

Welcome to the web supplement in tandem with the Testaments issue of Agenda, Vol 51, Nos 1-2

Featured artist: **Liam Holden**



Rock forms II

Liam Holden



Liam was born in Inistioge, Co. Kilkenny in 1961. He received a scholarship to study Art at the National College of Art & Design, Dublin until 1983. He then left college to take up a position as an apprenticeship potter in Kilkenny. Liam won the Apprentice Ceramic Award at Kilkenny Arts week 1983. He then went onto the Grennan Mill Craft & Design School, Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny for one year. Liam then moved to Dingle, Co. Kerry, and was inspired to paint. Liam's first solo show came directly from his personal experiences of fishing around the Blasket Islands of the Dingle Peninsula. He moved from Dingle to Tinahely Co. Wicklow in 1994, where he now lives and works from his studio at home. During his time in Dingle, where he spent the summers working as a lobster fisherman around the Blasket Islands and the west Kerry coast, he developed a love of the sea that was to have a profound influence on his journey as a painter. Water remains his principal inspiration – horizons, islands, boats and coastlines all feature in his paintings. Liam works intuitively, applying paint in layers to create texture and depth of colour, and will revisit a work time and time again until satisfied with its emotional resonance. His paintings are in private collections in Ireland, Europe and U.S.A.

Courtesy of The Greenlane Gallery, Holy Ground, Dingle, Co Kerry, Ireland
www.greenlanegallery.com



The Bow – oil on board

Aileen Paterson lives in Northern Ireland, where she is currently studying Creative Writing.

Comforted

Daddy did not know how to comfort her
and my mother did not think to comfort him
and yet, in spring, when the sheep's bellies swelled
Mammy's belly started swelling too.
This time, people did not tell her she was glowing.
They did not say anything at all.
She hid herself and hid the life inside her
until the sheep were sheared in the summer.

My new brother came with a head of curls
that were drenched by the priest in cold water,
even before the stump fell off his cord.
He slept soundly but was never left alone:
Mammy kept creeping over to the cot
until Daddy laid his arm over her in the bed.



Afloat – oil on panel

Craig Dobson worked in retail for twenty years before gaining an MA in Creative Writing from Bath Spa University. He has had poems published in *The London Magazine*, *The North*, *Stand*, *Orbis*, *Butcher's Dog*, *The Interpreter's House*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *The Frogmore Papers* and the University of Stockholm's *Two Thirds North* magazine. He has work forthcoming in *Under the Radar*.

Catch

Sand in the carpets, trodden in
for years. Leading from the beach,
through the garden, to his mother,
who washed it down the plughole's
spiral in the same en suite where he

and a girl once slid their costumes
to one side, the day they tempted
a bucketful of crabs with mussels.
Took them back to forget them,
while they angled their murk

of blind kisses and scratching gropes,
till imitation grew bold enough to show
her neat, tucked wavelets of flesh;
his slack worm cast's puckered sack.
Bored by their premature nothing-more,

the sudden confusion of ozone smell
and emptying bucket brought them back:
the click-clack of claws on plastic, shells hard
against the skirting board, sidling, stalk-eyed,
desperate for the nooks and crannies.

Edward Greenwood was born on December 23 1933 in Nelson, Lancashire. After attending Kirkham Grammar School he went up to Hertford College Oxford where he obtained a BA in English in 1954. He then went on to do a BLitt on Matthew Arnold's literary criticism. He taught in the English Department of the University Of Christchurch in New Zealand in the early 1960's and then at the University of Glasgow and the University of Kent. He has published several critical articles, the British Council pamphlet on F. R. Leavis and a book, *Tolstoy: The Comprehensive Vision* in 1975. He is at present Honorary Research Fellow at the School of English, University of Kent.

A BUILDING THAT CONTAINED DESPAIR

There was a building that contained despair
Although it looked attractive in the sun,
In which prestigious specialists would share
Their various nostrums for the troubled mind.
Was yours a case where something could be done,
Or would they claim: 'It isn't the right kind?'

They gave your illness some strange sounding name,
But could not find a cure to fit your case.
That building for the next few days became
Your home. Neat rooms, nice gardens, time allowed,
When you were well enough, to go out and face
The baffling traffic and the frightening crowd.

Psychologists in sessions would explore
Your past experience, certain they would find
Something you couldn't remember any more,
What death, what grief, what family secret lurked
In the subconscious to disturb your mind,
In spite of all their probing, nothing worked.

Your case had proved 'not the right kind' indeed,
Though promises were made of further care,
And then, against your plea, they all decreed
Your discharge to a life of narrowing scope
In which you looked on lives you could not share
And hopelessness usurped the place of hope.

