

**COLIN GLEADELL, *Belfast Telegraph* 1988**  
**Features Editor, Galleries Magazine**

My first encounter with Martin Mooney's paintings was brief. They stood on the floor, fresh and unframed, leaning against a wall on which hung a host of work by other hands, jostling for attention. I knelt, not out of reverence and noted: Architecture and still life.....traditional drawing, balanced compositions. Absence of figures and movement.....absolute stillness. Spanish heat and dust.....light and shade in bold, simplified contrast. Muted tones and restrained harmonies of mellow browns and yellows. Thinly textured, controlled brushwork.....unfussy. Classical and lean.....a solidly arranged twilight world.....'

Falling helplessly into the pool of references that generate comparison and classification, I toyed with a dozen Dutch masters, with a hint of Cezanne or Andre Lhote in the still lives, and then a sort of Mediterranean James Pryde or Venetian Sickert for the Baroque churches of northern Spain. Dissatisfied at that, I consulted Euan Uglow who had been Mooney's tutor at the Slade. Of course! It was Chardin, Piranesi and de Chirico – masters of the atmospheric, the magisterial and the half-dreamt – not plagiarized, but mulled together within an original and consistent personal vision. The voguish untamed expressionism that was swamping the art schools had found no foothold in Mooney's imagination. Highly recommended by Sir Lawrence Gowing, then Slade's professor, he won the Brinsley Ford Award and took off for Spain where he still works.

It is no less than coincidence that this, his first one-man exhibition, coincides with the rumblings of a neo-classical revival among contemporary artists (currently on show at the Royal Scottish Academy). However, Mooney's classicism, subtly transfused from the sources of his inspiration is, in comparison, the more honest, uncomplicated by the gimmicky and crudely collaged references to history that clutter a certain type of postmodernism.

Our second encounter, with canvas framed and hung at eye level, will be more equal.

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**THE IRISH TIMES, MONDAY APRIL 30, 1990**

### **Taking on the bucket and slosh brigade**

*Art critic Brian Sewell tells Francine Cunningham that he detects a European revolt against modernist painting and he sees Martin Mooney, whose exhibition opens at the Solomon Gallery, Dublin tonight, as a leading figure in the new movement.*

Young Belfast artist, Martin Mooney, has found an enthusiastic and energetic champion in the London Evening Standard art critic, Brian Sewell, who has been noted "Critic of the Year 89/90". Sewell, who has been interested in Mooney's work since he first came across it while the artist was still a student at London University. He has written very warmly of his work in the catalogue for Mooney's first Dublin exhibition, which Sewell will open at a private reception in the Solomon Gallery tonight.

Sewell says that his support of Mooney is "almost a political move". Speaking at the Solomon Gallery, where final preparation was being made for the hanging of the paintings, Sewell explains: "I sense that all over Europe there is the beginning of a revolt against the bucket and slosh brigade, against the kind of artist whose painting is entirely abstract but entirely accidental. It is almost like a new form of neo-classicism.

"I have been watching Martin for some years and I'm astonished by the way that he has arrived at traditional solutions by experiment; he has found his own way there. He also has great mastery in terms of technique. I think that this stage of his life is a springboard and I can see marvellous things ahead. Martin's pictures are very often extraordinarily beautiful, they have a kind of sombre, emotional resource which appeals to my own sense of melancholy."

Sewell himself studied History of Art at the Courtauld Institute in Britain under Anthony Blunt, Johannes Wilde and Michael Kitson. After spending time on research projects which ranged from Rubens to English neo-impressionists, he joined Christie's as an expert in Old Master paintings and drawings. "Working at an auction house is a baptism of fire," he says. "It is all very well being an academic, but academics do not have to make immediate decisions about authenticity, date, and value like an auctioneer does. It is exactly like doing one's national service in the art world."

Sewell is the first art critic to be voted current title of "Critic of the Year". He puts this compliment down to his Frankness of judgment.: "I don't give a damn for my won kind; I don't write glancing over my shoulder and wondering what others in the art world are going to say when they read it. I've got a reputation for speaking the truth, and my version of the truth is based on sound art history and a rather fierce judgment of quality."

Apart from his work as a critic, Sewell acts as a London-based adviser for museums in Germany, America and South Africa. "When I know a collection

very well I can see that there are gaps in it and advise if other aspects of a collection would be enhanced by something that would spark it all into a new kind of interrelationship.”

Last year Sewell brought out a book on the architecture and sculpture of Turkey, entitled, “South from Ephesus”. Of the architecture he has seen in Dublin, he says: “I am appalled to find in Dublin there are exactly the same architects’ designs as in every British city.” In May he will be launching a biography of the controversial late restaurateur and art collector, Peter Langan who was a personal friend.

Sewell is outspoken about what he sees as the British Government’s lack of concern for young artists: “I think the British Government doesn’t give a damn about young artists. It would privatize art if it could.” He is likewise critical of the quality of the artists now emerging from the art colleges in Britain. “There is a generation of tutors and so-called professors who are dishing out so-called degrees to thoroughly incompetent youngsters because they are themselves thoroughly incompetent.”

He finds the work of art students emerging from Northern Irish schools generally more robust and passionate. Martin Mooney, who was born in Belfast in 1960 and studied at the University of Ulster and at Brighton Polytechnic College of Art and Design before going to the University College, London demonstrates the return to discipline that Sewell admires.

“What Martin has done has happened many times in the past”, says Sewell. “He is one of the painters who is quite deliberately rejecting all the current idioms and trying to find a better root for his work. He is going back in order to come forward.”

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**MARTIN MOONEY**

**EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS AT THE SOLOMON GALLERY DUBLIN, 30<sup>TH</sup>  
APRIL 1990**

**Introduction by**

**BRIAN SEWELL *Art Critic of the London Evening Standard***

I first saw Martin Mooney's work five years ago when he was still a student at the Slade School, part of London University. Prowling round the studios there, my spirits sinking as in room after room I found no painting (as I understand that term) but only infantile determination to extend the boundaries of visual art into sound, the video recording and the rubbish dump, I came upon him with relief. His small paintings were abstract but not accidental, their disciplined structure hinting at the forms of architecture, and his use of black graphically suggesting a romantic mood that seemed to stem from both Piranesi and Graham Sutherland. I sensed that here was a natural painter with a fine intelligence who needed to escape the fashionable whims and pressures of the art school, and who, given support and encouragement, might return to the central traditions of European Painting.

I was not alone in my response to his work. Euan Uglow, his tutor, supported him; Sir Lawrence Gowing, his Professor, commended him for the Brinsley Ford Award, a travelling Scholarship that committed him to study in Spain; and within a month of graduating from the Slade School, the British Government (not much celebrated for its patronage of young painters) bought one of his paintings.

