

Monoprints by David Lilburn

HOME GROUND

For Romane, Joni and Caspar

Acknowledgements

Published to coincide with Limerick's Treaty 300 celebrations

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UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK



With texts by Jim Savage and Aidan Dunne

Monoprints by David Lilburn



HOME GROUND

University of Limerick



SELF PORTRAIT 22" x 30" (detail)

Special thanks to John Hargaden for initiating and organising the Touring Exhibition, and the University of Limerick for supporting it; Evan Morrissey of Mary Immaculate College of Education for providing me with a studio; Paul O'Reilly for his flexible policy at the Limerick City Gallery of Art; Jim Savage and Mike Byrne for their enthusiastic interest in the work and after-work discussions; Romanie for the after-hour conversations; and Mary Nagle and Hugo for taking time off from domestic activities to tackle the design.

David Lilburn

Foreword

"Perhaps it might be wiser for us to concentrate on things of the first rank in order to establish standards of excellence" Sean Ó Faolain

Home Ground is an apt title for Limerick man David Lilburn's first solo exhibition. As the graphic artist in the University of Limerick, his role in the presentation of the University's image to regional, national and international markets is crucial. Yet it is David Lilburn the artist who provides us with the opportunity to demonstrate the importance of the various arts media as the University pursues its twin missions of excellence in teaching and research.

This is the first national touring exhibition of contemporary art promoted by the University of Limerick. The support of the Arts Council of Ireland is greatly appreciated, not least for the fact that such support recognizes that "An education system which allows for achievements is not the same thing as one which provides for them" (*The Arts Council and Education 1979-89*).

The University of Limerick is proud to avail of this opportunity to acknowledge our indebtedness to the people of Limerick for their support and encouragement down through the years. We join with you in celebrating our city's heritage and history during the *Treaty 300* and we invite our neighbours, as we tour this exhibition nationwide, to meet and mix with us on our *Home Ground*.

Edward M. Walsh *President* University of Limerick

Printing with a pencil Jim Savage

Jim Savage, born in Manchester in 1950, is an artist who has lived and worked in Ireland since 1982. He teaches at Limerick and Cork Schools of Art.



UNION II 22" X 15" (detail)

A sheet of glass is inked up with a thin layer of printing ink. Then, a sheet of white paper is placed on top of it. By drawing with a pencil or crayon on the back of the paper the face of the paper is pressed into the ink, which it picks up. Thus, when the drawing is complete and the paper is peeled off the inked plate, the drawn line on one side of the paper is transformed into the printed one on the other.

Looking at Dave Lilburn's monoprints, it is clear in my mind that the impulse behind these images is not so much the impulse to print, but rather the impulse to draw - to harness the raw excitement of drawing directly in response to something seen and experienced, performing an activity that engages not only the hand and the eye in an encounter with the world but the feelings too.

The drawings are done quickly, taking risks, trusting to first responses. Perhaps this is something that makes their transformation into monoprint particularly successful, in that although in the process the drawn mark is re-made in ink, the reprocessing is still very close to the original activity of drawing itself, and not an elaborate transformation of it.

Dave's images are conjured up from animated bursts of expressive line. They are obviously drawn by someone who draws a lot, and for whom the activity of drawing seems to be a natural and celebratory response to the world around him. The images are scratched and scribbled onto the page. You can see the vitality. The lines are still sprung with the energy that put them down. It is the trace of a hand that is mobile and free, spontaneously inventive and improvisational, moving in a fluid, reactive response to the lived world of experience. I am sometimes put in mind of Bonnard's little pencil sketches - the ones done in his pocket diary or on small scraps of paper, more often than not, with the stub of a blunt pencil. Perhaps it is the visible flux and the charged exuberance that the drawings of both artists exhibit that suggests this comparison.