A DIALOGUE

'Is there an end to their grief
For one of such worth?'
Soft as the fall of a leaf,
Air sighed to earth.

Earth breathed back Air's sigh,
And, sorrowing, said:
'Not till those grieving die
Will Grief be dead.'



Over the Wave – oil on paper

Jane Lovell has had work published in a variety of anthologies and journals including *Earthlines*, *Poetry Wales*, *Msllexia*, *the North*, *Dark Mountain* and *Zoomorphic*. She won the Flambard Prize in 2015 and was recently shortlisted for the Basil Bunting Prize.

Solace

Crows became symbols those dark months,
appearing like omens each morning in the juniper,
heads tilted to pin him in a world blacker
than hell.

Then came a night of angels, a distant song
from next door's radio, net curtains blowing
to reveal the thinnest curl of moon, and a word
sent to him:

a message and a word, its syllables a bright shell
pared from a dark sphere.
There was hope. He could take 'solace'.

He took it, kept it like a talisman,
rolled it around his fingers, whispered its mantra
again and again.

And in that bright room, when it was spelt out for him
so that there was no further question,
it cut away the desperation like a small, curved blade,
left him clear and calm.

Wheeling up and down the canyons of his body,
vertebrae flaring like comets, they had no answer.
Their eyes slid to corners of the room, the space
behind him, refusing to gauge the days left to him.

In that silence, that room of moments,
he found solace in the altered step of time,
a world imaged through the curved eye of a lens,
and held onto his prayer.

He spoke the word, imagined the winds above
holding him until all that remained of the crows
were husks of feathers and bones
blowing in the half-light of some strange eclipse.

Two figures in an extensive landscape

Two figures below vast mountains
lit only by the nauseous bloom of fireflies

pause at a complete loss
as to what to do or where to go

for the paths are lost
and landscapes folded like maps,

days, a last hand of cards at the end
of a long night

and dreams grown old, like bones
bedding in earth.

They spent too long watching the horizon
while he sidled in

untying the windows for the moths to enter
and the years to leave.

Now in the corner he is counting fireflies,
rubbing his horned knuckles.

And so they pause in this strange valley,
hardly dare to catch each other's eyes

knowing nothing more remains
but these dark hours.



Horizon – oil on panel

Nick Cooke has had around fifty poems published, in outlets including *Agenda, Ink, Sweat & Tears, The High Window Journal, Dream Catcher, Sentinel Literary Quarterly, Poetry Space, I am not a silent poet* and *Nutshells & Nuggets*, as well as the anthologies *Poems For a Liminal Age* and *To Kingdom Come*. His poem 'Tanis' won the Wax Poetry and Art contest (April 2016) and 'Process' was Highly Commended in the Segora Poetry Competition (July 2015). He has also written several novels, and a collection of stories (due to be published by Sentinel in 2017), as well as around twenty stage plays and eight film scripts.

OSCAR, AS I LIVE

I used to skirt the wall
of Reading Gaol, en route

from a prison of my own,
along a leafy path.

In quest of bitter refreshment
I oftentimes looked up

and strained my ears
for the scratching of quill

on standard-issue notepad,
complaining about the bed linen

but in such tones
as would have charmed a siren

and stilled the brutal roar
of a Paddington express,

and snuffed out its steam,
half-way down the track.

Rebecca Hurst is a doctoral student at the University of Manchester where she writes poetry and researches Soviet fairy tales. Her work has appeared in various magazines including *Aesthetica*, *Antiphon*, *The Wild Hunt*, *Magma Poetry*, and *The Next Review*. Her chamber opera *Isabella*, written with the composer Oliver Leith, premiered in London in 2015. A new work includes the libretto of a new opera, *After the Fall*, written in collaboration with Helgi Rafn Ingvarsson, which premiered in London in May 2017.

Niht-sang

The danger of lying in the dark and dreaming
before sleeping and the words half-forming
like letters scratched on the frosted window-pane

*Are we there yet?
Yes, almost there.*

and in the dark, half-dreaming, remembering

*What is the place we run to?
Just sit tight. Try to sleep now.*

when footprints in the shimmering snow
are the only trace left of you

*Are we there yet?
Just a stone's throw.*

see the line of trees hoisting the sky's grey weft

*Did you stop and look back?
Once, as we watched and waited*

and the wicked cold enters like a shadow
aslant or askew, as a needle etches the skin

*What kept you?
I was calling and calling you*

and the blush of ink and the sparrow's beak
nipping the seams, stitch by stitch,
and the north is a rip you crawl through
to hear the voice that prickles
like frost on a window-pane as you lie in the dark dreaming
before sleeping and the half-formed words leak through.

