
Meet the ex-Disney animation artist living in Lahinch

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**Kevin McNamara in his Lahinch studio. Photograph: Martin Connolly*

A former Disney employee who could have lived anywhere in the world now residing in Lahinch feels the coastal town is “as good a place as any” to call home.

Four years ago, Kevin McNamara and his wife Rachael Montejo moved to Moy in the townland of Lahinch and have no desire on ever moving. At their home, what on the outside appears to be a modern garage is in fact Kevin’s studio with current projects on easels with finished works taking pride of place on the walls. Paintings of sentimental value are hung inside their house with jewellery made by Rachael on show in the corner of their dining room.

“We’re not summer holiday blow-ins, we’re here the whole time, this is our home. We were here Christmas on our own, we didn’t bother travelling. I lived in Florida in places where I was out in the boonies, this is not as rural as some of the places as I’ve been. As far as I am concerned this is as good a

place as any, we could have picked anywhere, we're here because we want to be here and my family are from here too. Drive around the coast and have a look at the variety of the landscape here in Clare. It's not just the coast in Clare, there's a lot of other stuff as well all the way from Ballyvaughan to Kilkee onto Carrigaholt out the Loop Head there's tonnes of stuff, that's the beauty of it there's variety," he told The Clare Echo on their love for their home from which on a clear day gives a view of O'Briens Tower at the Cliffs of Moher and Liscannor Bay.

As well as running workshops which last six weeks, Kevin constantly hones his craft and rarely takes a day off, he can often be spotted sitting at areas throughout the county putting together his art. Rachael who spent twenty five years in museum store management and consultancy, formally studied photography at NESOP in Boston travels with him, while he paints she shoots.

Born in Manchester and bred in Dublin, Kevin's family links stretch back to Scariff. A graduate of the National College of Art and Design in Dublin, he recalled his early memories of art and animation. "I always gravitated towards it and was always doing it. I can remember just using anything and everything even screwdrivers to draw and put things down, I was always at it".

Outdoor painting has always been his preference, "I try to use what's in the light and the colour and react spontaneously from those things to create something exciting that's of my own". He adds, "Often times I would have done a smaller painting of a scene to understand it similar to running a horse around a course to learn the course before a main race, that gives me an idea of what's going on so that I'm free to look for things in colour, light and design when it comes to the real painting. Sometimes those sketches are unique and beautiful and pieces of art in their own right if

they're done well".

ENNISTYMON AS PAINTED BY KEVIN MCNAMARA.

From 1994 to 1999, he worked as a background artist for Disney on films such as *Mulan*, *Tarzan* and *Thumbelina*. "When I left college, I worked for an animation company in Ireland, then I went to England and worked freelance because of the experience I had gained. I came back and worked for Don Bluth Studios and because of the work I did, Disney had heard of the talent and the artists had a good background, they came over, met us all in person, recruited us and basically Disney paid for me to go and live in the States and work on their films, they relocated me".

"Everything in an animation movie that doesn't move is a background so they would have to be drawn and painted that's what we did. We had the colour, mood and lighting right and what was critical especially in Disney was mixing the colours for a background, for instance if we were doing a sequence, we would pick a main background, sometimes I would spend one, two or three days just mixing colours in little tubs and putting them on little slivers of paper drying them with a hairdryer and matching them with the painting for hours and hours, nine to six everyday till I had a cross section of colours that I could mix ten to twenty colours. The reason for that is on the large screen those colours can pop and you lose continuity. It's a great discipline for an artist, that sort of exacting and colour matching, understanding colour".

On his reasons for departing Disney, Kevin said, "I left because my contract was finished and I had no interest in renewing it again. I had saved enough money from being there on my own without family and overheads relatively speaking and I just

used to money to put into other expenses such as paying off a mortgage, it was the one golden opportunity for an artist to get out on his own and I took it”.

His half a decade spent with the multinational mass media and entertainment conglomerate has influenced Kevin’s style to this day. “From discipline to the fact that Disney could recruit very talented people from all over the world allowed me to work in an environment with people from all over the world. If there was any downtime between movies, Disney would pay to have professional artists come in and hold workshops, it didn’t just happen on a one off basis, that was an ongoing thing, I got to work for a really great company and I got to be educated by a really great company as well. My painting is my own, Disney didn’t teach me to do what I’m doing now but all things are related when you’re working in painting, drawing and art so you feed from all the different sources”.

KEVIN MCNAMARA. PHOTOGRAPH: MARTIN CONNOLLY

Since 1984, McNamara’s work has featured in no less than 51 exhibitions all around the world including Temple Bar, Florida, South Carolina, London and Kentucky. Currently he has galleries open in South Carolina and Dublin, later this year he is hopeful of releasing a Cliffs of Moher collection and is very happy to be living in Co Clare. “I like it, we wouldn’t have picked it if we didn’t feel an attraction to the place. I like the fact that it’s a little bit rural, you’re a little bit cut off but nowadays it’s not as rural compared to what it would have been, there still is that little bit of being in a rural place. The connection to the people is good, they’re interested in what you’re doing but they’re not on top of you, people keep their space and I find that very healthy, there’s a little bit of being a stranger in a place for a while but that

doesn't matter it suits me too".

