

# Alexandra Van Hout Exhibition of Paintings

*Western Light Art Gallery  
Keel, Achill Island  
July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1997*

Dia dhibh, agus Fáilte go dtí léirshamhlú and taispeántas ealaíne seo.

Good afternoon and welcome to the opening of this exhibition of painting by Alexandra Van Hout. Thinking about what I wanted to say on this occasion, the Irish word "léirshamhlú" came to mind; not quite knowing where or how the original word "léirshamhlú" came into my consciousness, I decided to store it on the hard disk of my memory, not been quite sure of what it meant I let it sit there: on having had a sneak preview this morning I thought it was time to get a few thoughts together. The Irish/English dictionary told me that "léirshamhlú" meant "visualisation", it said everything to me about this exhibition.

I looked in the English/Irish dictionary under the word "visuaise" and saw "nochtaim don tsúil" – "to make naked to the eye". The eye and the heart are human nature's vehicles of enabling the soul (the inner self) to observe and communicate with the world. As I walked about this gallery this morning I was taken on a journey of my own place, back in time, and into the future. Each painting touched something inside of me. The series "Megaliths on Slievemore", aptly subtitled "Who Can Disentangle The Strands Of Memory". Taken from a "The Oracle In The Heart" a poem by Kathleen Raine speaks of people, strong in stature who once walked this land and whose memories call to us from those stones, call to us to re – member, not to go back in time but to recognise our own strengths, our own confidences, to become members again of that proud band of people who are our ancestors.

When I spoke to Alex about the other day, I said to her that her paintings spoke to me of life and of people; very quickly she let me know that she doesn't paint people, I smiled, because if we look at the Deserted Village, Slievemore series, the people who lived in those homes exude life, emotion, colour. You can picture the women calling to one another or the laughter of the children playing, and if you look really closely you might even see smoke rising out of the gable, or a couple of men standing in the evening sunlight recalling the days events while puffing on their pipe.

Mystery and mysticism emanate from all the others: as you journey with and into each one (#11 The Other Side Of Dream; #13 & 14 Lake and Vision of Sky I & II) allow your mind your soul to "visualise" to take you on your particular journey of Achill. Particularly dear to me is #20 "And Tir Na N-Og Hid" because, as a child when as a family we would go for a "drive"; I loved coming back through Keel, Pollagh, Dooagh, once we passed the last house in Dooagh in my mind's eye I could see it, "Tir Na N-Og", it was out there. Now I have discovered that Alex has her "Tir Na N-Og" out there also.

John Tolkien of "Lord of the Rings" and "The Hobbit" fame would, I believe have created another world and another novel to inhabit the scene created by Alex in #18 "Tolkien in Annagh".

#12 "Whispers from the Past" Bog and Corraun is slightly different from the subtle, subdued colour that we usually identify with Alex, here again you have life brimming over: bog is a growing, living part of our landscape and for me is not

empty and barren. Here we have images of the many colourful Achill people who ever worked the bog down through the ages intermingled with the earthy shrubs and plants that populate our boglands.

Two of the paintings are very personal to me; #24 "Dream Place" is what I would call a meditative painting or the kind of place I seek out or go to when I want some solitude; the rock(s) gives foundation and strength in a time of vulnerability and unconnectedness. #25 "Rock Pool At Ooghnadirka" would be my journey piece, my eye is taken in through the rock overhangs to journeys far and wide or near to home.

In #'s 22, 23, "Quiet Interior" – "The Human Touch Lingers" we are brought into the simplicity and intimacy of the Achill home and this is continued in #'s 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32 & 33.

Achill's homes are gracefully depicted in #'s 1-3 and in #4 – "Croaghaun Evening" looking out from the security and comfort of one's own home one sees the world; a world in (of) which we are co-creators. Much has been written and spoken lately about the world which is our inheritance and of which we are caretakers become so marred by indiscriminate planning and out of character buildings that our only memories will be that inspired by paintings by people like Alex? Some damage has been done, but I think we are beginning to re-member and take a stand against the destruction of our home-land.

To conclude, I would like to say that my initial reaction on walking in here this morning was one of "awe" (again I went back to the dictionary as we seem to be losing the true meaning of many of those words); "awe" according to the Oxford Concise Dictionary, means "Reverential Wonder". Those two words sum up what this exhibition means to me. I would like every Achill person, and those who have come to recognise what's "special" about Achill, to come and view this show, and to go away feeling very proud that they live here and that this belongs to us.

On those words I declare this show officially open and I would like to wish Alexandra many more years of happiness creating worlds where I feel at home. I would like to Thank Sean and Margaret for presenting Alex's paintings in a way...etc..