



Welcome to

The Pattern Days

Paintings by John Mulvany
Austin Studio Tour 2020

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The Pattern Days

A pattern (Irish: pátrún) in Irish Catholicism refers to the devotions that take place on the feast day of the patron saint of the parish. On that date, called a Pattern Day, people gather at a holy well or other site to commemorate a saint by “paying rounds”—circumambulating the well three times in a clockwise or sunwise direction, reciting prayers and replicating an ancient Celtic practice known as the deiseal, a ritualized human action mimicking the sun’s rotation. Pattern Days are linked to rituals at wells and other special places, showing clear associations with pre-Christian rituals. The well water is believed to have healing properties and some will sprinkle it on the body or drink it. Like wakes, there are the vestiges of paganism within the rituals of the Patterns.

These rituals were eventually absorbed into the Christian calendar. At one time, every parish in Ireland had some variation of a Pattern Day but few survive today. Over time, Church and civil authorities became strongly opposed to Patterns, ostensibly because of abuses such as drunkenness and faction-fighting associated with them, but also perhaps because of unease about popular, uncontrolled mass devotions with connections to Ireland’s pagan past. Today, the Pattern Day is seen as a turning point of the year, a demarcation, an ending and a beginning.

In 2019, having experienced the loss of both of my parents within six months of each other, I made two visits to my home country of Ireland. After living in Austin, Texas for more than twenty years I had previously only associated traveling back to Ireland as a joyful experience, a time to reconnect with family and friends and to introduce my children to the country where I had grown up. In March 2019, however, as I was preparing for my last exhibition “*Secure the Perimeter*” at GrayDuck Gallery in Austin I took a two-month hiatus to travel to Ireland to help my siblings care for my parents. The days and weeks during that time assumed their own painful patterns as we tried as best we could to provide comfort and care to my parents and to each other.

When my mother died in early May, I spent a lot of time walking in the countryside around my hometown. Wandering into a small forest at the site of a holy well the day after her funeral, I spent time walking through the trees and instinctively looking for solace in the natural world. I took scores of photographs on my phone from that place and when I returned to Austin I resolved to make my next body of artwork based on my experience there.

Then, in November of that same year, I got a call from my sister in the middle of the night to tell me my dad had died and I again left for Ireland. After his funeral I made my second visit to the forest, this time in the winter.

I spent a day taking photographs, all the time conscious of the changing of the seasons, the shortening of days as winter began to close in, the natural cycles of birth, transformation and decay.

Early March 2020

As Austin and much of the world went into lockdown during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, I had already begun to work on new paintings based on the photographs I shot on my phone from Ireland in the summer and winter of 2019. The paintings became an attempt to mitigate the anxiety many of us felt at our helplessness in the face of the pandemic and the sense in the US of the government abandoning its citizens to their own fates. As we navigated our way through our own nerve-shredding pattern days, this time became an opportunity to reflect on the one-year anniversary of my first trip back to Ireland. Making this work was a grieving process, and the generous and warm response to the work from friends old and new helped me to keep making paintings and to share them with new audiences online. This show encompasses work made during the lockdown and is also a meditation on love, grief, and loss in the context of a reconsideration of our relationship with the natural world.

I am profoundly grateful to everyone who responded so positively to these paintings and to all who purchased work during the lockdown.

John Mulvany

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Without and Within: Mulvany's Ephemeral Days

By Ashleigh Pedersen

John Mulvany's *The Pattern Days* presents a lush series of landscapes from intimate vantage points, each exploring, to varying degrees, the tension between life and loss, between the static and the impermanent, and the vulnerability inherent within the sacred.

