

art on LOCATION

Oliver Lange finds a perfect climate for artists — both for painting, and for becoming involved in new arts projects

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has produced many artists who have achieved fame at home and abroad, and with the international success of contemporary artists such as Turner Prize contender Willie Doherty there is much optimism for the future. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland, responsible for funding and developing the arts in the region, believes that "the arts lie at the heart of endeavours to create a new Northern Ireland and are sources of renewal and growth" and has established a five-year arts plan to set priorities and objectives and suggest how these can be achieved. While continuing to support artists and traditional art activities, it will encourage the arts in a broader context and make them accessible to the widest possible audience.

Artists

Well-known artists from the region have included William Conor (1881-1968), who remains the best-loved chronicler of Ulster life, Sir John Lavery (1856-1941), F E McWilliam (1909-1992), who created an extensive series of bronze sculptures, *Women of Belfast*, and the abstract painter William Scott. Today, T P Flanagan and Basil Blackshaw are senior painters of note, while contemporary art practice is reflected in the work of Rita Duffy and other young artists, many of whom collaborate in collectives or, less formally, by working together in a range of successful artists' studios throughout the region. The Belfast Print Workshop in Riddell Hall, off Stranillis Road (028 9068 7223) is an association of printmakers which has established European-wide contacts and relationships. Northern Ireland offers a wonderful variety of landscape

subjects and has its own particular quality of light and atmosphere.

"It was made for artists, and only an artist can convey this landscape," says Ray Elwood, whose work is exhibited in various galleries around the region, including the Royal Ulster Academy. Ray paints in oils and watercolour, with the bulk of his landscape paintings produced out of doors, whatever the season and weather. His preference is for winter light, and he firmly believes that we ignore nature at our peril.

"Our perception can never be heightened by the use of photographs," he says. "The camera lens may be good with surfaces, but it can't cope with space. Painting is about learning to see.

"When I'm painting or drawing outdoors, I'm firing on all cylinders! For me, drawing is a great joy. I never leave

home without a hardback sketchbook in my pocket. As a support for making figure studies in public places I have loose sheets of heavy quality cartridge paper hidden between the pages of a magazine, which is stuck down to a piece of 3mm board cut to the same size. My subjects think I am doing the crossword, and if anyone approaches they see me reading!"

Ray's approach with oils is to cover the canvas quickly to establish the principal areas of light and shade. He refrains from using white at the beginning. "Without white, lifting off is very easy," he says. "When I'm satisfied, I warm my flake white with a little Naples yellow before mixing the main tones — now I'm committed, and I work in a fury! With watercolour, I wet the stretched paper (usually Arches 140 lb [300gsm] Not) with white body colour. This helps to prevent

colours bleeding. Then I lay in the colour harmonies. When these are dry I unify the composition with pure washes of colour."

Courses

Ray Elwood is a member of the Ulster Watercolour Society and the Art Society of Ulster, and he also runs a variety of workshops and classes. "I love teaching," he says, "indeed I am painting better because of it."

He has a number of one-day outdoor workshops planned over the summer months and also weekend workshops for the Youth Hostel Association at Bushmills, County Antrim, in June, with another planned for August. He can be contacted on 028 9181 8586 for further details.

Ray Elwood, *Tawly, County Sligo*, oil on canvas, 8x10in. (20.2x25.2cm)

