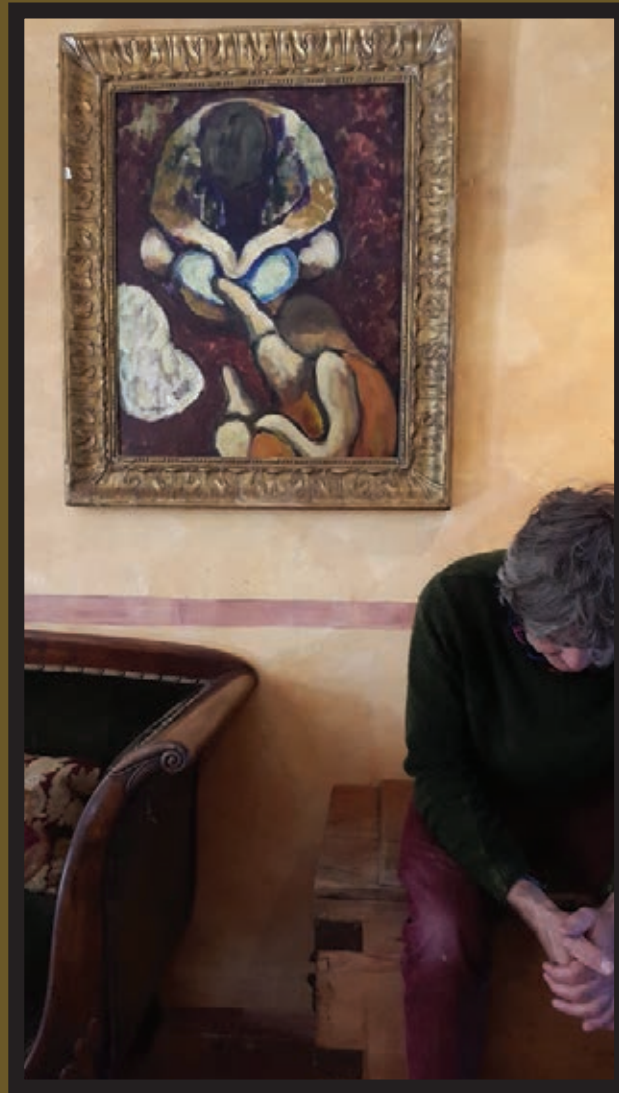


Anthony Murphy



A Retrospective

Anthony Murphy

“Unless there is wildness around you, something terrible happens to the wildness inside of you. And if the wildness inside of you dies I think you’re finished.”

John Moriarty



Life and Work
An Interview

The Artist's Bed

Anthony Murphy was born in Buenos Aires in 1956. He grew up in London and Suffolk and spent his twenties in Ireland. But for the last quarter of a century, he has made his home in southwest France. Home is a house on a hilltop. The house looks like the Ark. There is a wild Irish feel to the place: old farm machinery in the long grass, bathtubs in horse fields, big skies and untidy greenery. Driving up from the valley through shuttered French villages and along the wooded lanes, it is possible to believe you have left the real world behind.

Anthony's studio is above the old stables of his house. At the far end of the barn-like room is a bed by a wood-burner where the artist often sleeps. Overhead, a pair of budgerigars flit noisily between the cobwebbed rafters. There is a deep carpet of paint-covered rags underfoot. Tables are littered with tubes of paint, oil pastels, and several once-decent coats from Murphy's days in Ireland, which he now wears for winter painting in the studio.

In this private world, canvasses lean against chairs and boxes in the process of creation: half finished and energetic compositions in charcoal – sketches of turf cutters and laundry girls, landscapes and horse fairs – the French and Irish connections.





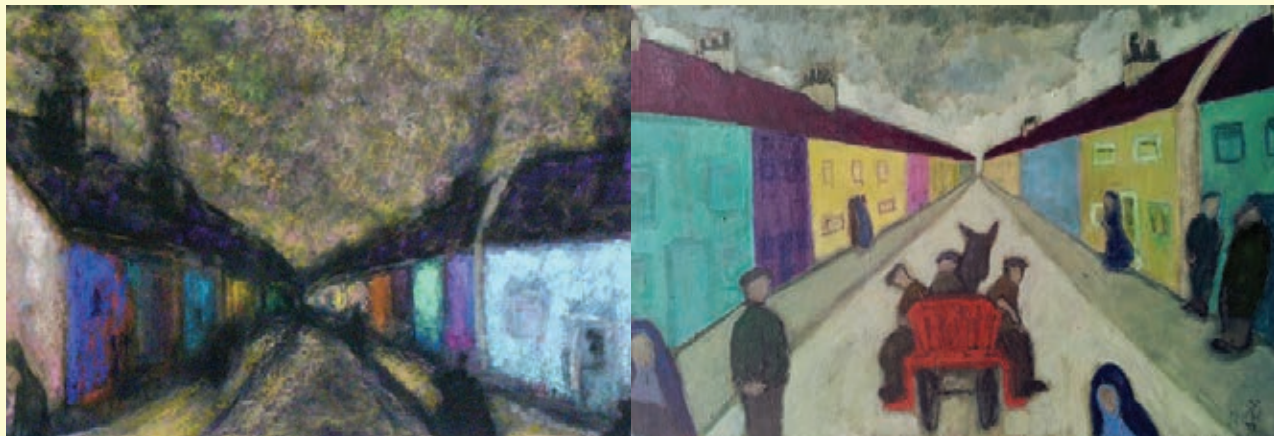
"I don't think about choosing colours anymore...my inner eye can see the palette and the rest is intuitive. Only composition is half intellectual."