Reminiscent of Bonnard too, is the fact that Dave's images are drawn from his immediate surroundings: his wife and family, the house, the garden, the weather, the river, the city, himself: a visual diarist, avidly and curiously digging

JIM'S QUARTERS 30" x 22"



his own patch and finding new engagements in the everyday. There is the vulnerable intimacy of the family portraits, at once tender and raw, deep celebrations of both love and mortality; there is the sheer visual delight in the pages of cat drawings; the visual curiosity in the recording of particular places and atmospheres, whether it is the contented hum of a summer garden, or the sour beauty of the river and docks, under a winter sky. In the self-portrait exhibited here lies, perhaps, the unseen keystone of the work. It is just one image from a continuing output over the years. The artist eyeball to eyeball with himself duels with his own self-image amid the bric-a-brac of imagery from his daily life.

These images and collaged image-fragments fill the pages of the ongoing sketchbook that forms this artist's work, images that proclaim the delight and curiosity of one man and a pencil in his response to the world around him.

Jim Savage

UNION III 22" x 15"





Line's Odyssey

for Dave

These are outhouses poised for flight
or tense with a force about
to spring. The country
bustles like the city,
and everything shouts its origins
in lines that will not rest
until the thrumming energy
of stillness is manifest.

This is line's odyssey
through colour's archipelago,
marks on paper that condescend
to wear the temporary mantle
of what's at hand,
shape-shifting in their elemental
permanence to become
a swollen stream, trees in a circle
of seasons, dockland;
to feed the wiry strength of marshgrass
or cut cranes down to size,
fatten to pregnancy, midwife birth.

Equal to anything on earth,
marks that remain themselves in all.

Ciaran O'Driscoll

Ciaran O'Driscoll has published two
collections of poetry, *Gog and Magog* (1979)
and *The Poet and his Shadow* (1990).
He is living in Limerick and teaches at
the Limerick School of Art and Design.



Kenrara, August 1990





MILLSTREAM 45" x 22"



GARDEN 45" x 22"

David Lilburn Aidan Dunne

Aidan Dunne is art critic with *The Sunday Tribune*. He is the author of a number of monographs on artists including Barrie Cooke, (1986) and Oleg Kudryashov, (1989)

Like ripples in water, the work in David Lilburn's *Home Ground* radiates in a series of concentric circles from a specific centre. That centre is the given fact of the arrival and presence of his young son Caspar who is one-and-a-half years old now, though the earliest piece in the show recalls his birth and, prior to his birth, his gestation in the womb of his mother, Romanie.

Caspar features in many of the monotypes but, more than this, his presence has, as the presence of children does, largely dictated the ambit of his parents' roving. Lilburn's images record his workaday world, one dominated directly and indirectly by Caspar, exploring it with a close, domestic fondness and ease. Briefly stated, the monotypes encompass the family's erstwhile home in the countryside, sprawling Mill Cottage and its surroundings, their present home in Limerick City, holidays at Wine Strand, a visit to Jill Dennis's home, the minutiae of baby-minding, and, last but not least, cats, each of these subjects forming a circle of imagery linked to all of the others.

Lilburn's work has an informal, intimate quality. Plethoras of fast lines and smudges of colour leads us into comfortable, familiar-seeming spaces. Flexibility rules and no view lays claim to being exclusive or definitive. A sheet devoted entirely to cats offers a panoply of views of the animals disporting themselves in a variety of activities, most of them, cats being cats, of a sedentary nature. No vision is left unqualified by an instant revision. The artist homes in on an elusive reality with speculative bursts of line.

Even more than all this however, he takes post-Cubist liberties with perspective. Assembled in composites of two, three or more sheets joined together in single works, his images further exploit the elasticity of space by moving around the object, be it house or river, and offering us discrete, incremental views, letting us build up our own picture of what he's describing, letting us, in fact, take a stroll around the place ourselves.

Not always, mind you. Sometimes he opts for a commanding, authorial version, more in tune with classical convention, suggesting that *this* is the way we should look at some particular scene, more or less. Which is what happens in the airy, atmospheric *Wine Strand* landscapes, even though they display his

BACKDOOR 30" x 22"





typical reluctance to pin down the subject too definitively. Or in *After Breakfast*, which hangs the composition on an anecdotal peg, the remains of the alfresco repast, while dogs loiter hopeful of scraps.

His exploration of various related alternatives to conventional perspective brings to mind David Hockney's photographic "joiners" and his related paintings, inspired, Hockney has pointed out, by Cubism and by traditions other than the Western, like Chinese scroll painting. Hockney's work is a persuasive bid to demonstrate that we can imaginatively depict a space by means other than the conventional and still - or perhaps more vividly - evoke a sense of its reality.

