



WILLIAM IRVINE

COURTHOUSE GALLERY
FINE ART

JULY 15 – AUGUST 10, 2026

WILLIAM IRVINE

HEADING HOME

Essay by Jorge S. Arango



Patience, 2026, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches

COVER *The Rough Sea*, 2026, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches

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To be sure, he didn't abandon abstraction completely. Instead he began deconstructing his subjects into basic components and reassembling them in recognizable yet not realistic ways.

Heading Home, 2026, oil on canvas, 36 x 72 inches





The Dark Green Sea, 2026, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



The White Horse, 2026, oil on canvas, 30 x 48 inches

WILLIAM IRVINE *HEADING HOME*

by Jorge S. Arango

No one on the planet does anything like Irvine does. This uniqueness of vision, and the persistence and prolific nature of its development are astonishing. All that is needed is exposure to a larger world, at which point he will come to be viewed—by those who do not know him now—as a modern master.

— Jorge S. Arango

“I’m old enough to know that logic is a mirage,” declares the 95-year-old painter William Irvine one sunny June day as we took the short walk from his studio back to his Brooklin, Maine home. “What we’re looking at is not real.” I glanced out to the view of Tinker Island, a vista that seemed familiar from the many iterations he has painted of it over the years, and I realized that it actually looked more real because of them. Those paintings had imparted a kind of emotional and extrasensorial knowledge of Tinker Island that made it recognizable in an entirely different way.

What Irvine means by “not real,” is a complex, many-layered thing. What we behold with the naked eye is not real in the sense that it is a fragment, a moment in time that, like everything, is ephemeral and evaporates into the ether. What was real to us a millisecond ago is no longer real because it is past. And what happens in the next millisecond will also recede into history immediately. It is not real because to Irvine, what is most truly real is feeling. It is a necessary part of the whole of any experience of perception. We can look at the landscape. But unless we feel it, it exists in only a single dimension of reality.



Landscape with Horses, 2026, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



Bringing In The Geraniums, 2026, oil board, 12 x 16 inches



Man With An Oar, 2026, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches

(Perhaps this is why the sight of Tinker felt almost intimate, and why, on several occasions, some people are moved enough to weep when standing before an Irvine painting.)

Most importantly, what we see is not real because it is invariably, indeed helplessly, filtered through the subjectivity of our consciousness, through the limited organ we call a brain, which immediately parses what we see only using what it knows now—not what it does not know (so much!) or will know more fully later. We only see, in other words, small aspects of what is real at any given time.

Irvine has spent a lifetime upending what we think we know. Clouds in his paintings are hard squares, rectangles and trapezoids, not billowy or fluffy rounded shapes. Enormous people stand in doorways of tiny houses they clearly could not comfortably dwell in. Seafood and loaves of bread sit on tables rendered with such foreshortened vertical flatness that common sense tells us the angle is too precipitous for them not to slide right off the surface and onto the floor or ground.

These distortions are entirely intentional. For this painter, “It’s a way of arriving at your own logic so you can bring the viewer into a new place where they can experience it the way I experience it.”

Irvine was born in Troon, Scotland and, after initial painting studies there and in Glasgow, served in the army. Following his service, he moved to London to be an abstract artist. “I wanted to remove the realism



Clouds Over Tinkers, 2026, oil on museum board, 26 x 36 inches



The Rough Sea, 2026, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches

right away,” he says of his painting style in the 1950s. But Irvine soon tired of the total obliteration of content this required. “I’ve never seen an abstract painting I totally loved,” he admits. “Rothko comes closest. You get a sense of something else in his paintings. I was trying to get a feeling that didn’t depend on realism.” (More on this “something else” in a moment.)

Irvine was moved by British painters such as surrealist Paul Nash, and by Christopher Wood, who depicted people and street scenes and churches, but in a very folksy, chunky style. Both Nash and Wood were what one might call “illogical.” One trafficked in subconscious dream states that made no rational sense, while the other flattened and squared off forms that equally challenged our logical view of the body, of architecture and other subjects.