AM



The only concessions to order in the studio are the well-cleaned brushes by the easel and the carefully graded oil colours on various palettes lying amongst the chaos. Those carefully tended brushes speak of that other craftsmanship silently accompanying serious painting. Here is a truth; here is a hint of the care, because Anthony Murphy's work has a naïve, Fauvist simplicity that belies a rare talent honed by the workmanship of thirty years application. To become a great colourist is no mean feat, and Murphy has achieved it. His paintings are rich with light and colour: contrasting, harmonic, shining. You can see the influence of his pastel drawing in the oils; the bold daubs and the immediacy.

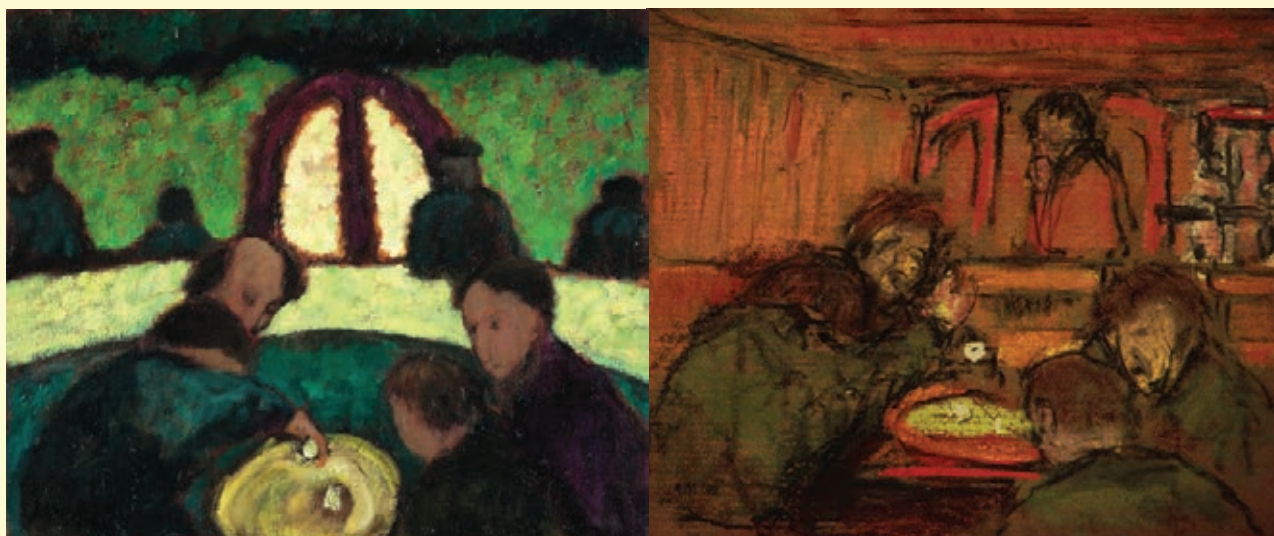
High Street Headford; Pastel on paper; 1999



Road to Letterfrack; Oil on Canvas; 2013

“I often sketch in pastel and work from that. Pastels have instancy, and I can hide unobtrusively in a corner with my box of colours and a sketch pad.”

The Gamblers; Oil on canvas; 2009



The Gamblers; Pastel on card; 1992

An Interview



The Junkies; Oil on canvas; 2010

There is an aura of ‘boundaries’ about Anthony Murphy – some people have that quality and others don’t. It’s hard to quantify. But there is a vulnerability too. I know some of his outrageous biography, but I’m hopeful he’s going to be forthcoming about the other – always more interesting – inner journey. Half of his life has been spent acknowledging the shadows. As his uncle, the poet, Richard Murphy, put it:

“Now I see that Anthony’s painting embodies and transfigures the tensions, pain and glory of his time, of his Irish, English and Jewish heritage...of the addict within the survivor, the rootless visionary brought through art and suffering to earth.”



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SD: A creative career is never easily won – what was your path?

AM: Pottery is where it began for me. When I was a teenager, art was private – down in the cellar with my pottery wheel. I was young and in love - painfully unrequited. I made a bowl for the girl I adored, glazed the Chinese symbol for love, then found her in the arms of another boy. So I took the bowl back – I still have it. I'm a dreamer. The creativity was always there. I was reckless and bought a hang-glider – I busted up a few limbs learning to fly that thing. For a while in my youth though, drugs seemed like the magic portal. It happened like that – as if I had been pushed down a helter skelter. Then expectations crowded in. I got my act together thinking I had to conform to save myself from the madness of it all...