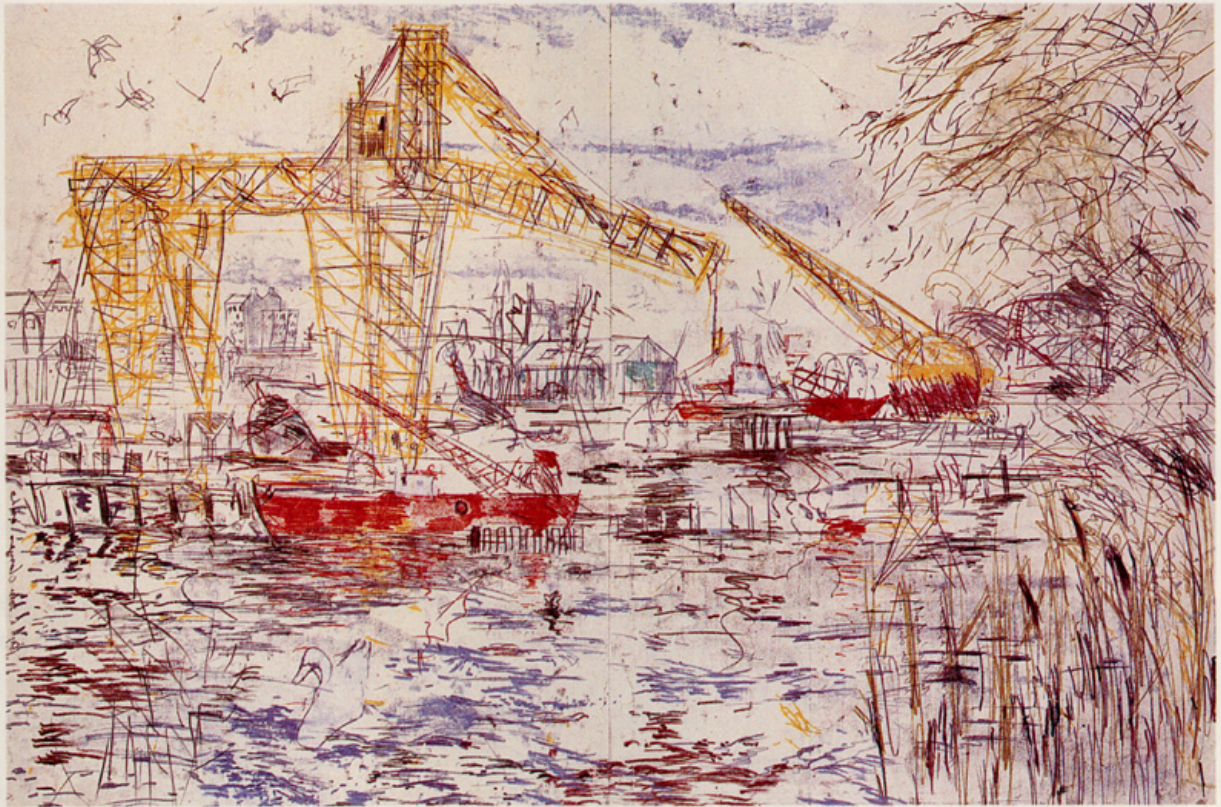
The same holds true for Lilburn's monotypes. He first tried the idea of multiple viewpoints and moments in pieces made about the circus two or three years ago. Now we are invited to wander around the garden in which his older son, Joni, sits, and we can do so easily enough. Sometimes the disjuncture is more extreme, as in *Streetwalker*, a ramble around the dockland haunt of prostitutes and their clients, close to the artist's present home, which shuffles a jumble of views in unreconciled fragments.

What is strongly suggested here is not only a spatial disruption but also a temporal one, something characteristic of several other pieces and exemplified in *His Hour*; which, with all the informality of a doodle, offers a kaleidoscopic view of sixty minutes in the lives of Lilburn and baby Caspar: feeding, changing, playing, smoking, just getting through the day.

