

Candy R Wei Prize Application

Megan Jones

In the summer of 2018 I enrolled in the Burren College of Art program, which took me to the small town of Ballyvaughan, Ireland. While there, I wrote and illustrated *Ancient Echoes*, a poem describing a small Irish village losing its priest to famine. The poem expresses the spiritual value of empathy and environmental stewardship.

The program at the Burren gives students ample free time, which I used to hike the nearby mountain. I climbed every day I could, spending up to 8 hours in silence, exploring the limestone formations, plants, ruins of churches, and settlements. Though initially procrastinating, this meditative habit created the space for the blending of descriptions of what I saw with the content we learned in lectures. The poem that bubbled up moved me to identify as an illustrator and writer, whereas I previously didn't know what to call myself. I now focus on the partnership of words and illustration in my practice and consider time in nature a critical working material.

The time in class influenced my artistic trajectory too. The course centers around the intersection of art, environmental, and social themes. In our discussions, we learned about the old Irish traditions that influence the sustainability initiatives there today. This introduction to Ireland's environmental efforts led me to return the following summer on an independent study. While there, I interviewed members of community energy coops, Extinction Rebellion-Ireland, and researchers of alternative energy solutions at the National University of Ireland-Galway. I presented my research in a comic that employs poetry to portray information in a way that data and essays cannot.

Influenced by my time in Ballyvaughan, I continue to use illustrated words in IP and will continue to use these tools to advocate for environmental and social justice after graduation.

Ancient Echoes

It was a starved and empty Friday when the old priest
passed away,
discovered by the boy who used to ring the time of day.
He hurried to the town to share the ruin he had found
and by the time the sun had set the man was settled in
the ground.

The hot breath of summer flowers filled the fields now
dead and wrong.
A darkness gripped the town, though most the town was
gone.
They'd gone to new America or passed into the dust,
leaving the hazel and the thistle and the gates now
veiled in rust.

The congregation elders searched for a man to fill his
place,
but none were near as godly, and none so touched by
grace.
Remaining empty handed, to their homes they each
returned
as Saturday descended and to ash the sky was burned.

In crept Sunday morning, the town gathered at the
church
like soldiers returned to camp to heal their hopelessness
and hurt.
From their seats among the pews they looked with
hollow sunken eyes
to the empty space before them where their last hopes
came to lie.

Silence draped the room as some bent their necks to
pray
when from within their ears a piercing roar broke upon
the sullen grey.
The sound crumbled into thunder they only heard from
deep within
before apocalyptic trumpeting gave way to a calm and
stoic wind.

The church bells rang above them to call the start of
mass
but hung still as ancient stones that rest along the paths.

They reached for one another and some sank to touch
the floor
as a bludg'ning of ancient echoes rose from decades
long before.

They heard the morning of the rebel, the prideful boasts
of daring priests,
the whispers of young newlyweds in their first devoted
weeks.

They heard days of silent winters spent by the closing
years' last flames,
the cries of fearful parents calling out their children's
names.

And the thunder of the waterfall 'gainst rocks reposing
in the pond,
the fluttering of stars from beyond the last beyond.
They heard regretted words spoken in angry, heated
breath
and the loss of the unspoken love not revealed before
one's death.
And the creaking of decaying wood from which new life
will grow again
they heard every first, and every last, every midst
without an end.

The sounds grew within their hearts until it became a
deafening riot
and then the moral with no words rose from the sermon
in the silence.

As quickly as it started the sound receded into the walls
as the congregation saw that in the pews there sat their
God.

She was strong with angry hands and yet his face was
soft and kind.

They could not bear to look too long, for they saw that
God was crying.

It was ever long ago the last townsman left his home.
The old forgotten church, now a corroding catacomb
Walls shrouded in dark ivy let wind unknowingly pass
thru
where once upon a time, God prayed from a wooden
pew.

