

a sacred place has been ritually altered with these pink additions. As part of his research Mooney also describes the phenomenon of the 'migration' of culture, referencing the mass migration of Irish peasants to the Carribbean in the seventeenth century.² In *Mounds* he has taken decorative and symbolic motifs from Africa and the Carribbean and superimposed them on a distinctively Irish setting. The result is a kind of votive painting overlaid with an encrypted map.

Crossroads is a very striking if somewhat chilling painting. What looks like a severed head wearing a balaclava lies weightlessly in a bed of straw. The eyes are blacked out. The straw has been woven crudely and certainly wouldn't stand up to any kind of practical use. Some of the cleanest and most vibrant streaks of colour in the entire exhibition appear as pieces of red (blood?) and white cloth below and above the head. Under the straw the remains of another image is barely visible through a film of wash. Straw has particular resonance in Irish folk history as part of the Mummers, Strawboys and Wren Boys. Some of these traditions date to pre-Christian times and still carry pagan associations. The folk forms of visual art that dominate Irish art history are where Mooney has found his heritage.

Throughout the exhibition other iconic Irish cultural and artistic references emerge, such as the Corleck Head in the painting *Crom*, coffin ships in Arcs and John Hinde postcards in *Self Portrait*. 'Dog Island Days' marks the beginning rather than the completion of Mooney's ideas on this theme. With such a rich seam of source material, I look forward to seeing it develop and expand.

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Notes

1. From a conversation between the author and the artist
2. *Ibid*

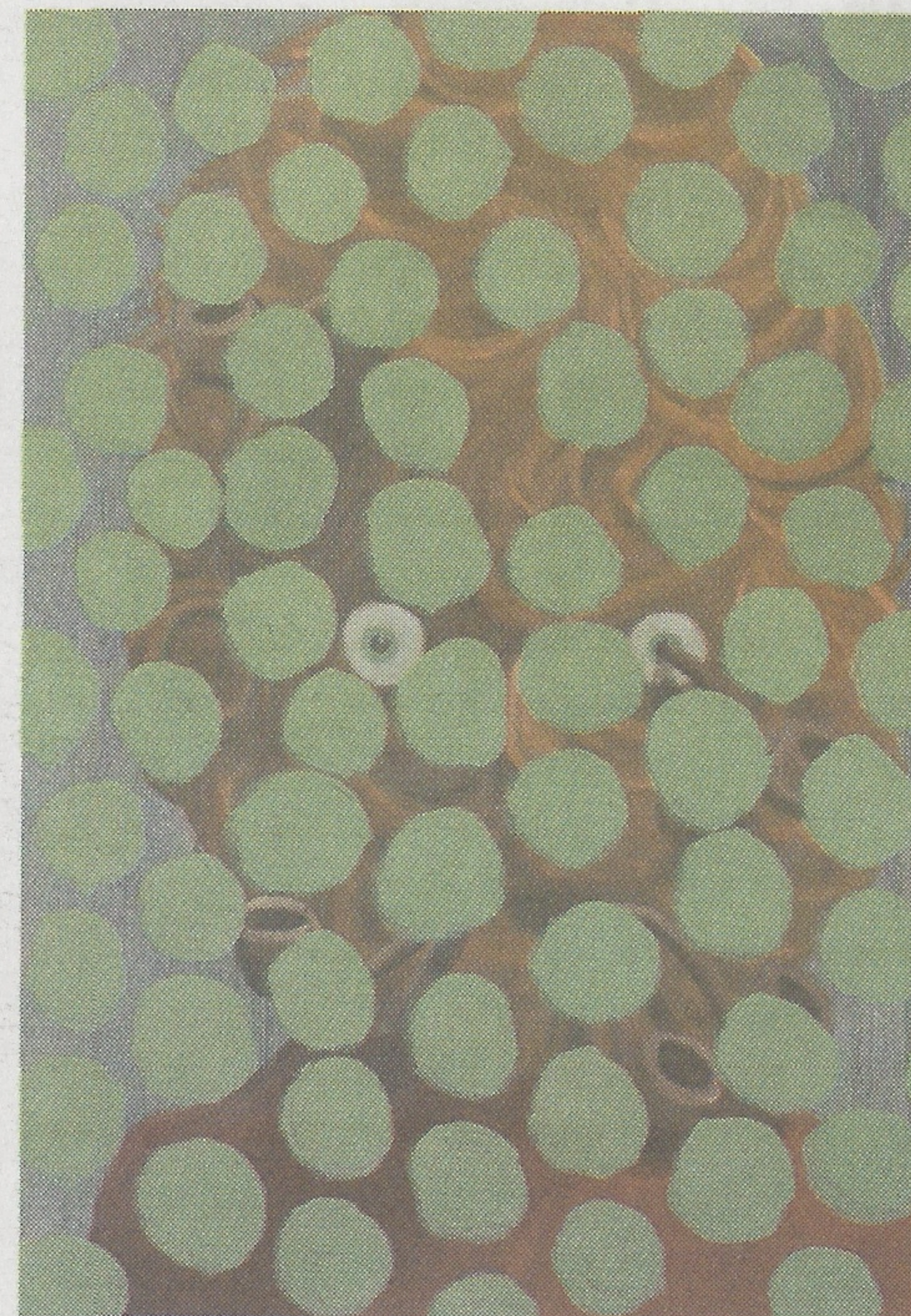
with this kind of painting; only long hours spent in the studio brings rewards.

