

SARAH POLAND

Tuath – Paintings

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On closer investigation, the title of Sarah Poland's debut solo exhibition, *Tuath*, seems particularly well chosen. In its more common usage, the broadly Celtic word (existing in Irish and Scots Gaelic, as well as Welsh and Cornish branches of the Celtic family of languages) signifies a place, but in terms of its people (or 'tribe') as well as its geographical location. The word's deeper etymological roots also allude variously to 'north', 'left-handedness', and 'good omen'. Her paintings seem to both mediate and blur the boundaries between the subject and the place; not by the narrative suggestion of 'figure in landscape', but by articulating landscape in the physical, intellectual, emotional and psychological terms of the human subject. She is also, incidentally, a left-handed Scot of Cornish extraction.

Over the five years that have elapsed since I first saw her paintings, I've been fortunate enough to follow Sarah Poland's artistic development at close quarters; growing from focussed and determined aspirant through to fully-engaged and increasingly confident practitioner. When she first arrived in West Penwith in 2001, she painted small, broad-brushed, abstracted landscapes that demonstrated a clear facility with oil paint, and an intense connection with the indigenous landscape. Living then at Lelant, she found her first fluency through the repeated drawing and painting of a single view of Hayle Estuary, and benefited greatly from the influence of artist and St Ives School of Painting teacher, John Charles Clark. Since joining Belgrave St Ives' group of contemporary artists in 2002, Sarah Poland has contibuted regularly to mixed exhibitions and participated in a four-person show,

29-92, in 2004. For her first one-person showing, she has produced a body of work whose confidence, singularity and sense of artistic purpose is tangible.

Coming out of seeing, feeling, reading, reflection, research, habitual drawing and note making, Sarah Poland's paintings have always demonstrated a very physical approach to the application of oil paint. Often generously applied (sometimes with great speed and energy, sometimes with languid luxuriance), her chosen medium expresses the highly considered sensations of 'being', using a spectrum of brush marks that embraces the sensual, the lyrical, the reflective, the spontaneous, the compulsive, the aggressive and the clumsy. This always-expressive outpouring in paint is contextualised by a deep-rooted fascination for the physical and historical landscape, which emerges occasionally in near-representational form (as in *Disturbing a Sleeping Carn* and *Fired Moorland*), and more often in landscape-informed abstract works (as in *Dissolution*, *Catching Black Sheep*, and *Divine Motion*). The current exhibition also contains a significant series of paintings exploring the expressive articulation of being and moving in space. *Make It Happen*, *Raga*, and *Mareel*, for example, are full-body movements realised as painterly, abstract mnemonics of really *being*. Derived from drawings made directly from the physical experience of either walking through a landscape, or dancing to music in the studio space (as in this catalogue's untitled drawing), these paintings are a passionate assertion of independence in the full acceptance of mutual dependence. They are also, I believe, possessed of the challenging

beauty of the Cornish moorland to which they make reference.

In the context of West Penwith's art heritage, Poland's boldness and determined integrity bear the hallmark of Bob Crossley's painterly influence. Further, Karl Weschke's exhaustively worked, Romantic treatments of the fact of landscape in relation to the body, find resonance not in the execution of her work (which tends to be almost explosive in its spontaneity), but in the agonised questioning of her artistic motives, the extended preparation for her painting, and in the meticulousness of her tangential titling. But most strongly, her work echoes that of Bryan Wynter in its engagement with being and moving in landscape – sharing also his deployment of clearly psychological components. Sarah Poland exists in her paintings to the same degree that she exists in her landscape, and it would seem that the landscape lives in her in equal measure. A need to discover a better way of living and understanding fuels this show's artistic fire, revealing itself not only in the passionate paintings illustrated here, but also in the quietly determined and engaging works that constitute the complete exhibition. This is work that wants to expand beyond its frame, and since it is only natural to want to grow and develop, one can't help but feel that, akin to Wynter's, the scale of her work will almost necessarily grow to accommodate the shape of her particular being. Like *Tuath*, that suggests a good omen.

Richard Blackborow, June 2006



Raga 2006
Oil on canvas 110 × 120 cm



Make It Happen 2006
Oil on canvas 120 × 100 cm



Caspian Blacks 2006
Oil on board 110 x 120 cm



Mareel 2006
Oil on canvas 110 x 120 cm



Disturbing a Sleeping Carn 2006
Oil on canvas 190 × 150 cm



Fired Moorland 2006
Oil on canvas 110 × 120 cm



A Pocket Full of Kisses 2006
Oil on canvas 27.5 × 30 cm



Catching Black Sheep 2006
Oil on canvas 35.5 × 45.5 cm



Divine Motion 2006
Oil on canvas 55 × 60 cm



Drawing Lightning out of Heaven and Leading Love Around the World 2006
Oil on canvas 82 × 90 cm



Dissolution 2006
Oil on canvas 55 x 60 cm



Untitled (improvised dancing drawing) 2006
Mixed media on card 31 x 36 cm

SARAH POLAND

Born 1974, Inverness

Studied: Edinburgh College of Art 1993-1997

Moved to Cornwall 2000

One-person exhibitions

2006 *Tuath – Paintings*, Belgrave Gallery, St Ives

Selected mixed exhibitions

2006 *The Cornish Connection*, Belgrave Gallery, London
London Art Fair, Belgrave Gallery

2005 *St Ives Past and Present*, Sherborne House, Dorset
NSA New Members, Newlyn Gallery

The Little Picture Show, Rainyday Gallery, Penzance

2004 *29–92* (four-person show), Belgrave Gallery, St Ives
Cornwall Open Studios

St Ives – The Next Wave, Hutson Gallery, London
St Ives Works, Atelier Gallery, Essex
Porthmeor, Belgrave Gallery

2003 *ID NSA members' exhibition*, Newlyn Gallery
Christmas show, Belgrave Gallery
A View of St Ives, Belgrave Gallery

Collyer-Bristow Gallery, Holborn, London
The Little Picture Show, Rainyday Gallery, Penzance

2002 Salt House Gallery, St Ives

Artist-In-Residence Canford School, Dorset 2000

Elected member of the Newlyn Society of Artists (NSA) 2003

Elected committee member of Newlyn Society of Artists 2004

Received Creative Skills Development Fund printmaking grant 2006



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