Walking Dwelling Thinking

This wood is a glove, dropped on the path
unclasped—four soft fingers and thumb.

This wood has a thousand exits and entrances:
stiles, gates, tripets, gaps and breaches.

This wood hides the boar-sow in a thickety hemmel;
is home to the kine, the flindermouse, the scutty.

This wood is cut and coppiced and burned.
Each decade caught hurt—it takes a tumble.

This wood is hammer-pond, chestnut and chalybeate,
charcoal and slag heaps, leats and races.

This wood is two green and clay flanks
pinched by the link of iron bridge over water.

This wood is ashen, eldern, and oaken
a mile from the village, ring-fenced, well-trodden.

This wood scolds with a tawny owl's brogue
shrucking and shraping, kewick hoohoo.

This wood keeps its secrets: the peat-black
knuckerhole where the dragon lies dreaming.

This wood recalls each shift and raid
carries the scars and the shape of change.

This wood summons you from out of your house
to walk through leaf mould and sphagnum moss.



Oilean – oil on paper



Out of the Mist – oil on canvas

Robyn Rowland lives in Ireland and Australia. She regularly works in Turkey. She has 9 books of poetry. Robyn's poetry appears in national and international journals, in 40 anthologies, and in 7 editions of *Best Australian Poems*. She has read in many countries e.g, Bosnia, Serbia, Austria, Turkey, Canada, India, and Portugal. Her two books in 2015 are *Line of Drift* from Doire Press, Ireland, and the bi-lingual *This Intimate War Gallipoli/Çanakkale 1915 – İçli Dışlı Bir Savaş: Gelibolu/Çanakkale 1915* published in Australia and in Turkey, with trans by Mehmet Ali Çelikel.

My Turkish brother

for *Şerifali Ermiş*, *erkek kardeş*, brother, friend, Bozcaada Island, Turkey

Hazel eyes scan horizons even at rest.
Blood throbs with blue salt-sea tides.
His grin is broader than Aegean waters
parting his island from the coast of Turkey.
He knows the names of every fish here.
When they are ready, he brings them cooked.
Son of a fisherman, grandson of a captain,
his uncle Halil Yakar is brass-stamped into history
on the wall of the village house where he lived.

His skin shines burnished olive, seal-sleek
and he dances, arms lifted in the fluid wash of waves.
He calls me to the kitchen to watch the squid cleaned,
see their parrot-sharp beaks, tortoise-shell stippled,
their sacks of black ink that stain his fingers
before he cooks it from pearl-white to tender pink.
He knew me unanchored when I washed in, flotsam,
storm-stripped of home. He pulled out a chair at their table
under food his father farms – tomatoes, fig, white mulberry.

He loves deep. He loved her so big when they were young
he knew they would knot for life. Soon the sea would have
to wait. When the child was coming he remembered fear,
its clutch, four hours in huge swells struggling for life while
his love's brother drowned. Solid ground lay claim.
Fishing is risk, but land-work a special kind of tiredness,
draining life into the problems of others.
He gets burst water-pipes repaired, works the marina,
keeps the ledger of boats coming and going.

At night he walks us – big sister *abla*, and his wife, Meral –
along the harbour edge. Friends call to him from cafes.
We sit to watch night flow on, stars pooling at our feet.
Laughing, we choose our dream boat – 'Blue' – rigging
daisy-white in the dark, sigh over the map of opalescent trails
as it heads out to the free expanse, the unexpected. But he
is a man who makes dreams live. His own boat, his own work,
soon. She waits just out of sight, around the far search of his eye.
He can hear the slap of sail, taste her salt in the wind. Waiting.

Shaun Traynor, N. Irish poet and children's author; lives in London; latest collection *Van Gogh in Brixton* from Muswell Press.

See also www.shاونtraynor.co.uk

BLOWN LEAF

Blown leaf into the hall
From the traffic's frantic squall
Brown and beautiful, close to bloom
As I walk troubled to my room.

Blown leaf into the hall
From the traffic's frantic squall
Tossing in the draft, its bloom
Pirouettes in my room.

Blown leaf into the hall
From the traffic's frantic squall,
Withers now in loss of bloom
Settles now in my room.

Static now from the squall
From the street and from the hall:
A matchstick man on bed of tears
Surrounded by his life-time's fears.

AUBADE

Burnt in embers to be spread
As ash upon another's bed;
Place ash around the sacred Yew
Where hope and trust and love renew.