The first painting in the exhibit, "The Pattern Days I 2020," establishes the motifs we see throughout the series. It sets the viewer before an impenetrable tangle of forest debris, its vines and branches moving horizontally across the foreground. Rising just beyond this dense, shadowy thicket are verdant trees and glimpses of white sky. The artist's characteristic magenta markings, suggestive of film burns, are overlaid across the vista. A pointillist-like technique creates leafy patterns among the tree canopy that complement the lines of the branches below, but as in the other paintings in the series, the various patterns also constantly play with our sense of what is still, and what is ever in motion. In this first painting, even the presumably dead branches create a perceived motion, running river-like across the foreground. The bright burn marks floating within this landscape not only add to its sense of movement, but also remind us of its transitory nature.

The majority of paintings in this series place the viewer close to the ground, and rarely do we see the full reach of the trees or sense the spaciousness of the sky overhead. Most often, we are immersed in the green world, lost among the trees. The effect is one of supreme intimacy, inviting us to consider ourselves not spectators of this natural world, but a part of it. As such, we're intertwined with not only its vibrancy and beauty, but also its entropy and, at times, its destruction. At times, in fact, we are overtly the cause of that destruction.

In "Trash Landscape 2020," garbage speckles a forest clearing like fungus, extending to the very edge of the foreground as though to the viewer's own two feet. Here, the burning is not magenta but aggressive shades of orange—clearly resembling actual flames—and the predominant colors of the forest aren't the luscious blues and greens present in so many of this series, but dense, earthy browns. There's a sense that we are standing mid-destruction—as though inside of a wound—and while it's tempting to view the greens in the distance with optimism, the trash and surrounding flames feel too immediate to do so honestly.

Still, Mulvany's series is less about doom than it is the poignancy of the impermanent. Both life and loss are juxtaposed so intimately that the one highlights the other (in both contrasting color choices and subject matter). Moreover, this dichotomy is not always so distinctly rendered—what seems a clear sign of destruction in one painting loans a sense of magic to another. In both "Lady's Well I 2020" and "The Pattern Days 2020," the magenta markings feel less like signs of burning or decay than they do springtime blooms (or even something fairy-like), and it's impossible not to admire the beauty of this light-dappled forest, even as it perhaps burns away.

It's the beauty of impermanence that exists at the heart of *The Pattern Days*. In several of the pieces, the burn marks take on a directionality, like small comets shooting across the canvas. The effect is similar to a scrolling film frame, reminding us that the moment we are viewing is already gone—and that the moment of our viewing it is just as fleeting. In the quietly exulting "Hanging Branches," the only sign of fire is in the color of the dying leaves themselves, a patch of vivid orange among predominant greens—an inevitable death within a forest otherwise very much alive. The ephemerality of the world Mulvany portrays is precisely what makes it sacred; and our intimate perspective reminds us that within ourselves exists that same inextricable dichotomy—that our own lives are patterned with loss, and sacred for it.

Ashleigh Pedersen is a writer with an MFA in fiction from the University of Pittsburgh; she's represented by Jon Curzon at Artellus Ltd.

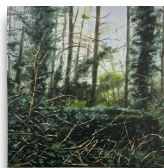
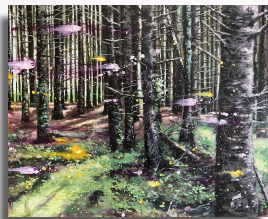


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The Pattern Days I 2020

Acrylic and oil on panel
10 x 10 inches (25.5 X 25.5 cm)

