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# Art Recollected In Tranquility

by PENNY MCCORMICK 5 MIN READ SAVE

DUBLIN ARTIST GERARD BYRNE SHARES THE LESSONS HE LEARNT DURING LOCKDOWN ...

"I love getting out of my studio and braving the elements. When I paint outdoors I capture not only what I see but also the energy of my surroundings," says self-taught artist Gerard Byrne. For those living in Dublin, specifically Ranelagh where his eponymous gallery is located, Byrne became something of a local hero during lockdown. "I decided to concentrate on painting as a way of focusing my mind on something else rather than Covid-19, something over which I had no control. It wasn't my intention to capitalise on what I was going to do. I was purely thinking about my sanity."

Following his wife Agata's instructions to paint on the roof of their gallery flat, Byrne completed his first piece, a charcoal sketch of a terrace across the road from the gallery. "We shared it out on social media and to my surprise Bryan O'Brien from *The Irish Times* turned up the next day to film me painting." O'Brien's video became so popular that when Byrne went out to paint people recognised him as "the artist from the roof" and many began clapping. "I felt that I was in some ways similar to the Italian opera singers singing from their roofs and balconies, healing souls."



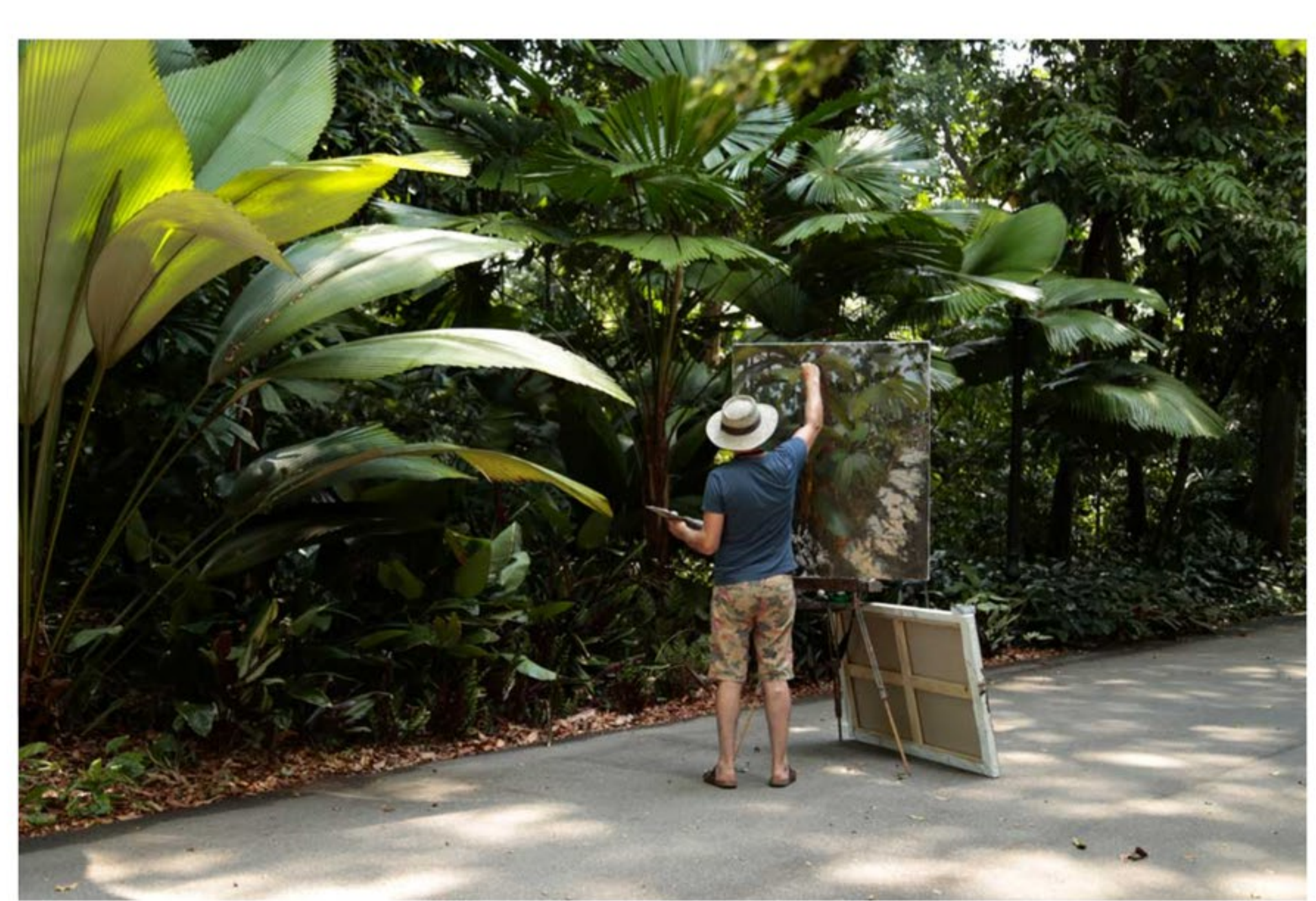
After several rooftop scenes, Byrne changed his view and decided to do more for his local community, painting on quiet, neighbouring streets. During the course of the last three months he has completed some 53 oil paintings, which incorporate his signature flair for florals and foliage, in addition to recreating the beauty of Dublin 6's Georgian architecture. Byrne's so-called "Pause for Harmony - Art in Lockdown" series has already garnered support online and in real life. Many enjoyed watching Byrne paint from a safe distance. "The collective energy of people's positivity and emotions as the city's nature was reborn with birds chirping minus the sounds of cars and jet engines, fed into my work. I thought this was a very special time and I wanted to capture that collective energy in as many works as I could." One interesting outcome is that he has been asked to do a number of commissions of local homes, though this was never his intention.