There's more, of course: what we get as well is a spatial view of time, as elsewhere we get a temporal view of space, the quality of duration that Hockney is so enthusiastic about, the difference of pace that distinguishes painting and drawing from the instantaneous photograph. Space and time as structured elements that can be taken apart and analytically reassembled in images. And sometimes parts of the picture are inhabited by ghosts, as if to say: there was a swan here, but he moved. Nothing stands still, everything changes. There is as well a sense of the importance of individual objects, animals and people, a bemusement that things are just so, at the randomness of the world, with matter distributed here and there.

STREET WALKER 44" x 30"





DOCKLANDS 44" x 30"



AFTER BREAKFAST 30" x 22"

Yet there is an order in the randomness, if only the casual order of Lilburn's perception. Often he feels free to dispense with the conventions of scale, concentrating on something that has attracted his attention, but by and large, like Hockney's, his images are easily read in conventional terms, we can follow their logic without much difficulty. They are, with their schematic elements, as much like personal maps as pictures, something like a diary of spaces and objects, a world shaped to accommodate us, the viewers.

In studying animals, naturalist Jacob von Uexkull developed the concept of the *Umwelt*, the self-world. That is, as each species possesses different organs of perception, and depends to greater or lesser degrees on different aspects of perception, they embody perhaps radically divergent views of the same terrain: any environment consists of many complementary *Umwelten*. Combine this line of thought with the geographers' notion of "mental maps" and you have something close to a description of Lilburn's exhibition.

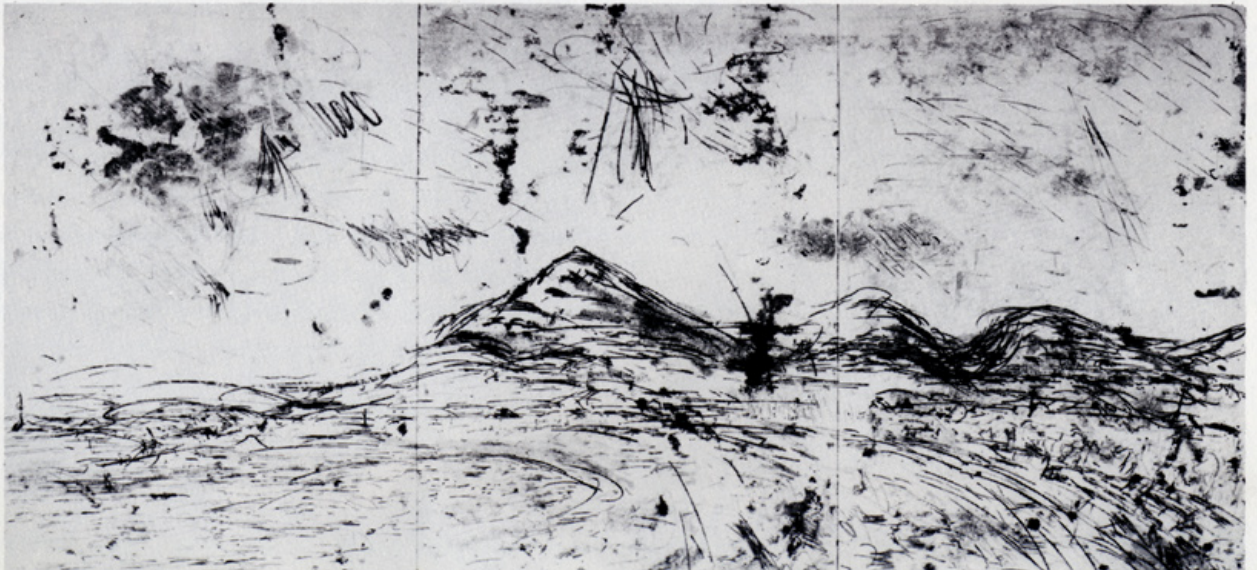
Mental maps are the maps we each carry around inside our heads, accumulations of our knowledge of our immediate world, be it urban or rural,

bringing together masses of different classes of information and memory. A mental map is another sort of self-world, the individual in a context. Lilburn's monotypes build a cumulative guide to his contest and also, in terms of emotional context, to himself.