In 1960, Irvine married an American student, Stephanie Schram, who soon became a teacher. The couple moved eight years later to Maine to accept a real estate offer that seemed too good to be true. In fact, it was. Nevertheless, Irvine was smitten, irrevocably transfixed by the state and its coastline, which reminded him of Scotland. “When I came to Maine,” he recalls, “something in my painting completely changed. There was something about the landscape that didn’t lend itself to abstraction.”

To be sure, Irvine didn’t abandon abstraction completely. Instead he began deconstructing his subjects into basic components and reassembling them in recognizable yet not

“When I came to Maine,” he recalls, “something in my painting completely changed. There was something about the landscape that didn’t lend itself to abstraction.”

realistic ways. His seascapes became a kind of coalescence of abstracted geometries: triangular sails, as in *Among the Clouds* (p. 14); square clouds, which also appear in many of his paintings; the simple line of a lobster boat’s wake, as in *Heading Out* (pp. 4 and 5); and waves that look like jumbles of blue triangles, most evident in *The Rough Sea* (opposite and cover), where the reassembled triangular waves are treated “almost as if they were tiles,” Irvine notes.

Using a palette knife to apply color, Irvine then moves pigment around using paper towels to create layer upon layer of hues. This gives a multidimensionality to each shape and what it is standing in for—wave, boat, squall, figure, dog. In Irvine’s seascapes, color functions very much like it does in Rothko’s paintings. It implies depth, emotion, complexity of expression—that “something else” that Irvine cites above.



Among the Clouds, 2026, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



Heading Out II, 2026, oil on canvas, 20 x 40 inches

This underlying emanation is subliminal yet unquestionably palpable. Plainly, Irvine understands something phenomenological about life on the water: the way conditions change so rapidly that we may emerge from a blinding fog into bright sunlight, then plunge into the darkness of a squall and try to outrun it in order to once again find a place in the warming sun. In many of his paintings, we see boats slipping out from one condition into the next. Often, he does this with split perspectives, where a scene appears collaged together from separate parts of the same subject, one section in the foreground, others in the background.

But what can seem at first like mere weather patterns become, if we look and feel long enough, different dimensions of reality and perception crashing together. They convey, to the viewer willing to suspend disbelief (and, yes, logic), a journey through various states of being, through lapses of time and space, intimating a profound spiritual understanding of how reality and awareness actually operate. The painting *Two Boats* (p. 17) for example, Irvine describes as “like looking out at these two boats from some inner space.”

The artist’s seascapes feel like Carlos Castañeda’s “points of assemblage,” which maintains that at any

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given moment, who and what we are exists at a particular convergence of planes of reality and understanding. When some new revelation dawns, we are essentially blown apart and reassemble at a new intersection of planes of reality and understanding. Irvine's work seems to be dissipating and reassembling constantly, reflecting the dynamic creativity of the universe, which reinvents everything anew in each instant.

The seascapes are where Irvine explores the great mysteries of existence (nowadays, due to shoulder pain, more with thick brushes and less with paper towels). Yet even when they depict lovers at the shore as in *Lovers By the Sea* (p. 21), Irvine paints the space they inhabit on the sand as distinctly separate from the brushy, watery world right next to them. This is, he says, because the experience of being in love is an actual different space held between two people—devoid of time or topography, or the things in our lives we have to do.

Figures appear for many reasons. Sometimes it's as simple as a painting "needing a spot of color" that a yellow rain slicker can provide. Other times it conveys something more awesome about nature and the universe that gives perspective to the minimal importance we occupy by comparison. "Putting a figure in you get the feeling of a trajectory and a transitional passage," Irvine explains. "Little figures against a tremendous ocean and sky—they are insignificant in terms of permanence."

Other times, however, the figure is everything. In between his larger nautical works, Irvine creates smaller paintings that are disarmingly charming. They depict people hanging clothes, resting in the grass, gardening, greeting their dogs. In these, the figure is unavoidably prominent. They are oversized and crudely rendered. "I can paint a face and put everything in the right place," he explains, "but I really find the face; I don't paint a face." Instead, he lays down a glob of pigment and moves it



Two Boats, 2026, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



Woman With A Cat, 2026, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches

around until a face appears. “I manipulate paint in such a way that it will only work if it surprises me.” And the figures are intentionally outsized. “I can’t reduce her in size because she’s more important than the house,” he says of one work “*Woman With A Cat* (opposite).

