In Full Flight: David Lilburn's Maps and Monoprints.

There may have been a time when an island was understandably regarded as
some form of natural 'floating' fortress, distinct and separated from the world that
surrounded it. This image of an island is one that has persisted through tradition,
finding expression in phrases such as "an island mentality", "an island race", etc. But,
of course, the real as opposed to the imagined island isn't, and never ever truly was, a
fixed and isolated identity. Through time it is constantly subjected to change, to inflow
and outflow. Its edges are continually traversed, they are thresholds of contact and
transmission, rather than merely defensive barriers. Across those edges there are
arrivals and departures, and all are part of the transitory flux of a living - not a fossilised - identity.

In many ways David Lilbum' s big Irish map: "Coastline" (the centre-piece of
his current exhibition "In Full Flight" at the Chris Doswell Gallery in Limerick,
September 15th - October 10th.) represents this creative, Heraclitean energy of identity.
His island Ireland is in no sense static. It is visibly alive with the dynamics of creative
change that brought it, and presently continue to bring it, into being.

Taking as his starting point the visual form of an archaic map, such as would
have been used for coastal navigation, the artist has loaded it with teeming historical and
contemporary reference, that spill across the coastline of the title to reach out into the
world beyond. The very shape of the island itself, its boundary, dissolves under the
flurry of activity that crosses it in both directions.

Crammed with allusions to the past and the present - to the public and the
personal - to the factual and the fictional, "Coastline" is both humorous and serious. It
operates through many 'voices': combining the diagrammatic with the pictorial, words
with imagery, the idea of the expressive work of art with the idea of the scientific map;
all in a lively, and hugely entertaining, visual dialectic. There is great skill in this chancy
juggling of 'opposites', and great draughtsmanship in the vigorous graffiti of the
drypoint drawing. It is drawn by someone with ideas - and with the skill to present
them: an artist with a strong sense of what it is to make a visually exciting and
absolutely individual image resonant with contemporary meaning.

There is a freedom in David Lilbum' s drawing that belies its accomplishment. It
is not easy to make a drawing like this. This artist is thoroughly assured in the medium
he is using, and he demonstrates quite clearly that he has the confidence and the
curiosity to explore and experiment with it. There is nothing uncertain and hesitant. The
energy and intellectual passion that went into the making of this ambitious work are
visibly there in the image itself, coursing through the outbursts of direct, spontaneous
lines and the risky, agile, first-time marks.

The impulse to 'speak' through drawing is self-evident here. In this unusual
mapping of his native land is a thoughtful and thought-provoking work of metaphor,
making, in its own particular way, a fascinating and intriguing contribution to the
contemporary debate about Irish identity and culture in the twenty-first century.

There are other drypoint. maps here too. Smaller scale maps of towns: Kilkee
and Killaloe and Kinsale; they also are crammed with the bustle of activity and incident.
Layered into these drawings are observations and narratives - fragments of public and
private histories. They are the latest maps in the expanding series that has been
produced by this artist over a number of years now. He seems to have great fun making
these maps. He has taken this visual format as a vehicle for recording and organising
his own day to day experience and thoughts - he has personalised this (usually) public
form, writing himself and his life into the longitude and latitude of a lived-in place -
turning a map into something that exists halfway between geography and diary, and in
the process producing some kind of extended self portrait.

(In relation to the artists series of maps, one might mention in passing his huge,
idiosyncratic map of Dublin that has been only recently put on show in the restored City
Hall in Dame Street.)

There are also a number of monoprints in the exhibition - another form of
drawing that this artist has made his own - coloured linear monoprints of landscape,
the most minimal that David Lilburn has made to date - pushing at the limits of just
how minimal a drawing of landscape can be. Conjured in these spare and excitingly
spontaneous lines are not only wide vistas of beach and mountain, of rock and sky and
cloud, but also weather and wind. The marks are strewn across the paper like wind
blown spume. This is done with such first-time ease and confidence that it looks
deceptively casual; however, to express so much with so little, so directly doesn't come
out of nowhere. These are taut visual haikus; skilful expressions of authentic
experience, honed through (probably) thousands of previous acts of drawing.

Finally there is the artist's book "Paradisi Portae Clausae Sunt", which contains
a series of physically linked drypoint prints that open out, concertina-fashion, from
between their hard covers to produce a final image 45cms x 600cms. Here it is spread-
eagled the length of the gallery. Once again there is that that creative collision between
map and diary, as the artist writes himself into the streets and landmarks and history of
his own city, exploring the complex interactions between identity and place.