In Spain he became aware of the still lives of Zurbaran and Melendez, saw that behind their realism lay a quality of abstraction that was almost mathematical, and used the information to inform his own work, learning the lessons that the abstract painter has everything to gain from realism and that the work of the realist is nothing without the virtues of abstraction (though it has many vices). As the graphic emphasis of his work diminished, so its painterly qualities increased, taking on the bravura touch of Brabazon and Sargent, but gentling it in the half light that is so often Mooney's chosen moment, allowing, as it does the use of subtle glazes, tones, and what the Italians used to call *sfumato* – a romantic and mysterious smoke.

In its new maturity Mooney deliberately excludes his work from all current fashion, preferring to risk in his choice of subject – crepuscular landscapes, baroque facades, tumbled ruins and capricious evocation of Venice and the classical past – comparison with such older painters as James Pryde, Corot, Guardi and Magnasco: these are masters whom he acknowledges but does not imitate or challenge (as did Turner in his references to Claude) as he takes up their traditions and adapts them to the present day.

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**MARTIN MOONEY**

**EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS, OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 1991  
MINERVA GALERIA D'ART, MATARO, BARCELONA**

**Introduction by  
FRANCESC MIRALLES *La Vanguardia***

It is essential to understand Martin Mooney's work within the context of postmodernism. It would be too easy to see in his canvases an exotic landscape which connects with those travellers of the beginning of the last century, who captivated the old world because it had just appeared before their eyes; it would be too easy to think that this young Irish painter based in Catalonia for some years, wants to rediscover the south and the roots of his own culture as so many intellectuals did two hundred years ago. Martin Mooney, educated at the universities of Ulster, Brighton and London, is a cultural man and an expert painter. His work is a reflection on his time and culture, like all true artists.

That is why it is necessary to understand his work in the context of postmodernism: because it is a moment in which it is convenient to pause and, in the uncertainty, reflect on the present. Martin Mooney's work takes us back to themes which were dealt with in Romanticism: the archaeological ruins of historic civilisations, lonely landscapes, facades of monuments and churches....Martin Mooney is submerged in the past, not in the nostalgic sense of evoking a better period but with the hope of finding again distant values, abandoned, for a new way of life which has not been able to give us a completely satisfactory philosophy of existence. These lonely landscapes take us back to our immediate surroundings, to nature, to the source of life as the source of emotion; these monuments make the past present, the source of humanness, the source of feeling. We find ourselves in front of a global reflection on existence "the absolute work of art" which wants to make real that conception of the world which the Renaissance posed, in which man was the center and the primary value of the universe. A utopian conception, because science and technology have made it redundant, but which returns at the end of the twentieth century as a utopia of salvation.

Martin Mooney is a post modernist in the concept of reviving historical themes, and in that he seeks new structures. His occupation with the past: Roman ruins – ethical feelings – church facades – religious feelings – dusky landscapes with no trace of technology – personal elation -. His painting is not an escape, easy and nostalgic, but a reflection to redefine the present.

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**MARTIN MOONEY**

**EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS**

**WATERMAN FINE ART, LONDON 1993**

**Introduction by**  
**GILES AUTY *Art Critic for The Spectator***

Martin Mooney's paintings look as though they would be a pleasure to make as well as to own yet, ironically, the artist's very straightforwardness seems to present problems for contemporary critics. Theorists who believe artists are compelled by hidden forces to work in such and such a way at such and such a time will find a serious stumbling – block in Mooney. I salute him for it. In effect, he has chosen from an early age to go his own particular way and to disregard the dogma of determinism completely. How ironic it is that modernist orthodoxy which prides itself so much on artistic liberalism should not extend its toleration to those who show genuine independence. Yet the ability to choose with absolute freedom must be the birthright of the artist in this, or any other time; for the constraints of fashion and the compulsions of the moment are all, at the last, illusory.

Some critics see Mooney's work in post-modernist terms while others stress the abstract nature of his compositions. That abstract geometry formed a basic element of the art of Vermeer, more than three centuries ago, seems to have eluded the attention of those who seek to justify Mooney's work entirely in modernist terms. While a great range of artist of former time has been summoned as a possible source of influences – Cezanne, Pryde, Lhote, Guardi, Piranesi, Sutherland, Zurbaran, Sargent and others – by far the more obvious echoes found in Mooney's work stem from Vermeer and Corot. Landscapes of Paris, Rome and Venice mirror something of the calm certainty of Vermeer's watery 'View of Delft' while the mood of Corot is evoked similarly by paintings of Peratallada and Castel Empordan. Not so much in the composition of his still-lives as in the application of paint, Mooney reveals himself as a former student of the Slade under the long-term influence there of Euan Uglow. The intensity of observation the latter inspired is generally admirable but Mooney has become very much less a clone of his tutor than many of his contemporaries. He seems to have found his feet and personal sense of direction quicker than most of these. Mooney is establishing a distinctive personal language in the cause of an obviously personal poetry. His landscapes are empty and free of all the bustle or evidence of the moment. He emphasizes peace, timelessness and permanence, perhaps in the causes of personal philosophy but possibly also to stress the availability of these to us all. In short, his paintings suggest that we, too, could share the experience of time suspended if we could but detach ourselves from our temporal imperatives. However, to experience Paris or Rome as he portrays them might seem to involve getting up very early in the morning with a crystal-clear mind. The props Mooney favours in still-life are similarly ageless, speaking of human continuity rather than schism.

Modernism in art is a language of schism, of dug-up and rejected roots, of discontinuity. It is a language that demands formal radicalism and non-stop innovation, even at the risk of impairing the language of human expression. Mooney seems to feel no such qualm about his cultural roots; he recognises them but does not allow them to swamp him. In a word, his relationship with the great European artistic heritage is a comfortable one. There is no particular plagiarism or harking-back in his work but rather a recognition that various traditional tools remain excellent for his own purposes. He seems to me to recognise in art a central truth which ought to be but is no longer axiomatic: that we are all unavoidably different and so do not need to search endlessly for language merely to prove this difference. Mooney's work is truly individualistic and thus original in the best sense.

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## MARTIN MOONEY

### EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS, SOLOMON GALLERY, DUBLIN, MAY 1994

#### Introduction by

**DR. S.B. KENNEDY** *Ulster Museum Belfast, September 1994*

All the paintings in this exhibition have been painted within the last year or so. A few of them were painted in Spain, but most were done in Ireland. As with most of Martin Mooney's paintings of recent years, they are domestic in scale, a direction in which he has been moving since the early 1990's when he first made his reputation with a number of large capriccio-type works, such as *ARCH* (Ulster Museum, Belfast), executed in closely modulated tones of sepia and with a strong *sfumato* effect. As for all of us, geography is important to a painter, for that determines the light and atmosphere associated with one's sense of place and it is by means of this that we often categorize an artist as, for example, typically Irish, French, Dutch and so on. It is here that Martin Mooney is unique in contemporary Irish painting, for he brings a distinctive view to his treatment of the Irish scene as well as to that of other places.