The work is overwhelmingly melancholic, both in imagery and colour palette, although the occasional candy pink and green polkadot motif or concentric swirl lifts the mood. The range of colours – muted greens, watery reds, soft mauve, lilacs and burnt orange – struggle not to be contaminated by a dull greyness which, upon examination, is hard to pinpoint exactly – perhaps it is in the mood rather than the colour.

'Dog Island Tales' combines figurative work with non-figurative compositions. There is a series of works depicting forlorn individuals who appear to have suffered a kind of estrangement from the viewer. They stare out wide-eyed through the gaps of Mooney's various painterly and decorative devices, which overlay them with a kind of protective camouflage.

Pipes is a particularly successful piece: a pair of disembodied eyes executed with strikingly realistic irises and pupils are centred on oversized rounded eyeballs and stare blankly forward through the grille of green spots slotted down in front of them. A number of old clay pipes (like those once distributed at Irish wakes) jut out from the space around the eyes and face and one pipe sticks out from an eye itself.

Mooney describes the pipes and figure as a reference to Peig Sayers, the infamous Irish storyteller and bane of Ireland's leaving cert veterans. A core motivation underpins the works in the show: the search for an artistic heritage, specifically an Irish History of Art. Mooney tracks this elusive notion in a non-linear fashion, citing noble pre-historic and Christian periods, centuries of colonial suppression and from the twentieth century onwards – Ireland as hostage of social, political and culturally entrenched positions. Mooney considers how the less than healthy evolution of our visual arts heritage



Kevin Mooney *Pipes* oil on canvas 80x60cm

has impacted on himself and the wider culture and society in Ireland.'

One of the largest and most decorative works in the exhibition is the landscape *Mounds*. It depicts what ostensibly looks like an ancient burial mound, decorated with concentric motifs typical of pre-historic Irish art. At the top of the mound sits a circle of bare trees, a fairy fort perhaps. A white mist washes over the entire canvas, overlaid with long shards of pink and white polka-dot triangles, which point inwards towards an imaginary vanishing point. It looks as if a mystical painting of



Kevin Mooney *Mounds* oil on canvas 95x80cm

KEVIN Mooney's exhibition 'Dog Island Tales' straddles itself somewhere between Outsider Art and its sophisticated and more strategic cousin, Expressionism. It's good to find a young artist grappling with this difficult language of painting. Mooney's work betrays a hard won struggle and search for something deeply felt in instinct and new in form. This 'holy grail' is seldom tackled by artists and few painters can manage the process with finesse, save notable exceptions such as Brian Maguire and Patrick Hall. Mooney has treaded a brave and challenging path – and good on him –