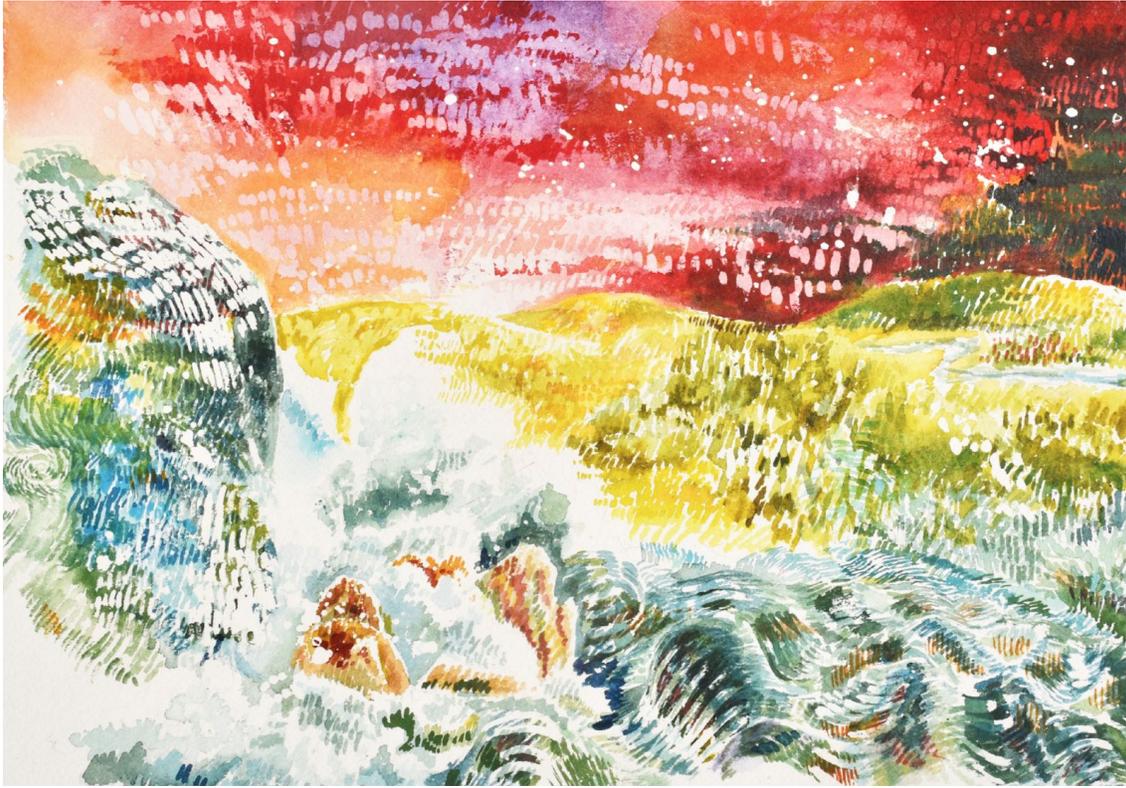
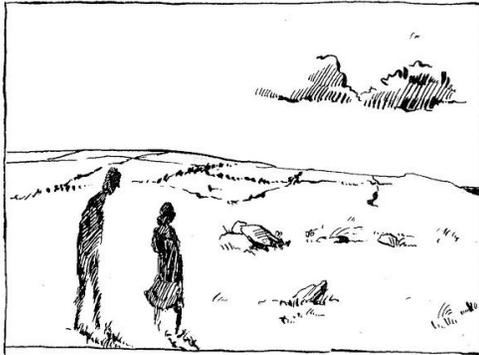


Illustration from Ancient Echoes- 2018
Watercolor



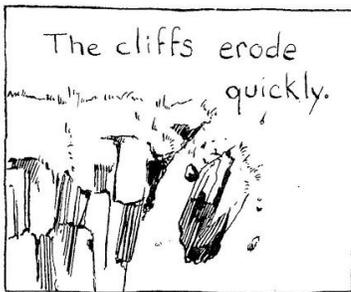
Illustration from Ancient Echoes - 2018
Watercolor



Here lie the last stone walls of ancient homes,



built when these fields were further from the edge.



A toxic atmosphere and stronger storms wear on them

And soon, what remains of the buildings will fall into the rising sea.