Martin Mooney's chief interest is in painting as an activity, and herein lies the key to understanding his often slightly disturbing imagery. The semi-surrealist scenes devoid of people, yet redolent of human activity, may puzzle us, but once we understand the artist is concerned with the act of painting and not, for example, with the narrative of the scene, they become more easily comprehensible. Cityscapes, landscapes and more recently, still-lives are Mooney's chosen subject-matter. Where his early 'capriccio' pictures were characterized by a focusing of attention of a few large architectural elements – a classical column, an archway – usually seen in isolation, his later works are characterized by landscape panoramas, usually of familiar scenes such as *A view of the Pont Royal, Paris* or closer to home, the *View of the Liffery, Dublin* and *The Leannon at Ramelton*. The absence of people in such compositions is deliberate and is due to his absorption with architectural structures, for the introduction of people would merely detract from the primacy of the architectural setting. Since he returned to Ireland after living in Spain, the grey skies and soft northern light have contributed a blueness to his range of colours and his landscapes have assumed moodiness not seen before. His compositions are usually made in the studio from sketches done on the spot and he frequently returns to the scene to check its topography, although, as he insists, in the end his own intuitive instincts prevail over nature. Increasingly Mooney is turning to still-life as subject matter. To this he brings a sense of intimacy which at times makes us feel as though we are intruding upon him. *Still Life with Apple*, for example, with its carefully controlled lighting – things seen for a mere instant – illustrates the point, and demonstrates too his dexterity in representing the surface quality and texture of different materials. Both here and in the *Still Life with Silk Shawl* the strong tones of sepia which earlier dominates his still-lives (a Spanish influence) have given way to a range of cool blues which, in the latter, especially, contrast with the brilliant red of the tablecloth. The loose brushwork evident in this cloth,

too, contrasts with the precision of his handling of the spode jug and bowl and thus heightens the sense of tension in the composition. The obvious, and acknowledged, influences upon Mooney's work are Vermeer and Corot, although traces of Caneletto, Velazquez and others whom he has studied in the Prado and elsewhere can be discerned. Yet, for all these comparisons, he has his own distinctive manner, brought about by a strong independence of mind and he looks to past Masters more to renew his understanding of his chosen craft than to evoke any sense of tradition. In so doing he has managed to side-step that craving for constant change which typifies so much avant-garde painting.

Despite his representational subject-matter, a strong sense of the abstract underpins Mooney's work. This is evident equally in his architectural structures and in his still lifes. Frequently a horizontal line, formed say – as in the *View of the Liffey* – by a bridge linked to quays on either side, the whole punctuated with a group of buildings, brings a narrow band of activity across the middle-distance of the picture plane and thus separates the sky from the (usually empty) foreground. We see this compositional device of a dividing line in his still-lifes too where it literally forms the spine to which all other elements of the composition relate. Technically, Mooney's painting is of the highest order. He works on a number of pictures simultaneously and almost invariably uses oil paint applied with careful deliberation in glazes of translucent colours laid one on top of another. The effect of this technique is to produce a finely honed surface, the emphasis being on description and free from all gesture. He defines forms concisely and represents the natural qualities of materials with complete clarity of vision, there being in his work no trace of hesitancy or uncertainty. In his use of light and shade to create mood, his works frequently verge on the theatrical, but this is never overdone and the underlying abstraction or architecture of the scene always predominates. This is never more telling than, for example, in those instances where a thin line of colour is used to highlight the meeting of two planes of contrasting tones. The predominance of warm colours such as olive greens and reds lends a sense of warmth to Mooney's pictures which echoes his own personality.

Martin Mooney has a distinct view of the world. While as we have seen, he often draws freely upon earlier generations for inspiration, nevertheless it is his independence of mind which challenges us as spectators. Perhaps in an otherwise frenetic society we are inclined to mis-trust the sense of peace, of timelessness, even of certainty which his pictures radiate. Perhaps, too, it is because of our own uncertainties that images which at first sight often appear to refer back to earlier times can be seen, paradoxically, to be firmly rooted in the consciousness of the late twentieth century.

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## **MARTIN MOONEY**

### **EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS**

#### **WATERMAN FINE ART, LONDON 1995**

##### **Introduction by**

**iAIN GALE *Art Critic, The Independent 1995***

It may at first seem absurd to describe paintings of such serene simplicity as those of Martin Mooney as paradoxical. But, that nevertheless, is the truth. The paradox lies in the fact that, while apparently embracing a traditional form and technique, Mooney is in fact a rare free-spirit in an increasingly dictatorial and compartmentalising art world.

Mooney chooses to paint only two themes – the formal still life and the classical landscape – and in both he offers a refreshing honest approach, content to explore, within his deliberately limited subject matter, the limitless possibilities of paint. Mooney's still lifes tend to invoke the name of Vermeer, but to ascribe their success to such a single influence would be to ignore their complex and carefully considered construction in which the artist takes care to isolate the motif. One might take them, to use a prevalent and often unsatisfying "modern" interpretation, as anthropomorphic examinations of relationships between objects. Why not though, simply enjoy them as exquisite exercises in the control of space and light? Mooney excels in his handling of both. Texture too, to judge by the care he takes to impart the nature of a copper kettle or a cotton cloth is clearly one of the artist's concerns. But none of these preoccupations indicate mere virtuosity. While Mooney is certainly confident in his handling of his chosen medium one can easily discern in each painting the fundamental desire to explore both form and content.

This is most evident in the landscapes. If we need a source for these seductive windows on to the Campagna or the Veneto, it is surely Corot. They possess too an early Poussinesque serenity in palette and composition and an overall lightness of tone with a slightly surreal other-worldly quality. Frequently, like Corot, Mooney uses devices of foreground elements to place the spectator within the picture plane. His buildings are treated as flat planes, vehicles for light and it is either they, or occasionally, a far off mountain which defines the depth of vision with a sharp, planar silhouette. For all their apparent derivation, however, Mooney's work bears his own unmistakable signature: evidence of consummate skill which augurs well for the future.

It is, of course possible to engage with Mooney's works on a purely abstract level and within this context they operate admirably as objects of contemplation. A good example of this would be the Venetian seascapes, in which the city is suspended in space, a fragile, translucent strip, between the sky and the water. In a sense all of Mooney's work conforms to the landscape format. In both landscape and still life, the eye is drawn to a horizon line, be it

that of water, land or table. But these paintings are also literal evocations of place and to ignore this would be to miss out on another level of meaning.

Common to all of Mooney's images is a certain sense that someone has just left the room, or the landscape. The evidence of human intervention – from the peeled lemon to the ploughed furrow is always present and it is perhaps this element of uncertainty which gives Mooney's work its edge.