The monotype comes somewhere between painting and print, being easily classifiable as neither. Though the proofs are indirectly produced each of Lilburn's finished works is essentially unique. Another artist, the expatriate Russian Oleg Kudryashov, has used drypoint in a roughly comparable way, making composite, unique images. There are other correspondences worth pointing out as well. While much of Kudryashov's output seems to fit in with the Russian Constructivist tradition - an interrupted tradition - the main thrust of his work is intensely autobiographical.

He has described how even pieces that look at first glance completely abstract are in fact topographical landscapes, drawings-cum-maps of the Moscow he remembers from his childhood. With other, more overtly anecdotal images they make up an *Umwelt* that has as it's still centre a childhood refuge beneath the family's dining table.

WET SUMMER, WINE STRAND 45" x 22"





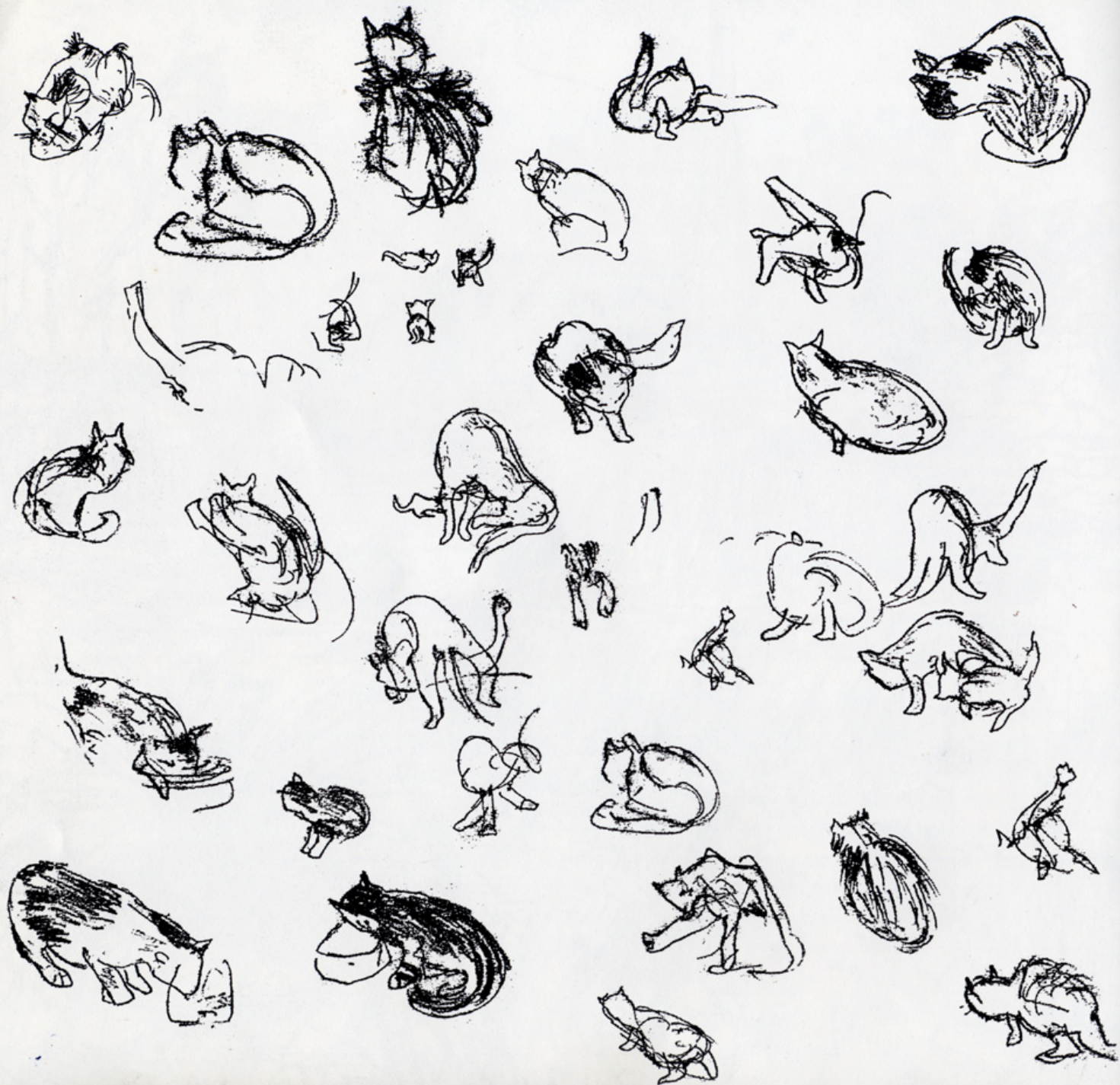
ROMANIE AND CASPAR II 40" x 22"