Paintings of his are varied in their settings with his subject matter mainly focused on landscape and fugitive work. In putting together so many different snapshots of life, sampling different ways of life is important he maintained. "Travel always broadens the mind. In terms of travelling to the States, first of all there's problems with weather, it's a little bit more problematic in Ireland with rain and wind but it doesn't get away from the fact that an artist can create enthusiasm and a vision or theme for their work whether they travel or not or if the weather is agreeable or not, a painter will always find a way but that doesn't preclude wanting to travel, it doesn't mean you can't travel, it only adds to it but a painter will always find a way.

"In the States for instance there's a lot of opportunities especially in South Carolina, I'm known for water paintings and it is a place of waterways with boats, those kind of things attract me because I have a really good understanding of painting water, of light and colour in water. There are going to be things and subject matter in Europe or the States that are unique but hey you're on the West coast of Ireland here with plenty of boats and harbours one of the wildest coastlines in the world, if you can't find subject matter here then there's something wrong".

Whilst based in Cape Cod in 2013, Kevin met Rachael, they married three years later and she has been a positive influence in both his personal and professional life. "She's a photographer in her own right so she has a complete empathy for what I'm doing without a conflict, I don't know if two painters could get on in the one house. We work as a team, we work closely together and she promotes my work in that way. It's not just about her being there to promote business, it extends to other things, we work as a team so that's how it works. She'll be with me when I'm working because

she's interested and chances are she's in an area where she is building her own portfolio for whatever she is doing with her own photography".

Away from paint, brushes and cameras, they are hopeful of a happy life in Lahinch. Professionally they will be kept busy with a high demand for places in the workshop while a series of paintings inspired by the beauty of Clare looks to be on the horizon.



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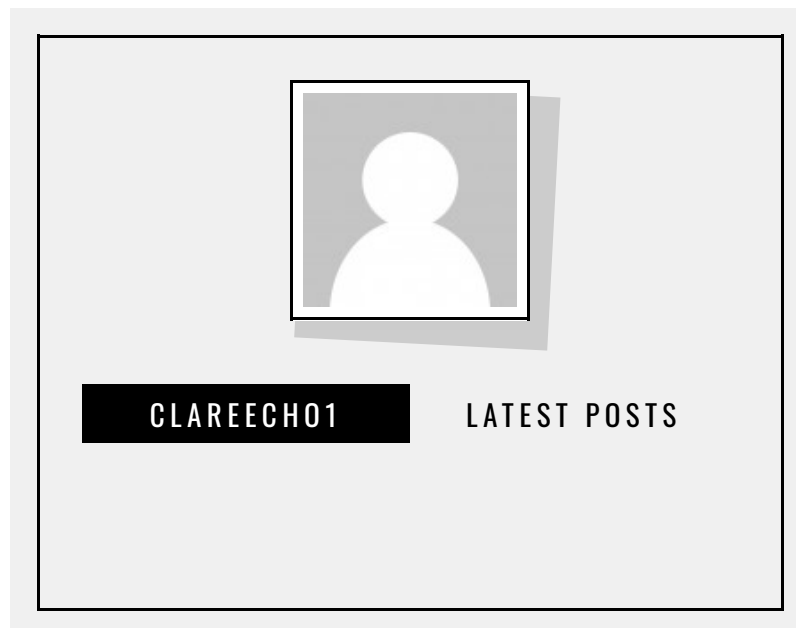


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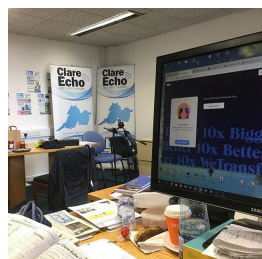
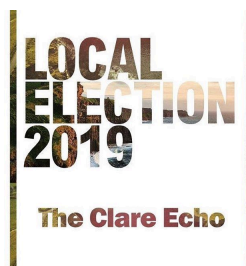
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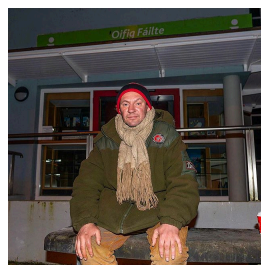


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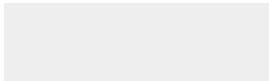
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*Pat Dowling. Photograph: Gary Collins Shannon's business community have confronted the Chief



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*Oliver Garry with Pat Breen and Cllr Johnny Flynn.
Photograph c/o Cllr

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