It is inconceivable that Irvine has not gained more notoriety in his lifetime, particularly for the marine works. His idiosyncratic style synthesizes many of the most recognizable “isms” in art history: abstraction (expressionistic, lyrical, geometric and figurative), folk art, Cubism, Tachisme, Color Field. We can intuit his love of Diebenkorn and Bacon, his admiration for Braque. But Irvine’s synthesis of all these muses is resolutely singular. No one on the planet does anything like what Irvine does. This uniqueness of vision and the persistence and prolific nature of its development are astonishing. All that is needed is exposure to a larger world, at which point he will come to be viewed—by those who do not know him now—as a modern master.

Perhaps it is because Irvine eschewed the art world and lived in seclusion with his current wife Margey (Stephanie’s best friend, who Irvine married when Stephanie died). Or because he limited his subject matter to the life that immediately surrounded him: Tinker Island, ordinary Mainers doing ordinary things; lobster boats and sail boats. Yet I would argue, again, that he renders these themes like no one else in the world and, importantly, unlike any of hundreds of Maine artists who paint the same thing.



Sunshower, 2026, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches

“I’m not interested in being famous. I don’t want to be in MoMA,” Irvine says. “It was never important to me. It wouldn’t have mattered since I’d have painted anyway. The only thing that’s changed is that I’ve realized I have a shorter time to work. Idling is such a waste of time. I’m trying to get better all the time. The more I paint, the more I can reveal of myself.”

Jorge S. Arango has been writing about art, architecture and design for over four decades. He is the art reviewer for the *Portland Press Herald* and also writes for *Boston Art Review*. He is the author of 14 books, the latest of which, *Contemporary Maine Art*, will be published in April 2027 by Monacelli Press. Jorge moved permanently from New York City to Portland, Maine in 2019.



Island Anchorage, 2026, oil on canvas, 24 x 30 inches



Lovers By The Sea, 2026, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



The Yellow Lobster Boat, 2026, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



Window with Forsythia, 2026, oil on canvas, 24 x 30 inches



Under The Cloud, 2026, oil on canvas, 24 x 30 inches



Into The Wind, 2026, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



Wash Day, 2026, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



Field With Two Horses, 2026, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



Landscape With White Horse, 2026, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



Feeding the Bird, 2026, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



Under The Cloud II, 2026, oil on canvas, 24 x 30 inches



Evening With Baxter, 2026, oil on canvas, 24 x 30 inches



Feeding The Birds II, 2026, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



Night Barn, 2026, oil on canvas, 12 x 16 inches



Night Anchorage, 2026, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



By The Sea, 2026, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



Woman With Birdcage, 2026, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



Boats At Low Tide, 2026, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



Evening Harbor, 2026, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



A Walk With Tam, 2026, oil on canvas, 30 x 48 inches



Calling In Baxter, 2026, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



Blue Harbor, 2026, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



Gathering Wood, 2026, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches



Departure, 2026, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches

WILLIAM IRVINE



William Irvine and his dog, Tam O’ Shanter, Brooklin, Maine, 2017

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 and 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 (Irvine and his best friend William Crozier¹), they invited the boys for a private viewing of Walker’s art collection. This was Irvine’s first opportunity to see original paintings by the masters.

Irvine graduated with a degree in drawing and painting from the Glasgow School of Art in 1953. After his National Service in the Scottish army, Irvine moved to London. During his ten years there, 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, 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 the figurative, producing bold new seascapes, landscapes, and still lifes. He was also 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 sea in Brooklin, Maine. Living in such close proximity to the ocean 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, 2014–2026
- 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
- George Marshall Store Gallery, York, ME 2007
- Greenhut Gallery, Portland, ME 2006–2017
- 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

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- Maine Painters*, Carl Little, editor, September 2006
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- Maine Times*, Feature Article, Donna Gold 2000
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- 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. Irvine and William Crozier attended Marr College and the Glasgow School of Art together. They moved to London and became part of the artistic and literary scene of 1950s Soho. Crozier to become a noted British painter.



The White Lobster Boat, 2026, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



Women Talking, 2026, oil on board, 12 x 16 inches

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