Mooney goes to nature, selects his view and objects and imbues all with unique sentiment. His achievement, a synthesis between nature and formalism, is precisely that prescribed by Corot:

*"The beautiful is art is made from truth which is suffused with an impression we receive from nature....The real is a part of art; it is completed by feeling."*

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## Martin Mooney Solomon Gallery

### [The Irish Times](#)

May 8, 1996 | [BRIAN FALLON](#)

THE SUCCESS of this exhibition (it has been almost a sellout) shows that there is a public and not an uninformed one, either for art which is "traditional" without being mere pastiche.

**Martin Mooney** paints landscape, cityscape and still life, and he does so in a style which variously pays tribute to the Dutch still life masters, to 18th century vedutisti such as Canaletto, and to the Italian Baroque illusionists and masters of chiaroscuro. The result, is not in the least anachronistic, it is intelligent, skillful and with a good deal of presence.

The still life pictures, which virtually dominate the show, are generally painted in shallow recession, and the objects vases, bowls, fruit etc. are often placed high in the picture, giving an effect which is faintly vertiginous. They cleverly utilise the contrasts and devices of lighting which were a feature of 17th century painting, and though they emphasise textures and objects, they are not academic illusionism.

The landscapes and cityscapes are mainly of locations in Italy, including Venice and a number of hill towns and villages. Again, the skyline is placed high, emphasising the weighty foregrounds, and a mellow light plays over houses and hilltops. They are conventional in approach, perhaps, but it is intelligent convention and done with style.

With due credit to the bravura touches in the big still life pictures, I found that the smaller landscapes, in particular, and certain small still life compositions "wore" best for me and were the most painterly things on view. There is a single nude, rather in the manner of Velazquez's Rokeby Venus that is to say, reclining and viewed from the back (or stern?).

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## WORLD OF HIBERNIA

March 22, 2001, Aidan Dunne

*A thing of beauty: Belfast-born Martin Mooney is just as passionate about the art and craft of painting as he is about creating works of luminous beauty. A representational painter at a time when painting has been regarded as somewhat unfashionable, Mooney has persevered and now finds his work in great demand around the world. (Portrait Of An Artist).*

**Martin Mooney** is strongly built, solid looking, fortyish, with a fast-receding hairline and an easy, affable manner. He is a Belfast-born artist who has, in a remarkably short time, carved out a formidable reputation for himself as a representational painter. This during a time when painting has been regarded as unfashionable by much of the contemporary art establishment. For the past decade, video, photography and instalation have been favored by the big international art shows. But **Martin Mooney's** popularity, among a large and discerning audience well acquainted with art history, reflects the fact that, no matter what the official trend seems to be, good painting will always be in demand. In fact, at one stage he came close to giving up painting himself. **Mooney** began painting when he was fifteen years old, receiving lessons from a local landscape painter with a few other enthusiasts. He went on to study, initially at the University of Ulster in Belfast, and then in England, at the Brighton College of Art and Design.....After that, he went on to postgraduate studies at the prestigious Slade School of Fine Art in London, which had a reputation as a bastion of traditional painting through its association with artists like Sir William Coldstream, Euan Uglow, Helen Lessore, Stephen McKenna and Sir Lawrence Gowing. **Martin** has ambivalent feelings about that reputation. The Coldstream legacy, as carried on by Uglow, is exemplified in a very particular kind of painting, obsessed with measurement and precision, and the Slade has, it must be said, turned out more than its fair share of Coldstream-Uglow clones.

**Martin** was determined not to end up as one of those clones. But he was there during a vogue for Neo-Expressionism, also called, with reason "Bad Painting," that is deliberately rough, clumsy painting. The approach was anathema to **Martin**, who was fundamentally interested in learning the art and craft of painting in the deepest possible sense, utilising every bit of talent, skill and cunning he possessed. Suppressing those qualities didn't appeal to him. "So I went through a really bad time for a while. I thought I would give up painting, there didn't seem to be any point going on with it in a way that went against what I felt. I thought I'd try something entirely different."

.....**Mooney** works with the classical oil painting technique of building up the

image in thin glazes of color. Each layer takes some time to dry, which means that he works on many pictures at once, attending to each in turn. "For me the important thing in painting is to be true, to be honest, not to try to trick people." His own style is firmly rooted in a tradition of 19th century realism typified by the superb French landscape painter Corot. "I also have a lot of time for Karl Blechen, a German painter, who isn't as well known but who I regard very highly." What Blechen and Corot, and indeed English painters like Turner and Constable, Cotman and the Welsh painter Thomas Jones have in common is a commitment to what they are painting. They throw themselves, with all the ability they can muster, into conveying a sense of what is in front of them. "There's a certain humility to that," **Martin** observes. "Their personalities don't get in the way. Today, personality has become more important than any other consideration." The strength of **Mooney's** own work is that he takes that classical realist tradition and continues with it. He doesn't, as many other representational painters find themselves doing, make pastiche versions of what has gone before.

The level of skill **Mooney** brings to the task, together with the straightforward honesty of his approach, have earned him the enthusiastic approbation of many distinguished observers, including the art critic **Brian** Sewell and the art historian Anne Crookshank. His two favored subjects are landscape and still life, though he has done some figure work. His still lifes, usually brilliantly lit against dark grounds, allow him to explore a range of strong colors, often in the form of depictions of dazzling kilims, that do not generally appear in the chromatically restrained landscapes.

The influence of Spanish painting is most evident in his still life. "I think I must be part Italian," he remarks. Apart from a passion for Italian food..... "He'd happily have pasta every day"--he has painted a great deal in Italy, like Corot. "In fact, when I won a Richard Ford Scholarship to go to Spain (this was back in the 1980s) I decided to go via Italy." Which, as anyone with even a rudimentary grasp of European geography will immediately realise, makes no sense whatever, Italy being considerably further from Ireland than Spain. **Martin** has drawn huge inspiration from many locations in Italy, including Rome, Tuscany and Venice. To take on Venice in a serious way is quite an undertaking given the level of the competition, but his Venetian studies display his characteristic pictorial virtues--calmness and a quality of silence, meticulously built-up surfaces, a strong feeling for architectural form and an awareness of the importance of space in composition, plus a subtle, restrained color sense that contributes to the atmospheric richness of his images. **Mooney** may have made his way to Spain circuitously, but he liked it very much when he got there. Initially he stayed in Madrid, but.....gravitated towards Barcelona.....where he stayed for eight years, returning to Ireland in 1994. It was in Barcelona that **Martin** began to paint still life, but he also did an enormous amount of landscape work, inspired by Spanish Baroque architecture. He also traveled to Morocco and, more recently, he made an ambitious painting trip to India. "It was difficult because if you start to paint, you quickly find yourself surrounded by people wondering what you're doing, so that it becomes impossible to do anything at all." He found a radical but

effective solution. "What you do is get up onto the roof of a building and paint from there, and you can be relatively undisturbed."

