



The change is remarkable. European ribbons of black macadam—laced with yellow and white and bounded on both sides by green—are the material metaphor of Irish modernization. It still can take a long hour to get to Cobh and the ferry from west Cork, particularly if you find yourself stuck behind a farm tractor, as you do, somewhere on the length of road between Clonakilty and Bandon. But in the main, the donkey carts are gone. Identities, landscapes, and material cultures everywhere are constantly being written and rewritten. West Cork, not unlike Manhattan, is ever posed to remind one of the constructed impermanence of all that surrounds. The residue of change, both the organic and that cultivated, accumulates in the terrain: from the majestic outcrops of volcanic shale that form the coastline to the proprietorial bliss of bungalows scattering extraneous pastels amidst thirty-two shades of green alongside the grey tribal ruins of O'Donovan and O'Drisceoil. Potatoes once rolled out of the fields to be plucked floating in the bay while horses swam to Rabbit Island to eat grasses no hare had sniffed. Moving north-by-northwest along older famine roads, one discovers entire valleys of roofless ruins left in the wake of hunger and ships sailing over and into the sun. Ireland and the Irish landscape have never stood still. In many respects, it is only today that the country begins to reap the revolutionary gains of its long struggle for independence. That the Irish landscape is strong enough to embrace the antinomies produced in the confluence of its pasts, presents and imagined futures is a fundamental part of the logic Graham Crowley's painting is predicated on.

West Cork brought me together with Graham and his work. We each operate and have existences, as such, in the London art world, but the actual spaces we hold in common have place names like Rineen Woods, Carrighilly, Ceim Hill, Toe Head, Castletownshend, Myross, Leap, Union Hall, and Glandore. This is a specific stretch of coast in the west of Ireland—County Cork between Clonakilty and Skibbereen. The quality of light on a day

that is not ‘soft’—as those who live with and in it refer to the rain—is magical. I’ve only seen the likes of it on Cape Cod in Massachusetts—in another town called Truro where Edward Hopper removed the westward side of his saltbox house so he could see the sun set over the water from his studio as he painted. It is a light that produces long autonomous raking shadows of the kind Graham Crowley constructs to become a landscape. Shadows and light, past and present, renewal, transformation, and independence—these are, for me, the subjects of Crowley’s most recent painting. Like memory and forgetting, these are paired terms that not only rely on the existence of the other for their meaning, but also the tensions produced therein.

A catalogue essay can only ever suggest a context in which to receive and read an artist’s work and practice. Materially, one might begin to look at these images while considering a tension that exists in the relationship between the painting of an object and that of an illusion. Shadows are wraith-like, shimmering elusive things. And yet, in Crowley’s practice of painting they are given the same degree of physicality, of veracity as the objects that cast them. Luminosity, transparency—light as subject-matter these values are an ideal entry into Crowley’s new work and practice of painting for they reveal the subtle and precise economy of his mark and its very nature. Fluid, immediate and yet, in areas of import, austere—his highly suggestive calligraphy is more often than not subtractive and about the removal, or absence of a mark. For example, in *The Stags*, Crowley denies the line of the horizon leaving the great stand of rock off the coast to float into negative space. Similarly true of all this work, shadows most convincingly describe the surfaces over which they fall exactly when those surfaces are absent as when a roof of a farmhouse or bungalow is coaxed into existence because of this line or falling shadow and not because of any other. This is a reductive, though passionate painterly economy that has resonance as much, if not more so, in the memory of site and space than in direct observation.

Cutting-in light to mark a doorway, the luminosity of a body of water, or and incongruous although entirely apt satellite dish hung at the eave of a comparatively ancient dwelling—this is a formal device wielded in the service of a master. What galvanizes the would be merely emblematic and technical virtuosity in Crowley’s newest paintings is the pleasure and enjoyment evident in his mark, facture, and brushwork. Graham Crowley here makes paintings, for perhaps even the first time, that harness his formal abilities in ways both familiar and unfamiliar to subject-matter that is his own. One’s identity only ever comes together within a community. We each struggle to be recognised through the forms we inhabit—our bodies—and the forms we create—our work. Confirmation, when it comes, stems from within an intimate network of bodies, subjectivities, labour, and its product. This is

what a community means in practice. What I am suggesting here is an allegorical potential in these paintings: the renewal of a practice of painting is mirrored in a landscape of renewal and transformation; a newfound independence from a catalogue of calculated options is struck and an artist is able to engage with materials, subject-matter, and a practice that is their own. A cultural space is created; a place to exist is made where one may belong.

Crowley has for long painted the places where he lives. The difference, here and now, may be he is more at home in the manner and practice of his painting of place. There is an Irish element to this work, but this can be easily overstated. A viewer could transpose the quiet, though no less celebratory aspect of these landscapes to any open space that has penetrated their innermost being and identity. Crowley's paintings are about being immersed in a cultural space while invaded by the smells, rain, climate, and light that quietly bombard our interior senses in the open air. Yes, this happens in Ireland and by the sea. However, the longer I am with Graham Crowley's landscapes, the less I am sure the uncanny inkling of familiarity I feel flows from the specificity of the places we share along the coast in west Cork. There are moment—only ever interior—when an individual and a landscape are no longer separate entities but one. The still of such moments is elusive and passes shadow-like before us in an instant. These are sometimes haltingly preserved in the that-has-been of a photograph. They are produced, to be sure, in the open air and floating perspectives of Graham Crowley's painted landscapes where, at long last, an Essex lad, motorbike riding petrol head, and father of Irish ancestry has constructed a practice in which the identity of the person and painter are one.

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