

WILLIAM IRVINE

WAYPOINT



Irvine

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JULY 10 – AUGUST 4, 2023

Essay by Carl Little

A Life Behind the Canvas produced by Whisky Wolf Media



Man Carrying a Boat, 2023, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches

COVER *Table with Lobster and Bait Bags*, detail, 2023, oil on canvas, 36 x 36 inches

COURTHOUSE GALLERY
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The Green Wake, 2023, oil on canvas, 36 x 72 inches



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William Irvine on the ferry to the Isle of Arran, 1947.

WILLIAM IRVINE **WAYPOINT**

THE BEAUTY OF EVERYTHING

by Carl Little



The “Stimulant” exhibition at David Archer’s bookshop gallery, Dean Street, Soho, London, 1957. Left to right: William Irvine, William Crozier, and John Wright, all three are graduates for the Glasgow School of Art. Photo by Roger Mayne.

Propped on a table in a corner of William Irvine’s Brooklin studio is a framed notice of the 1958 exhibition “Crozier and Irvine at the Drian Gallery.” The printed announcement is more than a souvenir of Irvine’s life in London in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It also serves to keep the memory alive of one of his closest friends, fellow painter William Crozier (1930–2010).

At the time both artists were exploring various modes of non-representational art. They applied abstraction to the world around them, lending a dynamism to their treatment of landscapes, still lifes, and other subjects.

Irvine never gave up his inclination for abstraction as witness the many paintings in his eleventh solo show at Courthouse Gallery since 2012. Irvine’s clouds, for example, are geometric wonders, hard-edged and akilter. Almost sculptural, at times they appear to fold like great sheets of paper; at others, they are part of the moving panorama of the sky.



Table with Lobster and Bait Bags, 2023, oil on canvas, 36 x 36 inches



Night Sail, 2023, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



William Irvine sketching on canvas at his studio in Brooklin, Maine, 2021. Courtesy of Whisky Wolf Media

“I’ve been simplifying my work for years and years,” Irvine says, paring down landscape elements to their essentials. His compositions are often balancing acts, the tableau teetering yet holding steady, with the triangle of a sail adding to the overall geometry.

At the same time, Irvine has sought to adjust his color scheme, again seeking simplicity. He points to Mark Rothko, “He knew how to get a lot out of a single color,” he says, but also

cites his friend, Port Clyde painter Robert Hamilton who once advised that one should use no more than three colors in a painting. “Of course, he was exaggerating,” says Irvine: “What he was really saying was to use color in a way in which it expresses something beyond being just another color.”

In Waypoint, Irvine returns to favorite motifs, including the horizontal line of a lobster boat making its way across the water,



The Broken Wave II, 2023, oil on canvas, 36 x 60 inches

this time with a ragged wake trailing behind the boat. These paintings bear modernist stylings, recalling, for instance, Milton Avery's *Speedboat's Wake*, 1959.

Most of his inspiration, Irvine relates, comes from looking out the window at the sea, sky, and islands in his front yard in Brooklin.

"Of course, the clouds and the atmosphere are changing all the time here," he says.

And fishing boats pass by daily. In several paintings, these vessels drop a line into the deep water. Is it an anchor? A baited hook? The white line trails off into the dark, its connection to the depths unknown.



The Dark Sea, 2023, oil on canvas, 36 x 48 inches



Pablo Picasso, *Night Fishing in Antibes*, 1939.

Irvine traces his inspiration for these paintings to an early love, Picasso's *Night Fishing at Antibes* (1939), which stunned him with its mystery and beauty. He recalls trips on a lobster boat out of Milbridge in his early years in Maine. They would head out at the crack of dawn when the sea was inky black. "I remember thinking I could be looking at black oil, that's how deep the sea was."

Irvine also returns to his signature still lifes, arrangements of various items related to the sea: lobsters, bait bags, blue fisherman's gloves, mussel shells. This time around, clouds replace the sea as backdrop to the tabletop compositions. The objects appear to float in abstract space like constellations.

And no Irvine exhibition is complete without some of his smaller seaside vignettes.



Early Morning Departure, 2023, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



William Irvine sketching near Cape Split, Maine, spring 1971.

Remembering beloved places in Scotland, Brittany and elsewhere, Irvine presents white-washed houses, fish shacks, harbors, and coves. Figures appear, hanging laundry, leaning a ladder against a roof, standing in a doorway, or sleeping on a beach.

Lately, Irvine has been placing figures in some of his boats. His motive? To express that feeling, he says, of “passing through life as a single identity.” He doesn’t want the images to be about loneliness or man against the sea, but rather to convey a sense of amazement at one’s surroundings. “I’ve been essentially exploring my own personal mythology,” he says.

Irvine continues to be amazed by the beauty of everything, an amazement he seeks to bring forth and celebrate in his paintings. We, in turn, look in wonder at his vision of a world that is at once familiar and mysterious. His world becomes ours.