He has also painted a great deal of landscape in Donegal and in Dublin, where his paintings capture a sense of the classical Georgian city. He is particularly fond of the view along the quays of the River Liffey. It's not that he distorts or denies the changes that have taken place in the city, but he instinctively seeks out angles of view that portray the classical architectural elements to best advantage. His affinity for architecture accords well with his sense of unforced geometric compositional structure and he delights in the complex patterns of geometric form and texture that masses of buildings create.

Though he has completed some major commissions, including six large paintings for the Merrion Hotel in Dublin, he is wary of accepting commissions. He prefers the freedom of being able to follow his own instincts and, given the demand for his work, he is in the fortunate position of being able to do so. His work has found its way into numerous collections, including the Ulster Museum in Belfast, the British Government Art Collection, and Harvard University. The work in his exhibitions ranges from small, spontaneous painted sketches, usually made in the open air, to full-scale, fully worked oils. He likes both the looseness and freedom of the small sketches, instinctive responses to the shifting atmospherics of the scene, and the long haul of the studio work, based on careful, incremental advances and a great deal of looking. Again and again he emphasises the slowness of the art of painting, in the sense that one learns slowly but surely. "I know it's not fashionable to speak of it in such terms nowadays," he concludes, "but I think what I'm trying to do is make something beautiful. And why not?"

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**MARTIN MOONEY**

**EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS**

**WATERMAN FINE ART, LONDON 1997**

**Introduction by**

**NICHOLAS USHERWOOD SEPTEMBER 1997**

For all the current hype about yBAs the simple truth remains that the business of painting concerns the long haul, the lifetime's activity or interactivity of mind and medium, rather than a five to ten years, at most, of fame and notoriety. Most good painters know this intuitively, accepting those moments when the spotlight of critical fashion falls on them with an equanimity born of the knowledge that it will almost certainly move on again quickly enough, however gifted they may be. The only danger is that the glare and the strength can nonetheless fatally dazzle and disorientate, particularly if you are just out of art-school and still learning your craft. For, as Martin Mooney has almost certainly discovered, it takes a lot to keep steady, especially when a number of more conservative critics have also been looking for young champions to embody their particular views about the virtues of traditional skills in opposition to the tide of avant-gardism. And over the last twelve years or so since leaving the Slade, Martin Mooney has received a quite remarkable stream of accolades, of the "young master of the future" variety (including a distinctly puzzling one as a potential Graham Sutherland of the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century), which while they pay tribute to his astonishingly precocious skills also conveniently ignore the underlying, essentially contemporary nature of both his artistic training and his attitude and practice.

While Vermeer for me even more significantly, such Spanish 17<sup>th</sup> Century artists such as Zurbaran and Sanchez Cotan have most certainly influenced the darkly glowing still-lives in this show, the painterly sensibility that informs them is still unquestionably of our own time. For Martin Mooney was a post-graduate of the Slade in the mid-80's and it is the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Slade traditions of precise drawing and observation and the accurate rendering of forms in space which give these paintings those qualities of strength and simplicity we now admire so much; his is an old tradition reworked in quiet and unmistakably contemporary terms.

The same is no less true of the landscapes; Corot obviously is present here, though Mooney himself prefers to talk in terms of Corot's less well-known late 18<sup>th</sup> Century precursors, the Frenchman Henri de Valenciennes and the Welshman Thomas Jones (whose paintings of his Italian travels are to my mind among the most "modern" in feeling of that period). Interestingly both artists were early and important experimenters with the plein-air painting that Mooney shows his obvious affection for here in his numerous smaller landscape studies, notably those of Donegal (where he now lives) and the

Aran Islands. These last, only painted a month or two ago in the summer, are delicious little works that also hint at some possibly interesting new directions for the larger, studio-painted landscapes that have always been such a significant part of his output. Meanwhile those shown here, mostly of Venice and the Lagoon, though very different in colour and tone, share with the still-lives an underlying sense of formal restraint and objectivity that comes from steady, careful observation and a meticulous artistic discipline. They are precisely the qualities that have enabled Martin Mooney to keep a cool head amid the hyperbole that surrounded his early career; they will stand him in good stead now for what will, hopefully be the long haul ahead.

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**MARTIN MOONEY**

**EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS**

**SOLOMON GALLERY, DUBLIN 1998**

**I n t r o d u c t i o n**

**b y**

**ANNE CROOKSHANK** *Fellow Emeritus, Trinity College, Dublin, October 1998*

In this exhibition of Martin Mooney's new work done for the most part during a visit to Morocco but including new paintings done in Ireland, the Aran Islands, in County Down and Donegal, a greater freedom of handling is apparent in the sketches. But his interest in architecture, shapes and light remain the outstanding memory. This is particularly so in the Moroccan work where the simple mathematical shapes of the often windowless buildings, give him the opportunity to use squares of colour in a near abstract manner with the brushstrokes emphasising the geometry of the architecture. The colours are of great delicacy and reflect his own reactions to the different effects of the time of day, the heat and the sun. They may look quiet, even gentle at first glance, but they also give us an understanding of the artist's real enthusiasm for depicting differing light on buildings and making the simplest object have an impressive gravity.

His unpeopled villages without cars, or camels, dogs or cats or carts give some mystery to his work particularly when he is painting in Ireland where the noise we all know to be excessive. But they make us think not so much of everyday life but of the basic, important elements which nowadays in an Irish village can only strike one when the populace is in watching an international football match on TV. Then our landscape and our villages take on a new importance, an old importance and one that is not going to disappear with a passing fashion. This is an important factor in making us enjoy his pictures, they have a permanent quality and this is what he depicts whether he is in Africa or at home.

When Martin Mooney is faced with a view of water and trees he achieves the balance and geometry of his work by the careful use of shadow, tiny points of emphasis and of course sunlight striking the trunk of a tree or a rock. He is not interested in movement but insistent on tranquility which is a rare quality in our bustling world. Again the brushstrokes are a very important element in giving depth and strength to his work. There is no doubt though that it is when he is looking at stones, bricks and mortar he is at his happiest.

Martin Mooney takes us into his pictures through his use of wide unpeopled foregrounds where in spirit we may be standing or sitting silently in a boat just out of his sight. The serenity of his work is remarkable whatever the size, shape or subject of the painting, whether we are looking at his huge, finished paintings done for the Hotel Merrion staircase or a tiny sketch of a Moroccan

village or a traditional still life. In these his amazing technique sings out memorably and remarkably for an artist of his generation. His artistic education which took him from Belfast to the Slade gave him all the mastery he needed to attack very varying commissions. But in the end his pictures are always simple and absolutely silent. It is this that gives them their quality.

