

Revolving with the light

I live on the Inishowen Peninsula where the light varies from hour to hour. The prevailing winds blow across the Atlantic, switching to northerly airstreams to bitter east winds to southerly gales in just a matter of a few days. During the bright periods it's easy to use the soft greens, blues and greys so common in seascape paintings. My "Rider from the Sea" series is a good example of this — it was inspired by Synge, the Irish playwright who wrote "Rider to the Sea".

When the light fades, I change tack and carry on with a series called "Burning the Whins". The farmer whose fields I overlook burns the whin plants, or gorse, each year to protect his lambs from becoming entwined in the overgrowth. The exciting dark greens, reds and oranges in the fires can be painted in artificial light. I've been working on both series for several years between commissions and exhibitions and I never tire of them. They work extremely well together — the tranquility and pathos of one against the vibrancy and anger of the other.

For me, pastels are perfect for rapidly changing lights and conditions. They're speedy to work with and are very responsive. They seem so eager to please that sometimes I have a quiet conversation with them. "Will you be the right tone for this shadow? No? What about you? Yes"! From there it seems the perfect pastel almost jumps into my hand.

Follow my daily diary as I start two quite different paintings to demonstrate my solution to the rapidly changing weather and light conditions.

Monday

It's 9:00 a.m. on a gloomy and wet Monday, so I'll start on "Fire". However, I prepare the sheets of paper for both paintings because



Silver Light, pastel, 53 x 41cm (21 x 16")