In the Clouds, 2023, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



Under the Cloud, 2023, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



Night Fishing, 2023, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



Resting Mermaid, 2023, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



The Fisherman's Gloves, 2023, oil on canvas, 36 x 36 inches



Emerging from the Cloud Bank, 2023, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



Out of the Clouds, 2023, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



Blue Rainbow, 2023, oil on canvas, 36 x 48 inches



Evening Return, 2023, oil on canvas, 36 x 60 inches



Seascape, 2023, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



Day Sail, 2023, oil on canvas, 36 x 48 inches



Evening Over Tinkers, 2023, oil on board, 26 x 36 inches



The Broken Wave, Evening Return, 2023, oil on canvas, 36 x 60 inches



Riding the Green Sea, 2023, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



Night Fishing, 2023, oil on canvas, 36 x 36 inches



The Green Lobster Boat, 2023, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



Table with Lobsters and Mussels, 2023, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



Woman with Seagull, 2023, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



Lowering the Sails, Brittany, 2023, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



The Blue Boat, 2023, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



Working on the Roof, 2023, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



Man Carrying a Boat, 2023, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



Waiting for the Ferry, 2023, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



The Sleeping Fisherman, 2023, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



Fogged In, 2023, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



Sheltering, 2023, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



The Green Boat, 2023, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



Hanging Wash, 2023, oil on canvas, 12 x 16 inches



Harbor, Orkney, 2023, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



Lowering the Sails, 2023, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



Fisherman's Cottage, Women Talking, 2023, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



Bringing in the Geraniums, 2023, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



The Abandoned Kirk, 2023, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches

WILLIAM IRVINE

William Irvine (b. 1931) was born and raised in Troon, a small town on the Atlantic coast of Scotland, a few miles from Alloway where the poet Robert Burns was born. Irvine became interested in art as a young boy. He majored in art at Marr College, a progressive secondary school in Troon. When the family of whiskey magnate Johnnie Walker heard about two budding artists at Marr, they invited the boys (Irvine and his best friend William Crozier) for a private viewing of Walker's art collection.¹ This was Irvine's first opportunity to see original artworks by the masters.

Irvine graduated with a degree in drawing and painting from the Glasgow School of Art in 1953. After graduating from Glasgow and serving in the Scottish army, Irvine moved to the bohemian neighborhood of 1950s Soho London where he rubbed shoulders with the likes of Francis Bacon and Paul Potts, and where he came of age as an abstract painter. During his ten years in London, Irvine exhibited in many galleries, including one-man shows at the Drian Gallery and the Parton Gallery. In 1960, he met and married Stephanie Schram, an American student studying in London.

After seeing a newspaper advertisement for property in Maine, the young couple moved to the United States in 1967. They settled on the coast of Maine in Washington County. A few years later, they bought a house in Blue Hill,



William Irvine and William Crozier in 1949 during their final year at Marr College, Troon, Scotland.

Maine, and the old attached barn became Irvine's studio for the next forty-two years.

Maine proved to be a turning point. Irvine combined the abstract with figures and objects, producing bold new seascapes, landscapes, and still lifes. He was moved by the everyday lives of the men and women living and working in these coastal villages. Paintings of these people, as well as his experimental seascapes, became lifelong themes for Irvine.

In 1985, Stephanie died after a long illness. Irvine married Margery Wilson in 1995. They built a house and studio on the shore overlooking the ocean in Brooklin, Maine. Living in such close proximity to the sea provides Irvine with daily sources of inspiration. He still lives there today with Margery and their Shetland sheepdog, Tam O' Shanter.

ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS

Courthouse Gallery Fine Art, Ellsworth, ME 2012, 2014–2023
Greenhut Gallery, Portland, ME 2017
The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland 2016
Marshall Store Gallery, York, ME 2015
Gleason Gallery, Boothbay Harbor, ME 2011, '12, '13, '14
Leighton Gallery, Blue Hill, ME 1986–2011
Firehouse Gallery, Damariscotta, ME 2002–2009
Studio E, Palm Beach, FL 2003–2006
Shaw Gallery, Northeast Harbor, ME 2003, '05, '07
McGrath Dunham Gallery, Castine, ME 2001–2006
George Marshall Store Gallery, York, ME 2005
Eastland Gallery, Portland, ME 2001
Carnegie Museum, University of Maine, Orono, ME 2000
Davidson and Daughters, Portland, ME 1996, 1999
Leighton Gallery, Westford, MA 1982, 1995
Art Alliance, Philadelphia, PA 1993
June Fitzpatrick Gallery, Portland, ME 1992
Bayview Gallery, Portland, ME 1989
Noel Butcher Gallery, Philadelphia, PA 1982–1986
John Little Gallery, Clark University, Worcester, MA 1980
Rudolph Gallery, Woodstock, NY and Miami, FL 1968–1976
Drian Gallery, London, England 1960, 1962
Parton Gallery, London, England 1960
McLellan Gallery, Glasgow, Scotland 1958
Carnegie Library, Ayr, Scotland 1949

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Courthouse Gallery Fine Art, Ellsworth, ME 2007–present
Gleason Gallery, Boothbay Harbor, ME 2011–present
George Marshall Store Gallery, York, ME 2007–present
Greenhut Gallery, Portland, ME 2006–present
Elan Gallery, Rockport, ME 2007
Center for Maine Contemporary Art, Rockport, ME 2006–2013
Turtle Gallery, Deer Isle, ME 2006
Penobscot Marine Museum at Searsport, ME 2002
Marine Environmental Research Institute, Blue Hill, ME 2001
Monmouth Museum, Lincroft, NJ 1984
Mast Cove Gallery, Kennebunkport, ME
Gregory Boon Gallery, Santa Fe, NM