"Practice makes perfect" is Byrne's personal mantra and he is best known for his still life works, particularly vivid pink lilies. He describes himself as "a colourist attracted to strong colours" - Hockney, Sorolla and Monet have all provided inspiration. His recent works echo Byrne's last two exhibitions "Botanical Fusion" (2019, Singapore Botanic Gardens) and "Inside Outside & Beyond" (2018, National Botanic Gardens of Ireland, Dublin). His artworks can be divided into two categories: summer works - *en plein air* landscapes, seascapes and urbanscapes, in both mediums - oil on canvas or charcoal on canvas. "In my winter work I concentrate on figurative and still life. Recently, after living in London, I also started creating large scale industrial and floral paintings, both verging on abstract. I wouldn't classify myself as a portrait painter, however I do paint figures. In my figurative work I'm not trying to capture likeness. I paint from my imagination, only using some imagery as a reference. I'm more interested in the overall composition of figures and the interaction between them. My ultimate goal is to create an emotion."



In tandem with painting during the day, Byrne was also busy behind the scenes. "With lockdown we learnt there are many ways of running a business. Like other companies, we implemented new practises and we also decided to change our business model to free us up to be more creative." One initiative was to create a 360-virtual tour of the gallery space, launched on World Environment Day (June 5), together with an online shop. The inspiration was to reach out to people. "As an artist, I have a need and a want to show my art to an audience. I am inspired by the feedback I receive. The creation of the tour aligns with our initial intentions when the gallery opened [in 2017] to create a space offering its visitors a visual and sensory experience. A place of solace to calm and settle our busy minds, not just an art gallery. Looking at art is a great way to slow down, reflect, and *just be*."



While Byrne admits it is still very early days to say how successful or not the project will be, he hopes the virtual tour will provide a way to reach those who are intimidated by art galleries ("even as an artist I'm intimidated by them" he admits) or geographically unable to visit. His objective is admirable: "My intention is to make people more aware of the beauty around them and how fragile it is." His overriding lesson - time is precious and should not be wasted or abused. "Prior to the pandemic we were consumed by running the gallery and being 'forever available'." An appointment-only policy is now in place - the gallery is open seven days a week - which is not only safer, but gives Byrne and his wife, a renowned landscape architect, more freedom to do what they are truly passionate about - creating beautiful landscapes both literally and aesthetically; [www.gerardbyrneartist.com](http://www.gerardbyrneartist.com).