

THE IRISH TIMES

‘You’ve got to soak it up like a ray of sunshine’

Moth Art Prize winner Bradley Wood talks to The Moth magazine’s Will Govan about his stay at the Moth Retreat in Cavan and life as an artist in New York

April 24, 2018

Will Govan



Bradley Wood on Lough Oughter

Bradley Wood’s work has featured in solo and group exhibitions in Toronto, Los Angeles, Miami, New York and Hong Kong, as well as in publications such as the New York Times and the Globe and Mail. A number of his paintings adorn the set of the TV show Will and Grace.



The Spoils, Bradley Wood’s Toronto show

Tell me about your life in New York.

Like a lot of NYC artists have realised, finding an affordable place to live and work often means moving further outside the city. Back in the early 2000s, we were living in a loft space in Williamsburg, Brooklyn when the owner decided to convert the building into a luxury condo. We ended up moving 45 minutes north of the city to Larchmont, which was a huge change.

I've had various different studios through the years where I'd have a pretty long commute – to Hells Kitchen, Union Square, Bushwick and Long Island City. Now I'm in Portchester, which is just a couple of towns over from where we live. You get so much more space out here, and it's in an affordable, friendly neighbourhood close to the Long Island Sound, where I can bring my dog for walks.



Wisteria Manor by Bradley Wood

Can you tell me about how your lush figurative interior paintings came about through the neighbourhood in Larchmont?

Moving to Larchmont was quite different from the artist's life in Brooklyn, especially going back nearly 14 years. The new environment made a big impact on my work. I would go on walks and wonder what people were doing in those enormous houses that surrounded my own more humble home. I started making paintings, imagining the possibilities. In a way it became kind of a Great Gatsby thing.



At the Moth Retreat

How did you find working alone in rural Ireland at The Moth Retreat, without all the usual distractions?

I had been doing constant back-to-back shows for a few years, so I was in search of solitude, some sort of inner calm. It helped me slow my pace, sit back and truly reflect. The Moth residency actually reminded me a bit of my childhood. I was an only child, growing up in a small town in Canada, and was constantly drawing. What really interested me was that, after being there for a while, I became aware of how much noise there is in my life back home, how much scattered thought there is with technology and social media from constantly looking at devices – ring tones, notifications. How loud cities can be. And then there are the stresses of parenting! My kids are seldom quiet. And when they are it is very suspect! It was so quiet there. I realised how much I needed that, and that did affect my work.

Of course you soon discover it is never really silent, though. You become aware of various different local birds, chickens (especially Erskine the rooster come 7am), a dog's bark, the rain on the roof, the wind in the trees, and the cows chiming in. I was imagining it all as a countryside symphony.



Long Hunter by Bradley Wood

Did your stay at The Moth and your travels lead to new work and give you ideas for future projects?

I had quite a few new ideas while I was there actually. I was really inspired to experiment, go to uncomfortable places. Of course, some experiments didn't work out, but it's still such a positive learning experience. And I enjoyed the food! I would get duck, fish, steak and various beautiful vegetables and fruit. As I unpacked the shopping, I would place it all on a lovely wooden table. It reminded me of 17th century Flemish still life paintings. I started to tinker with ideas of using the food in my paintings as symbols of abundance and opulence. I have been consistently interested in themes of the seduction of wealth and excess. I later worked the idea into my solo show, *The Spoils*, which opened last month in Toronto.



Bradley Wood's painting of Rebecca O'Connor and Will Govan

The painting that I did of you and Rebecca, based on that wonderful photograph that was in *The Irish Times*, reminded me how much joy I get out of making paintings of people I've made a meaningful connection with. I know that is not exactly a new idea, but while I have painted people I know in the past, I'm more often making paintings of fictitious people these days. I'm inspired to do a show filled with real-life characters some day as well.

After working solidly at the residency I realised quite spontaneously I needed to drive, see some of Ireland and hopefully do some landscape studies. The sun came out and it was a glorious ride out to the coast. I was literally yelling out the window YEAAAH!, and just like that my front left tyre blew out. I haven't had a flat tyre in 20 years. I guess it wasn't really a big deal. More of a surprise – but an unscripted part of the adventure that made me realise how safely planned out my life has become.

The landscape was amazing, with the light constantly changing, with the variety of cloud cover, and such contrast of lights and darks, as well as the array of chromatic greens. I would like to do another trip just for landscapes.



Trolling the Briar by Bradley Wood



The Gardens by Bradley Wood

What does winning The Moth Art Prize mean to you?

Exposure across the pond is always encouraging. The recognition doesn't come around a lot for New York artists. It can be so competitive. When it happens you've got to soak it up like a ray of sunshine.

The 2018 Moth Art Prize is accepting entries until May 31st. The prize is for a body of figurative or representational artwork (5-10 images can be sent electronically). The prize is open to anyone from anywhere in the world and consists of €1,000 plus a two-week stay at The Moth Retreat (described by the Irish Times as 'rustic but cosy, full of eclectic touches, witty and warm.'). See www.themothmagazine.com

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