

From the Tyrone Guthrie Centre at Annaghmakerrig to the KünstlerHaus I: Patricia Doherty's vision

A shortened version of this document was used for the catalogue of an exhibition of Pat Doherty's work at the KünstlerHaus II, Schwandorf, Bavaria, Germany

I met Patricia Doherty at the Tyrone Guthrie Centre at Annaghmakerrig in April this year. She was sitting quietly at the table, as if deep in meditation yet fully engaged with and by her surroundings. She was listening to everything; animated conversations, kitchen noises, birdsong, whispering trees, gurgling water, and the long, atmospheric silence that is only found in the darkness of the countryside. A request to visit her studio elicited a positive yet unassuming reply. It was a small, narrow room, with a large window at one end. There were two walls for paintings and a table in the middle of the floor. I had to step inside and close the door before I could really see what Doherty was making in that room. On the wall, to the right of the door, was one of the most extraordinary series of paintings that I have ever had the pleasure to see. Eight pieces of enthralling magic, each of which was vastly different and yet, all interwoven and connected to the other. They were not obviously 'landscapes', but they were not entirely 'abstract' either. The imagery hovered somewhere between the mountains and the sea, between the ghostly past and a hint of the present, and yet coupled to the real world through the presence of non-descript things.

Doherty says of her work that is not derived from a specific link or narrative. Her process has more to do with responding to things already present than with the actuality of initiating actions. Yet she is an artist who revels in the endless possibilities that can be wrought from her materials. Doherty's paint is often laid down in translucent layers and then shifted to hide, or emphasise, or even to obliterate something else underneath. Her habit is to work on individual paintings, but in conjunction with others, such as those I saw in the Tyrone Guthrie Centre that day. By working this way, every decision that she makes; every brush stroke, every choice of colour, every addition of paint has an effect on the entire group of images, and yet, each remains different and individual.

As a painter Doherty resists the urge to identify or represent things, or the real, in her work, and yet, she is not interested in abstraction for its own sake. It is for this reason that her images sit somewhere between the mountains and the sea, and it is for this reason too that Doherty's paintings resist the label of 'national.' Her process of listening, watching and of engaging with the world, when combined with her ability to translate that world to canvas via paint, has the effect of creating images that defy parochial categorizations. Doherty's vision is universal. Wherever she makes the work, whether beside Annaghmakerrig Lake in County Monaghan, among the busy streets of Berlin, or in the solitude of the KünstlerHaus II, Doherty presents her viewers with work that is emblematic of her personality: humble, quiet, and yet, incredibly powerful.

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