

# Introducing...

## Kevin McNamara



There's something extreme about living on a hilltop in the West of Ireland! But, the 360-degree panorama makes the blustery winds bearable and provides copious inspiration for a working artist

Words By Margaret O'Brien. Artist Photo By Rachael Montejo.



WEST OF IRELAND TOWN

Munster Interiors visits artist Kevin McNamara on a blowy winter's day at his studio perched high above Lahinch. Here at almost 300 feet high, the weather unfolds before us delivering a kaleidoscopic palette of colour and shade. We can see pockets of isolated rainfall in the distance and shadows forming under ominous dark clouds, punctuated by bursts of promising light that illuminate sections of the vast vista of beach, bog, sea, grassland and cliffs. Houses around the seaside resort of Lahinch are reduced to miniature scale from this lofty height. Nature in all its wild beauty is the undisputed star.

Kevin and his wife Rachael found this location after many months of searching and now divide their time between the wilds of County Clare and the genteel serenity of Beaufort, South Carolina. Kevin's life as an artist has taken him on an adventure that has crisscrossed the Atlantic. Born in Manchester to Irish parents, his family moved back to Dublin when he was very young. He grew up in Clondalkin at a time when it was a suburban village - a bridge between rural county Dublin and the city.

By his own admission he has enjoyed a love of drawing and painting for as long as he can remember and it led him to study at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin, where he graduated with a degree in fine art painting and the history of art in 1985. A year before leaving college, he held his first exhibition as a part of the 'Emerging Artists Show' organised by Guinness Peat Aviation, and the same year he participated in the 'Young Artists Exhibition' in Dublin. These early successes marked Kevin out as 'one to watch'.



STILL LIFE



HARBOURSCAPE

Over the intervening years Kevin has participated in several one-man and group art shows in the United States, London and Dublin. Highlights include participation in a show called 'Four Irish Painters' with the Messums Gallery and Petley Gallery on Cork Street, London. On the other side of the Atlantic he is particularly pleased to have been invited to present a selection of 50 works at the Museum of Arts and Sciences in Daytona Beach, Florida where curator Gary Libby described him as "a painterly realist with leanings into Impressionism." Kevin also singles out Irish designer and art enthusiast Ib Jorgensen for taking an interest in his work and for representing him so well here in Ireland for many years.

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While Kevin has enjoyed a solid career as an artist, his talent for art and in particular his talent for precision and colour has led him on some remarkable adventures. He enjoyed several years working in the Irish animated film production scene in its fledgling days, working for Don Bluth Studios in Dublin. From there he moved to London where he freelanced as an illustrator. Later, when head-hunted by Walt Disney Productions, he moved to Florida. "I worked as an artist for the Animation Department at Walt Disney Productions, on classics including Tarzan and Mulan, and on Thumbelina and All Dogs Go to Heaven directed and produced by Don Bluth. My job was to paint backgrounds to exacting colour specifications and to precisely match them from scene to scene."



CLIFFS OF MOHER

“THE WILDNESS OF THE CLIFFS OF MOHER  
CAN FRIGHTEN OR ELEVATE YOU.”

While the required precision and concentration were painstaking, Kevin says this taught him to be extremely discerning and respectful of the relationship between colour and light, something he carried through to his later years as a dedicated artist. Now in his fifties, Kevin's enthusiasm for painting hasn't dimmed. Not even the wildest winds blowing in from the Atlantic can make a dent on the impressive output of this prolific painter. He is passionate about painting landscapes and he likes to paint big! When he sees a window of opportunity, he packs up and sets off to paint favourite scenes en plein air.

"Once there's a break in the weather I am committed to painting outdoors," he says. "I only retreat indoors to apply finishing touches or to paint still life on a blustery day." In terms of technique, he says that although he knows many artists living in the west of Ireland paint from photographs, he prefers to brace the elements to capture and paint dramatic landscapes in the moment. "It allows me to respond spontaneously to my surroundings."



THE CLIFFS



PORTRAIT OF AUSTIN DODSON



ABSTRACT FORM BY WINDOW

KEVIN HAS ALSO DEVELOPED A PASSION FOR STILL LIFE PAINTING AND KEPT ALIVE HIS ENTHUSIASM FOR FIGURATIVE PORTRAITURE BY COMPLETING A NUMBER OF PORTRAIT COMMISSIONS IN RECENT YEARS.

He paints primarily in oils because they are so versatile. "With acrylic, the colour is just not the same." He never tires of painting the Cliffs of Moher and in turn it would be difficult to tire of gazing at his interpretation of these majestic wonders. He is in thrall to the cliffs' sense of foreboding, creation and power. His renditions are most arresting in large scale format, where he manages to capture the beauty, energy and menace of the cliffs.

"The wildness of the Cliffs of Moher can frighten or elevate you," says Kevin. His outdoor inspiration is not limited to the cliffs or the breathtaking scenery of the Burren and surrounding seascapes. He is also very taken with the quiriness and character of nearby Ennistymon, a market town enjoying a renaissance. His fascination with Ennistymon has set Kevin in a new direction. His engaging interpretations capture the fabric of the town in a non-prescriptive way, with the streetscape given an abstract overlay that is totally unlike Kevin's other landscape work. It's a new technique he is rightly proud of.

Always testing himself, and with a burning need to paint every day, Kevin has also developed a new passion for still life painting and has kept alive his enthusiasm for figurative portraiture by completing a number of portrait commissions in recent years. For such a prolific artist, he is very disciplined about the number of pieces he keeps. Some personal portraits of his wife Rachael adorn the walls of their Irish retreat; so too some incredibly striking examples of his landscape work featuring sultry scenes of tropical foliage from South Carolina and powerful scenes of the wind-chiselled scenery of County Clare.

Kevin's work sells for between €1,000 to €20,000 including portrait commissions, with 80 percent of his market in the United States, and the remainder here in Ireland and Europe. His studio in Lahinch provides unique access to his latest work where the public are welcome to visit any time prior to his bi-annual exhibitions.

*For more information visit [KevinMcnamara.us](http://KevinMcnamara.us)*