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**MARTIN MOONEY**

**EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS**

**WATERMAN FINE ART, LONDON 1999**

**Introduction by ANNE CROOKSHANK *Fellow Emeritus, Trinity College, Dublin September 1999***

It is an excitement to be asked to write an introduction to Martin Mooney's latest pictures as they are among the best works he has painted and show a marked development over the last few years. For an Irishwoman it is great to see that he has cracked the problem of our ever changing light. His pictures better called sketches, done in Kerry, or Tory Island and from his studio window in Co. Donegal have new broadness of brushstrokes and looseness of handling which combine to give us the beauty of our skies.

Our awful weather is to blame for these, the sudden darkness of a fierce shower; the beam of quickly passing sunlight; even the peace of a windless, deeply poetic sunrise over a calm sea which will certainly disappear by midday to be replaced by shaking trees and moving shadows. All come to life in these new works, deeply nostalgic of our country which happily still retains some places of silence and peace.

Then one must of course remember Martin's travels. This time to India where he gives us a very personal view. Not for him the crowded, colourful streets with their hustle and noise, but a fascination with the geometry and colour of the buildings whether they be grand palaces in Udaipur or small villages. Viewed as Martin does from an adjacent balcony or rooftop they rarely stand on the ground rising in front of us, but have the air of piled up blocks forming shapes and shadows and distances totally beyond our experience. Again light is a major interest. The shrouded brightness of petrol polluted Udaipur is varied with the pure blue of country town sky. All are recorded with honesty and the contrast between the two countries, India and Ireland is made by the apparently eternal architecture and the ever moving light of the other.

Martin's still lifes are always a pleasure – they bridge the gap from classical antiquity to the seventeenth century in Holland to our own time. Again they show his love of shapes and soft flowing colour.

It is a joy to look at his work and an even greater to joy town one.

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## **MARTIN MOONEY *Masterclass influences of PAST MASTERS***

### **JULIAN HALSBY, *Interview, The Artist Magazine, October 1999***

Born in Belfast 1960 Martin Mooney now lives in Donegal in the Republic of Ireland in an old house overlooking the sea. His foundation year was spent at the University of Ulster where he was able to spend some time in the life room drawing the figure with the help of Neil Shawcross. He moved to England to study fine art at Brighton where he found his head of department Patrick Burke, a good teacher who encouraged drawing. He took the opportunity of visiting Paris to draw in the cafes and during his second year began painting very simple still lifes using cardboard boxes and dishes as subjects, much in the spirit of Giorgio Morandi. He also began painting rather abstracted interiors, maybe looking at the work of Balthus and Patrick Henry Bruce, a student of Matisse.

A highlight of Martin's three years at Brighton was a stay in Cyprus where he studied at the college of art and made a series of drawings of churches. In 1983 he entered the Slade on a postgraduate course. "My tutor was in theory Euan Uglow but in practice I saw very little of him. The two years at the Slade were very exciting with much happening, but I also found it a confusing period and in retrospect I wish I had spent more time leaning from Uglow. I think most art colleges are actually rather sad places where there is little or no interest in technique. Over the six years I spent in art college, I learned nothing about technique and all that I know I taught myself by practice and by looking at past masters.

"On leaving the Slade I decided to start again and return to basic drawing. I was lucky to win a Richard Ford Scholarship which enabled me to spend five months in Madrid where I looked at the work of the 17<sup>th</sup> century still-life painters, in particular Juan Sanchez Cotan, whose work really changed my whole outlook on art".

After a year teaching part-time at Brighton, Martin decided to return to Spain and was again lucky to receive scholarships from the Irish Arts Councils to help him get established. The next eight years were spent in Barcelona where he survived by selling pictures in London, Dublin and Spain. Here he developed his interests in still life as well as studying Spanish baroque architecture which he incorporated into his paintings. In 1998 he visited Venice for the first time and as a result of this trip he painted a series of 20 capriccios, Italianate studies of ruins, whimsical architecture and crumbling buildings, all influenced by the work of Piranesi. He continues to find Venetian buildings and their interiors fascinating. He also visited Rome where he again looked at the classical ruins including the Villa Adriana. Art history is thus a significant influence and source of inspiration.

In 1994, Martin finally left Barcelona to return to Ireland. He continued to paint still lifes, but also began to tackle painting landscape *en plein air*. "After the good weather in Spain, I found painting the Irish landscape a real challenge, but I believe that an artist achieves a certain honesty from working outside. You're faced with an ever-changing reality and you have to make quick decisions as there is no time for fiddling about. Sometimes you make the wrong decisions but this doesn't really matter as it can make a painting work.

"Although I often work up my outdoor sketches into larger paintings, I never touch the original sketches. I recognise their faults, but I never correct the originals. I like the freshness and spontaneity of my outdoor sketches and in the studio I try to recreate this first impression. This is actually impossible, because I work them up into larger pictures and to do this you have to change the composition. You can be more selective in studio pictures and you analyse and develop a composition which is always impossible to do while working on the spot".

In February 1998 Martin visited Morocco, travelling around for a month but spending four days in each place. "I painted every day, doing an oil sketch in the morning and another in the afternoon. It makes for a very long day requiring great concentration. I travelled with a friend, also a painter and I can recommend this because it gives you moral support, someone to share your problems with. Working on your own as an artist abroad can be very lonely. We hired a guide, almost a bodyguard, who held back the inquisitive crowds and in one place we counted over 50 people trying to catch a glimpse of our work. I returned with nearly 30 oil panels, most of which I later worked from in the studio".

He recently returned from a trip to India, again in the company of another artist. "I found India quite difficult to paint as I think I was surprised by the noise, chaos and poverty. I decided to concentrate on the buildings rather than struggle with the crowds in the streets and markets. Indian architecture is quite marvellous with its intricate carved decorations". He has also worked in Tuscany and Portugal and hopes to have the opportunity to paint in Cairo.

While travelling abroad, Martin often thinks back to the great *plein air* artists of the last century. "I greatly admire the oil sketches of some of the earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century French artists such as Corot and Henri de Valenciennes, as well as some of the English watercolorists such as Cotman. I like the way in which they simplified their subjects while achieving a sense of sunlight through their use of light colours, in particular a creamy white".

Martin works on plywood or MDF boards which he seals with rabbit skin glue before priming with coloured gesso. HE prefers board to canvas as he likes to be able to treat the surface quite roughly, scraping down areas before making changes. He builds his pictures up with a series of oil glazes, with some areas receiving as many as ten layers.

He usually sketches out his composition using a wide brush and dark colours mixed with Liquin, a medium which he also uses for his glazes. He lets the initial composition dry until tacky and then 'cuts out' areas using turps on a rag to expose the board beneath. This is a method of creating sharp edges. He then works into each area using an initial layer of quite thick paint which he over-glazes with a mixture of oil paint, Liquin and turps. "I might, for example, apply an area of quite strong and thick red, which I modify over time with many glazes. I also find that mixing Liquin into oils helps prevent the colours from 'sinking as they dry'.