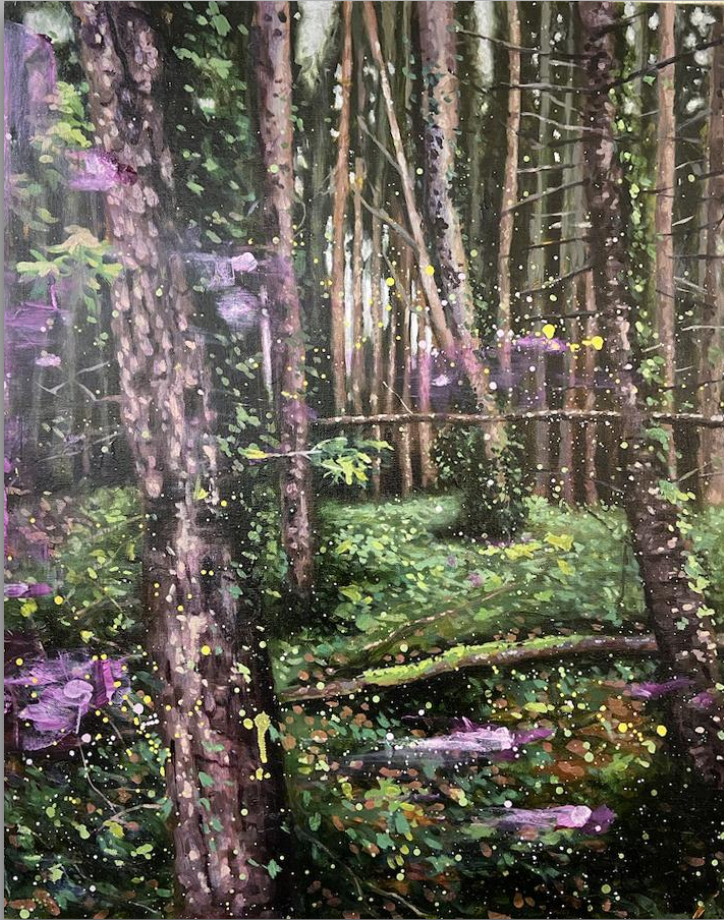
SOLD

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The Pattern Days II 2020
Oil on canvas
10 X 10 inches (25.5 X 25.5 cm)

SOLD



The Pattern Days III 2020

Oil on linen

20 X 16 inches (50.8 X 40.64 cm)

SOLD

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The Pattern Days IV 2020
Acrylic on paper
12 x 9 inches (30.5 x 23 cm)

SOLD



Flames 1 2020
Acrylic and oil on panel
12 x 9 inches (30.5 x 23 cm)

SOLD

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Trash Landscape II 2020
Acrylic on paper
12 x 9 inches (30.5 x 23 cm)

SOLD

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Lady's Well I 2020

Oil on canvas

20 x 20 inches (51 x 51 cm)

SOLD

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Trees 2020
Oil on panel
9 x 6 inches (23 x 15 cm)

SOLD

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Trash Landscape 2020
Acrylic and oil on panel
12 x 9 inches (30 x 23 cm)

SOLD



Flames II 2020
Acrylic and oil on panel
12 x 9 inches (30 x 23 cm)

SOLD



Bottle 2020
Acrylic and oil on panel
12 x 9 inches (30 x 23 cm)



The Pattern Days V 2020
Oil on linen
20 x 16 inches (51 x 41 cm)

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Pattern Days VI 2020
Oil on canvas
16 x 20 inches (41 x 51 cm)

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Lot 2019
Oil on canvas
16 x 20 (51 x 41 cm)

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Lady's Well II 2020
Oil on canvas
12 x 12 inches (30 x 30 cm)

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Hanging Branches 2020
Oil on canvas
12 x 12 inches (30 x 30 cm)

SOLD



Feathers I 2020
Oil on panel
9 x 6 inches (22.5 x 15 cm)

SOLD



Feathers II 2020
Oil on panel
Oil on panel
9 x 6 inches (22.5 x 15 cm)

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Pattern Days VII 2020
Acrylic and oil on panel
10 x 10 inches (25.5 x 25.5 cm)

SOLD



Feathers III 2020
Oil on panel
9 x 6 inches (22.5 x 15 cm)

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Dedicated to the memory of my parents:
Liam Mulvany and Jean Mulvany

Next

Personal Helicon (last stanza)

by Seamus Heaney

*Now, to pry into roots, to finger slime,
To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring
Is beneath all adult dignity. I rhyme
To see myself, to set the darkness echoing.*

