

EILEEN MULROONEY

7 November 2026 - 30 January 2027

Eileen Mulrooney

There is a framed painting on paper of a tiger's face hanging beside my fridge that I bought from Eileen Mulrooney around 4 years ago, from her exhibition in Callan. Hanging that painting was one of the first things I did when my then two-year-old son and I moved to our new home from the Southside to the Northside of Dublin city. We played a game where he would ask the tiger for a suggestion of what to eat or drink from the fridge before settling on a cup of orange juice or maybe a yoghurt. The tiger's expression is so ambiguous, so mysterious that a multitude of responses could be imagined. It was a fun and helpful parenting device to lead him towards my preferred nutritional choice for him in that moment.

Mulrooney's paintings, in various ways, all hold this sense of quiet mystery. Although the landscapes, buildings, animals and people that populate her paintings are usually a part of her everyday lived environments and experiences, there is nothing about her painterly gaze that seems to take them for granted. *Statue in the Garden*, for example, depicts a white statue, standing among palm trees and other foliage, set against the backdrop of a garden centre. Garden centres are typically referred to within categories of the quotidian, however, so many people find them to be places of healing, renewal or possibility. The enigmatic energy of the statue holds this sense of the potentially transcendental within the everyday.

Mulrooney's rigorous attention to detail when painting or drawing familiar architectural sites also accommodates these seemingly opposing forces: those of the sublime and the prosaic. Painted subtleties tell the viewer that this is not just any church, bridge or ruin. What is communicated is a feeling of specificity, relationship and a deep personal history with each site. This is also true of her rural landscapes, such as *Ballyneale, Ireland*, where soft, hazy brushstrokes convey the artist's ease and familiarity with these places. Though at the same time, it feels as if there is always more to notice, more time to spend, more that is yet to be unearthed. These paintings tell of strangeness that exists within familiarity. As if, the more we look, the more we realise we will never truly know a place. That there is no real end to this curiosity but always another painting to be made.

In paintings such as *Forest Shadow*, Mulrooney depicts the biodiversity that exists on a seemingly simple patch of forest ground. Her use of light and shadows express the transient nature of these places, how they are constantly in a state of flux themselves and how our perceptions of them too, are ever-shifting. The inclusion of her own shadow as she stops to observe and perhaps, take a photograph, reveals

an important part of her process. That is, the act of quiet looking. While painting as a process will always involve some kind of looking, there are different types — different gazes — to be embodied. Mulrooney's gaze is one of contemplation, wonderment and humility. Contained in which, is also a sense of equality among all of her subjects. She is not an artist who waits for something interesting to happen in order to make a painting. Rather, through her gaze, we see how any sheep, donkey, tree, river or road that she encounters could be deserving of our interest.

I first became familiar with Mulrooney's work when I visited KCAT in the summer of 2021. A mutual artist acquaintance had suggested we have a series of meetings, as our work shared a certain sensibility. This proved to be a good idea. After meeting with some other talented residents of the KCAT studios, we sat down for our initial conversation. As it was a nice day, we decided to bring a table, chairs and some painting and drawing materials outside to the front of the art centre and made a series of *au plein air* works on paper as we chatted. This was a novel act for both of us, both being more used to the confines of the studio space. This sense of novelty brought with it an ease of interaction, as we talked about our families, areas of Kilkenny that we both knew, food and mostly about the act of painting. It was a very enjoyable day and one in keeping with the feelings present in Mulrooney's work.

The term *soft fascination* comes to mind while reflecting on these meetings with Mulrooney, as well as reflecting on her paintings. I'm grateful to have come across this term, as it makes sense of the nourishing quality of spending time in nature and the subsequent paintings that that time brings about. The term is defined as a state of mind, often brought on by observing patterns in nature. As the eyes focus on solving visual puzzles (such as branch formations, leaf configurations, grass textures or cloud patterns) the mind is allowed to wander and rest. Such moments often also lead to valuable, if modest, epiphanies.

School House Ballytobin is a painting that seems to contain many of these ideas at once. At the centre of the painting, foregrounded by a bare winter tree, is a small figure with their back to the viewer, carrying a soft bundle, perhaps even a baby? The figure is about to enter a wooden building, one whose rendering communicates a feeling of familiarity and safety. Yet the figure, like the tiger's expression, possesses a sense of ambiguity and mystery, leaving space for the viewer to speculate and wonder. This is the magical balance of Eileen Mulrooney's paintings. In their viewing, we are at the same time enjoyably lost and grounded.

Kathy Tynan - November 2026

Eileen Mulrooney

"Life would be very dull without art"

Eileen Mulrooney has been a member of KCAT studio since 2005. She has exhibited widely in Ireland and internationally, including at the Kilkenny Design Centre, Freight Gallery Fremantle Australia, Gallery Prabbeli Wiltz Luxembourg, Crawford Gallery Cork, Uillinn: West Cork Arts Centre and Linenhall Arts Centre Castlebar. Eileen features alongside her KCAT colleagues in the documentary *Living Colour* (2011) by Wildfire Films. Her work is also featured in several publications, including: *The Engagement Project KCAT* 2014-2020 (2020), *Perceptions: The Art of Citizenship* (2016), *Art & Inclusion: The Story of KCAT* (2009) and the retrospective catalogue, *Eileen Mulrooney* (2022).

Kathy Tynan

Kathy Tynan is a Dublin-based artist whose paintings of familiar landscapes and domestic scenes illuminate moments of affection, intimacy, and curiosity. Her semi-autobiographical subjects include her own family and friends, but speak more broadly to shared enthusiasms, experiences of care, community, and relationships. She studied Painting (BA) and Art in the Contemporary World (MA) in the National College of Art and Design, where she now teaches Painting. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally since 2013. Tynan is represented by Kevin Kavanagh, Dublin.

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