Closer to hand, Joe Wilson's more recent drawings and paintings have consisted largely of a leisurely, sustained exploration of the overgrown garden of his County Wicklow home, work that in turn recalls the impression we sometimes get in Jill Dennis's paintings of finding our bearings in familiar, enveloping places.

Lilburn's work is personal, but not private. He invites us into his world, invites us to notice what he notices. While he wryly observes that the baby, Caspar, has inevitably tied he and the rest of his family down, he does so matter of factly, without implying any resentment. Caspar has also, to judge by this work, engendered concentration. Lilburn has been drawn to look closely at his surroundings, and has found there something if not quite universal (a vague and overused term) then certainly typical, a domestic world that will be familiar to many, a physical world sensitively and affectionately depicted, and one that it is a pleasure to encounter.

Aidan Dunne







Biography

- Born in Limerick 1950
- 1969-1973 Studied History and Political Science, Trinity College Dublin
- 1972 Course in lithography, Scuole D'Arte, Urbino, Italy
- 1974-1977 Studied art and design, Limerick School of Art and Design

EXHIBITIONS

- 1977 Listowel Graphics III
- 1978 International Graphic Exhibition '78, Listowel; Limerick Exhibition of Visual Art, Limerick
- 1979 Listowel Graphic Exhibition Prizewinners Show; Group Show, Eindhoven, Holland
- 1980 Graphica II, Galway; RHA, Dublin
- 1981 Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick; Graphica II Galway
- 1982 Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick
- 1983 Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick, Grapevine Arts Centre, Dublin, with Joe Wilson
- 1984 Independent Artists, Dublin; Peacock Gallery, Craigavon, with Joe Wilson; Exhibition of Visual Art, Limerick; Art in Schools, Mid West Region; University of Limerick; Arnotts National Portrait Award Exhibition, Dublin; RHA, Dublin
- 1985 Independent Artists Dublin; University of Limerick, Merriman Summer School, Lisdoonvarna, with Dietrich Blodeau and Jim Sheehy; RHA, Dublin
- 1986 Independent Artists, Dublin, Limerick; Western Artists, Galway; Oireachtas, Dublin
- 1987 Limerick City Gallery of Art, with Michael Byrne; Limerick Contemporary Art 1983-1987, 1st Collection, Mid West Region; Independent Artists, Dublin; Western Artists, Galway; Arnotts National Portrait Award Exhibition, Dublin; Oireachtas, Dublin
- 1988 Impression I, Galway; Western Artists, Galway, Tralee; Independent Artists, Dublin
- 1989 EV+A New Work of Past Winners 1984-1988, Limerick, Dublin; Limerick Soviet Commemorative Show, Limerick; The Belltable Print Collection, Limerick, Galway, Wexford; Western Artists, Galway, Impression II, Galway; Fools Gold, Dublin, Galway; National Self Portrait Collection, Dublin; Oireachtas, Dublin
- 1990 EV+A New Work of Past Winners 1984-1988, Cork, Sligo; National Self Portrait Collection, Belfast; Landscape Urban/Rural, University of Limerick; Oireachtas, Dublin; The White House Revisited, Limerick; Art Forum, Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick; Dance Strokes, Dublin; Western Artists, Galway

COLLECTIONS

Limerick Contemporary Art
National Self Portrait Collection
Mary Immaculate College
of Education
Thomond College of Education
University of Limerick

AWARDS

- 1977 Setanta Award, Listowel Graphics III
- 1984 Graphic Prize, Limerick Exhibition of Visual Art, Selector: Peter Fuller