Like many artists Martin likes to reveal some of the original ground in each of his paintings, so some areas of the coloured board are left visible to give depth and an extra dimension.

This is a slow process and his pictures take many months to complete, so he likes to have at least ten pictures on the go at any one time. "Some pictures take up to six months to completed in the studio for as long as possible so I can make final alterations to them. It is a great mistake to let pictures go out too soon. Although I work my pictures over a long period, I try to keep them fresh and uncomplicated."

....."Sometimes I find that the painting has become too laboured and has lost all spontaneity. In this situation I like to work into the picture with hard brushes using raw umber and black to redefine the drawing. It is like taking a few steps back in time."

Martin is doubtful about many of the claims made for modern art. "Does Damien Hirst really represent progress, or is art just becoming too fashion orientated? The idea that painting is dead is ridiculous, painting has been thriving for thousands of years and it seems an outrageous claim to say that we have become so clever in the last 30 years that we can dispense with painting and with tradition. I suppose that I should be depressed about the state of art, but I am not. I have discovered what I want to paint and I no longer worry about my contemporaries, especially as most of the artists I admire come from the past."

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## BELFAST ARTIST HELPS KEEP PRINCE'S TRIP IN THE PICTUR

[Belfast Telegraph](#)

April 23, 2002 | [Fiona McIlwaine Biggins](#)

AN ULSTER **artist** who went on tour to the Baltic States as **Prince** Charles' official **artist** last year, is to show his work at a Dublin gallery later this month.

Belfast-born **Martin Mooney** (41), who accompanied the **Prince of Wales** on the five day trip to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania last November, will include the paintings inspired by the excursion in his exhibition at the Solomon Gallery in Dublin from April 23 to May 15.

The show, which will be opened by Sir Ivor Roberts, the British ambassador to Ireland, will display views of Baltic capitals Tallinn and Riga, as Mr **Mooney** concentrated on buildings, one of his specialist areas.

And some of the Belfast College of Art-trained painter's pieces are expected to be selected for the Royal collection, as is customary after such overseas tours.

It was back in 1985 that **Prince** Charles revived the Royal custom of taking an official **artist** with him, most of whom are 'younger painters who are still defining their direction'.

A spokesman for the **Prince** explained the duo 'got on very well'.

He continued: "Then on the flight back from these trips, the **Prince** would have a look at the sketches and discuss with the **artist** how some would be worked up."

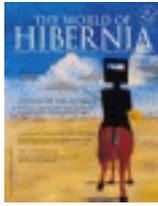
Mr **Mooney** follows in the footsteps of other Ulster artists who have accompanied the **Prince** on such trips.

The **Prince** commented in his book about the official **artist** scheme Travels with the **Prince**: "I used to take a camera with me, but I found photos rather flat, they don't give a sense of landscape."

And his spokesman concluded: "It's about finding an essence of the tour that in other ways is lost."

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## The art of buying. (20th century art at auction)(Brief Article)



### [World of Hibernia](#)

June 22, 2001 | [Reilly, Cosima](#)

The prices being achieved by 20th century art at auction continue to give pause to art commentators. Last year for the very first time a living **Irish artist**, Louis Le Brocquy achieved a record Stg 1.58 [pounds sterling] million for his painting "Travelling Woman with Newspaper." A rediscovered work by Roderic O'Connor, "Paysage, Pont-Aven" sold this year for Stg 289,750 [pounds sterling] at Christie's showrooms in London. The purchaser was a private US collector. Although the state of the art market is intricately linked to the health of the stock market, despite recent jitters **Irish** art is still holding its own as well as attracting international attention. James O'Halloran of the James Adam showrooms has noticed that the Internet has certainly aided this process and Adams are receiving requests for catalogs from all round the world and not just from members of the **Irish** diaspora.

Suzanne MacDougald of the Solomon Gallery maintains the state of the art market is very healthy at the moment. And because there has been such a healthy auction market, particularly in 20th visual arts, it has, in turn, had a trickle down effect on the work of contemporary artists, inspiring confidence in the contemporary art market and exciting great interest in the current crop of **Irish** artists. MacDougald still believes that the principle behind buying art must be love. She is slightly dismissive of the notion of investing as a sole motivation for buying works of art though she reckons investing in pictures is a better bet than many other types of investment. For those who are approaching the business of buying art for the first time MacDougald advises buying from an established gallery and building up a rapport with the staff, listening to their advice on up-and-coming artists. In this way there is more likelihood that a quality piece will increase substantially in value. MacDougald thinks it is also important to establish whether or not the **artist** has a track record and some kind of curriculum vitae, rather than being a flash in the pan character. **Martin Mooney** (profiled in the spring issue of The World of Hibernia) is a case in point, "We can't keep his work on the walls at the moment. It's just walking out the door," says MacDougald.

James O'Halloran of James Adam Auction also advocates buying from a reputable dealer or gallery. "Go to galleries, go to auctions, talk to the experts,

work out what you like and above all do your research," says O'Halloran. The best way for the novice to the **Irish** art world to educate themselves is to keep track of sales and auction catalogs, to familiarise themselves both with key artists but also to note the prices they are commanding. Whilst high-quality works by the elder statesmen of **Irish** art--Yeats, Lavery, Orpen, O'Conor--are out of reach for many people, nonetheless there is an increasing interest and appetite for the works of **Irish** artists from the mid- and late 20th century, which represents an important half century in the history of **Irish** art. In last year's "Shifting Ground" exhibition at the **Irish** Museum of Modern Art, a panorama of **Irish** art from 1950-2000 was on display. The works of Patrick Collins and James Coleman elicited critical acclaim. O'Halloran also points to the growing acclaim--and appetite--for the work of Charlie Brady and Camille Souter. **Irish** women artists are also making waves, particularly those from the 1940s and 1950s, and O'Halloran cites Mary Swanzy, Letitia Hamilton, Mainie Jellett and Nano Reid as names to note.

Philip Gray of Riverside Arts in Cork believes that the prospective art buyer has to identify clearly whether they're buying purely for their own enjoyment or purely for investment purposes. His cardinal rule is, where possible, buy what you like and what you can afford of an established **artist's** work. Gray notes that there has been a huge increase in interest in all forms of art and there are many people in Ireland now who are lovers of art but who can't afford to spend huge sums of money. "There has been a huge increase in international interest in **Irish** music, dance, culture, and up until now fine art has been left behind, but I believe it's the next big thing to become very acceptable and create a buzz, particularly in the US." Just as the nation's tastebuds have become accustomed to fine food and wine, Gray believes there is a sea-change underway as regards appreciation of the visual arts, previously limited to a small, elite group. Buying limited editions or signed prints by a well-known **artist** is also a way of circumventing budgetary limitations.