Congress Square Gallery, Portland, ME
National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, DC
Munson Gallery, New Haven, CT 1982
American Art Cultural Center, Washington, DC 1978
Shore Gallery, Boston, MA 1970–1973
Portal Gallery, London, England
Artists International Association, London, England
Blue Hill Library, Blue Hill, ME
Scottish Arts Council, Edinburgh, Scotland 1953

PUBLIC AND CORPORATE COLLECTIONS

Art in Embassies Program, Republic of Lithuania
Courthouse Gallery Fine Art, Ellsworth, ME
Hand and Flower Press, London, England
Marine Environmental Research Institute, Blue Hill, ME
Rouse Corporation, Pittsburgh, PA
Scottish Arts Council, Edinburgh, Scotland
University of Maine Museum of Art, Bangor, ME

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Maine Painters, Carl Little, editor, September 2006
Maine Sunday Telegram, Philip Isaacson 2001, Ken Greenleaf 1996
Maine Times, Feature Article, Donna Gold 2000
Bangor Daily News, Feature Article 1999, 2000
Art New England, Carl Little 2000
Portland Press Herald 1992, 1999
Preview 1993
The Maine Times 1991
The Philadelphia Inquirer 1983
ArtNews, Ann Jarmusch 1983
Maine Life 1979
The London Observer 1960

EDUCATION

Glasgow School of Art, DA, Scotland

1. William Irvine and William Crozier attended Marr College and the Glasgow School of Art together. The friends moved to London where they exhibited together and became part of the artistic and literary scene of 1950s Soho. Crozier went on to become a noted British painter.

WILLIAM IRVINE

A LIFE BEHIND THE CANVAS

A Life Behind the Canvas is film that chronicles the seventy-year career of artist William Irvine (b.1931), a Scottish/American expressionist painter whose abstract overtones and underlying geometric forms make his iconic work both modern and accessible.

The film follows Irvine's life and artistic growth as it spans both shores of the Atlantic, from the village of Troon in Scotland where he was born and raised, to his eventual migration to America and the coast of Maine where he spent the past sixty years living and painting.

Utilizing never-before-seen archival footage interwoven with present-day footage, the film provides an intimate portrait of Irvine's artistic endeavors as he recounts historical moments during the twentieth century, including World War II in Scotland; the gritty, industrialized streets of Glasgow; and the bohemian neighborhood of 1950s Soho London where Irvine and his best friend artist William Crozier rubbed shoulders with the likes of Francis Bacon and Paul Potts, and where he came of age as an abstract painter.

Much of the archival footage was filmed by Irvine, including footage he shot in the 1960s, when he went to Provence in the south of France to make a film about Vincent Van Gogh. Irvine had planned to film the outside of the

nineteenth century asylum and monastery in Saint-Rémy where Van Gogh spent a year as a patient and created over 150 paintings.

Upon his arrival, Irvine discovered that the old building was about to be demolished. While the workmen were having lunch in a field, Irvine and his wife slipped inside the monastery where they explored the gardens and the interiors, eventually making their way to the cells with bars on the windows and doors.

Using a Bolex 16mm camera, Irvine was able to film a great deal of the landscape and the interior, including a cell looking out the window at the olive trees in the garden. Although Irvine abandoned the project due to the high cost of film at the time, this never-before-seen footage survived, and is included in this wonderful documentary.

The Premier Screening of *William Irvine: A Life Behind the Canvas* will be held at The Grand in Ellsworth on Sunday, July 23 at 3pm. There will be a reception immediately following the film at Courthouse Gallery with William Irvine and the filmmakers.



WHISKY WOLF MEDIA

Whisky Wolf Media is an award winning Maine based production company with a diverse portfolio serving all people's of Maine and beyond its borders. Filmmakers Leigh Doran and David Jester focus on telling compelling stories through documentary and narrative film. They seek to animate stories for future generations to enjoy and learn from, to further the historical record, and to advance the human condition through storytelling, film, and visual media.

David Jester is a published writer of non-fiction and a documentary filmmaker. His love of storytelling manifested itself in Folklore and Oral history studies at the University of Maine in Orono. With a degree in Anthropology and Masters in American and New England Studies, David has an intense curiosity at finding all the stories the world has to offer.

Leigh Doran is inquisitive by nature, traveler by blood, and New Englander by lineage. She is an award winning photographer, whose images have graced the covers and pages of numerous magazines. Her degrees include an Associate Photographic Technology from Randolph College, and a Bachelor of Arts with a concentration of Piano Performance Cum Laude.



Leigh Doran



David Jester

For information about the release of *A Life Behind the Canvas*, please scan the QR Code.



the filmmaker G. J. Smith. The photos were taken by Hillary Becton during an interview on a recent visit to Tinker Island.

Sunset Sail, 2023, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches

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