, Dublin Airport
2000 Hallward Gallery Summer Exhibition, Dublin
2000 Microsoft *September* Exhibition, (Invited Artist)
2000 The Winter Show, Dyehouse Gallery, Waterford
2000 *Eigse* Carlow Arts Festival, Carlow
2000 Hallward Christmas Exhibition, Dublin
2001 Christmas Exhibition, Hallward Gallery, Dublin
2001 Summer Show, Hallward Gallery, Dublin
2002 Invited Artists Christmas Exhibition, Hallward Gallery, Dublin
2002 Christmas Exhibition, Riverview Gallery, Enniskillen
2003 Christmas Exhibition, the Dyehouse Gallery, Waterford
2003 Hallward Christmas Exhibition, Dublin
2003 The Fenton Gallery, Cork
2003 *Eigse* Carlow Arts Festival, Carlow
2003 *Four Painters*, Invited Artist, Gallery One, Kilkenny
2003 Invited Artist, *Radharc*, Draiocht, Dublin
2003 *Iontas*, National Small Works Exhibition, Sligo
2003 The 173rd RHA Annual Exhibition, Dublin
2003 The Moulin Gallery, Denmark Street, Limerick
2003 Wexford Opera Festival
2004 *Art of the State* Touring Exhibition, Ireland
2004 *The Summer Show*, the Hallward Gallery, Dublin
2004 Boyle Arts Festival, Co. Roscommon
2004 The 174th RHA Annual Exhibition, Dublin
2004 The 123rd Royal Ulster Academy Annual Exhibition, Ulster Museum, Belfast
2004 Hallward and Mill Cove Galleries joint exhibition
2004 Invited Artist, Cavehill Gallery, Belfast

Solo Exhibitions

1994 *Moods of a Landscape*, The Dolmen Gallery, Limerick
1996 *New Paintings*, The Hallward Gallery, Dublin
1997 *A River of Images*, The Dolmen Gallery, Limerick

Biographical Details

- 1997 *A River of Images*, The Dyehouse Gallery, Waterford
2001 *Dun Aimirgin* Gallery, Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands – Two Painters, Rachel Kierans & Bernie Masterson – Dublin, *The Tree Series*
2002 *An Odyssey, Kerry/Queensland Works*, The Hunt Museum Gallery, Limerick
2003 *An Engagement with Nature 1*, Hallward Gallery, Dublin
2004 *Landscape & Memory*, Draiocht, Dublin

Awards and Residencies

- 1995 *The Cill Rialaig* Project, Ballinskelligs, Co Kerry
1996 *The Oireachtais*, Douglas Hyde Gold Medal Award for Painting
1996 The Tryone Guthrie Center, Annaghmakerrig
1997 Arts Council of Ireland Artflight Award.
2000 The Tryone Guthrie Center, Annaghmakerrig
2001 *The Cill Rialaig* Project, Ballinskelligs, Co Kerry
2002 Nominated by the Hunt Museum for the AIB Award

Bibliography

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Collections

Smith, Kline and Beecham; New Market Partnership; Office of Public Works / Government Buildings; Fitzgerald Insurance; Dept of Telecommunication & Regulation; Limerick County Council; Norkom Technology; Microsoft Ireland; Tyrone Productions; Harcourt Development; Brian Hogan Architects; Axa Insurance; Fingal Council County

Private collections in Ireland, and abroad

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