Incoming Tide – oil on canvas

Margarita Serafimova has published one book of poetry, *Animals and Other Gods*, in the Bulgarian (Sofia University Press, 2016). Her second book, *Demons and World*, also in the Bulgarian, is forthcoming in May 2017 (Black Flamingo Publishing, Sofia). In English, pieces of Margarita's have appeared in *Outsider Poetry*, *Heavy Athletics*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *The Peacock Journal*, *Noble / Gas Quarterly*, *In Between Hangovers*, *Window Quarterly/ Patient Sounds*, The Voices Project, and are forthcoming in *Tales From The Forest*, *Obra/ Artifact*, the *MockingHeart Review*, *London Grip New Poetry*, and *The Birds We Piled Loosely*. Margarita is a human rights lawyer. Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/MargaritaISerafimova/?ref=aymt_homepage_panel.

I was breathing in the cyclamen hyacinth,
and when my gaze stopped in its black stamens,
I gasped.
Eros.

* * *

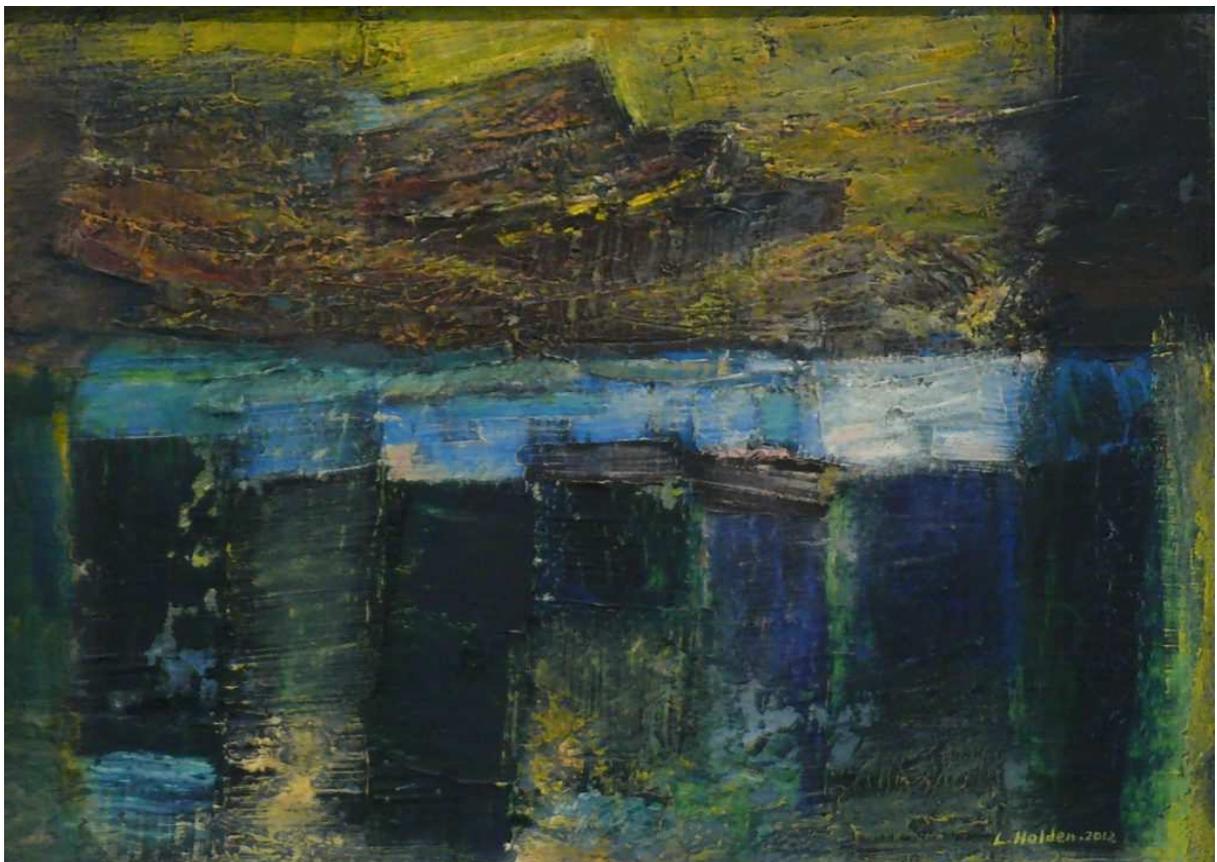
The wind is treading in the grass.
A starling is calling in the light.
The spirit is walking.



Coastlines – oil on panel



Coastal Cliffs – oil on canvas



Across Smerwick Harbour – oil on canvas

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