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## Light in the limelight

### The Irish Times

May 1, 2002 | [AIDAN DUNNE](#)

.....**Martin Mooney** is a superlative exponent of the well made picture in the tradition of 19th- century realism. He applies a wealth of expertise in oil painting technique to the production of landscapes and still lifes, and he does so straightforwardly, without nostalgia or pastiche.

That said, he does have elements of a signature style that depart somewhat from strict painterly realism. In his still life, particularly, he seems to be fascinated by the interplay between the factual flatness of the surface and the illusionistic possibilities of depicting depth.

His luxuriant, virtuoso still life studies often feature low viewpoints, and what might be described as confrontational positioning, with uncompromising planes of colour. He evidently enjoys setting himself technical problems, manipulating lighting with gusto. These preoccupations are also evident in his paintings of Dublin from the Liffey. He is at his most relaxed in an extremely good series of small Irish landscape studies, made in Connemara and Donegal (where he lives), that some respects recall the work of the late Derek Hill.

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**MARTIN MOONEY 1960** *Dictionary of Living Irish Artists* Robert O'Byrne

'Martin Mooney is a superlative exponent of the well made picture in the tradition of 19<sup>th</sup> Century realism'. **IRISH TIMES** *May 2002*  
**Aidan Dunne**

Whether Martin Mooney be deemed a post-modernist or an anachronism, he is without doubt a formidably accomplished painter. Stylistically his landscapes owe a debt to the 18<sup>th</sup> century Italian school that produced the likes of Canaletto and Guardi while his still-lives are essentially Hispanic in spirit and filled with resonances of Zurbaran and Melendez. Although he lives and works in County Donegal, even in his finished views of the surrounding countryside he displays little evidence of the Irish painterly tradition. He is unlike any other artist in Ireland and his immediately identifiable pictures have been consistently popular with buyers since he began to exhibit in the early 1980's.

Mooney attended a number of colleges including London's Slade School of art, one famous as a bastion of the art of painting. However by the time he studied there the place was largely given over to other forms such as video and conceptual art. He was, therefore, an outsider from the very start since his work looked to the past for its inspiration rather than being preoccupied with the present. At the same time, his outstanding technical ability meant Mooney never lacked for admirers, among them his tutor and Professor at the Slade School, Euan Uglow and Sir Lawrence Gowing, both of them traditionalists. He also attracted the attention of London Evening Standard's high-profile art critic Brian Sewell who, in a short essay written in 1990 for Mooney's first solo exhibition at Dublin's Solomon Gallery spoke glowingly of this 'fine painter with a natural intelligence' who had taken up the mantle of the past. Reviewing that show Irish Times, Desmond MacAvock observed, 'The general impression of a series of very similar stage designs of the kind of scenery that depended on backcloths and side wings; all very decorative and suitable for interiors that feature old reproduction furniture by expressing anything about the here and now'. The same broad criticism could be leveled at Mooney's work ever since. Built up of carefully layered glazes, the majority of his paintings are bathed in a universally golden hue and whether representing Dublin or Venice, Gerona or Donegal the result is remarkably similar. His preference for the same low, wide viewpoint in which a generous expanse of honey-coloured architecture or countryside is shown lying beneath a pale blue, near-cloudless sky. Similarly in his still-lives he reverts again and again to a long, cloth-covered surface close to the bottom of the picture above which are placed a variety of china pots, jugs and bowls.

However, in his October 2007 exhibition at the James Adam Sale in Dublin, Mooney showed two groups of paintings that suggest even he was growing tired of repetition and wanted to break free from what had hitherto been a tightly controlled manner of representation. The first were a number of floral

still-lives that recalled those of the 19<sup>th</sup> century French master of this genre Fantin-Latour and the second a group of studies of cattle in fields and Donegal shorescapes that brought to mind those of Nathaniel Hone. The spontaneity of certain pictures in Adam's exhibition indicated he has the potential to do much more than produce well-made pictures.

## ARCHITECTURAL OBSERVATIONS

**The Irish Times *Friday November 25, 2005***  
**Aidan Dunne**

Bangor's Ava Gallery has proved to be a remarkably enterprising venue with a consistent record of strong solo and group shows. Martin Mooney is one of the most successful Irish artists of his generation. His great technical skills and his style of measured realism have proved popular with a wide audience, including as it happens, the Prince of Wales who has twice invited him on state visits to Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia and to St Petersburg, as an official artist. Belfast-born, Mooney lived in Spain throughout much of the 1980's before moving to Donegal where he is based now. Once best known for his highly formulated still lifes, he has more and more painted landscapes and particularly, architectural landscapes. The Ava has had the good idea of bringing together a number of the latter, including scenes from Venice, Morocco and India. Mooney's compositions are themselves architectonic, built from regular, rhythmic geometric blocks of muted earth tones, arranged with classical evenness and poise.

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## **Major Dublin art fixture calls it a day after nearly three decades; Muse: Suzanne MacDougald.**

[Daily Mail \(London\)](#) August 11, 2008

ITS THE end of an era as Suzanne MacDougald closes the door to her Solomon Gallery in Powerscourt Townhouse after twenty-seven years. The 62-year-old former gameshow host has decided that its time to call a halt to her suave commercial art gallery where she was always so welcoming.

Suzanne first came to public attention on RTEs Jackpot where she starred with Terry Wogan, and no doubt for many of a certain age she always remained for them the gameshow hostess they admired in the early days of television.

Her openings in Powerscourt Townhouse included guests of the calibre Norma Smurfit and Jerry Hall. She built up a fine stable of artists in her gallery over the years, and promoted Prince Charles friend, painter **Martin Mooney**, over here.

He left her stable a few years ago and later had a solo sale at Adams all to himself. What harm this method of auction-sale is doing to private commercial art galleries is still a matter of debate.

Earlier this year Suzanne held a marvellous outdoor sculpture exhibition in the Iveagh Gardens. Just last month, Image magazine carried an interview with her.

But there was no whiff of her gallery in Powerscourt Townhouse closing down. Word was travelling around Dublin 4 only for the last couple of weeks that the gallery might be closing.

Suzanne has written to her supporters to inform them that as of October 1, the Solomon Gallery will be known as Solomon Fine Art and we will cease operating from Powerscourt Townhouse. Solomon Fine Art will hold up to four exhibitions per year at The Merrion. This is, of course, a fraction of the former activity at Powerscourt Townhouse. Since 1985 she has hosted more than 350 exhibitions.

Solomon Fine Art will also host an outdoor sculpture exhibition biannually in the Greater Dublin area and have a continued presence at Irish Art Trade Fairs.

From October 1, Solomon Fine Art will will operate from Rathmore, Naas, Co. Kildare. It is a big change for the glamorous Suzanne, but we wish her well with her new, somewhat decentralised, venture.