- 1. Murphy with his hand-painted hang-glider. 1970's
- 2. Love; Anthony Murphy; Glazed Stoneware; 1972; Artist's Collection



Murphy as Tom Brown; and in his studio in France.

SD: Your former headmaster at Westminster, Dr John Rae, wrote in his Diaries (1970-1986) that he thought your early fame had led to your well-documented escape into a hedonistic, drug-fuelled lifestyle. (Murphy won an Emmy in 1971 for his starring role in the BBC's adaptation of Tom Brown's Schooldays.)

AM: It's hard for me to say. I actually found the fame element of that time utterly hollow. It didn't interest me. At school I was ostracized by most of my fellows for a year afterwards. But I had taken my first acid trip by that time. That interested me. And falling into a painful and unrequited love. Yes, that was a big deal for me. Perhaps I did protect myself with the idea that drugs could become more important than people.

SD: And now?

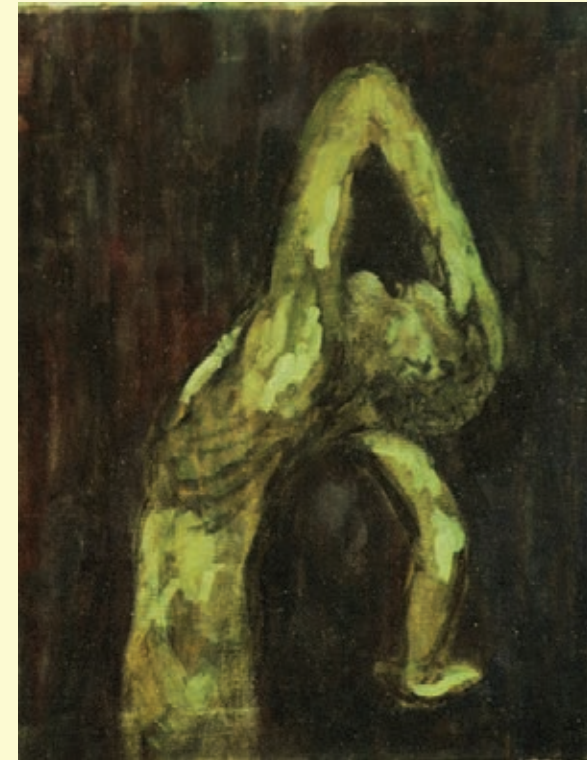
AM: I've lived a clean and sober life for the last 25 years. My work is my vocation and my drug. I don't need protection anymore. I've come to believe that we're all quite similar – battling our demons, suffering our defeats – I think it's a mistake to confuse a man with his failures or his achievements. I'm enamoured of the Irish writer, John Moriarty. I identify with his belief that as well as everything else, we are all still primeval beings.

"...There is all Africa and her prodigies in us. That in us also is all whatsoever the Sun shines upon. In us are all the Heavens, all the Hells, and all the Deeps."

John Moriarty; Dreamtime; (Lilliput Press)



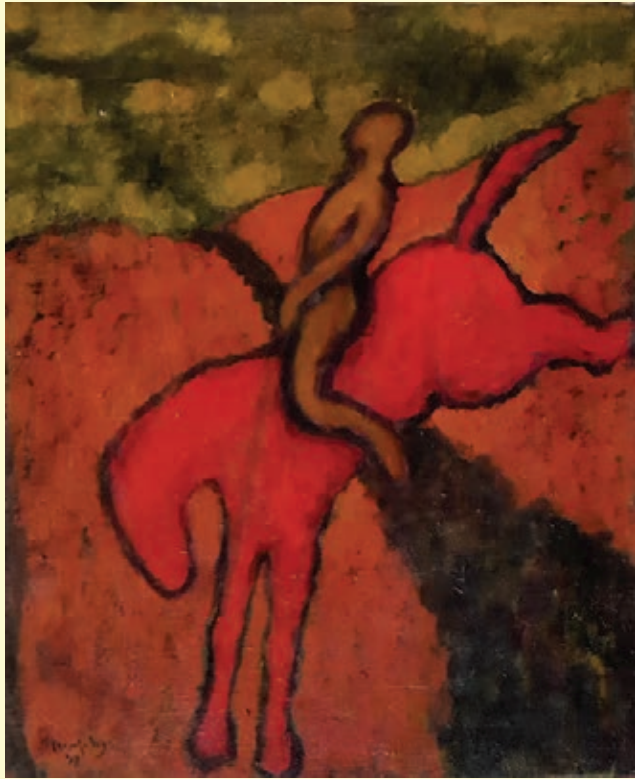
Murphy with his painting: The Awakening; Oil on canvas; 2007



The Blinding of Oedipus; Oil on canvas; 2009



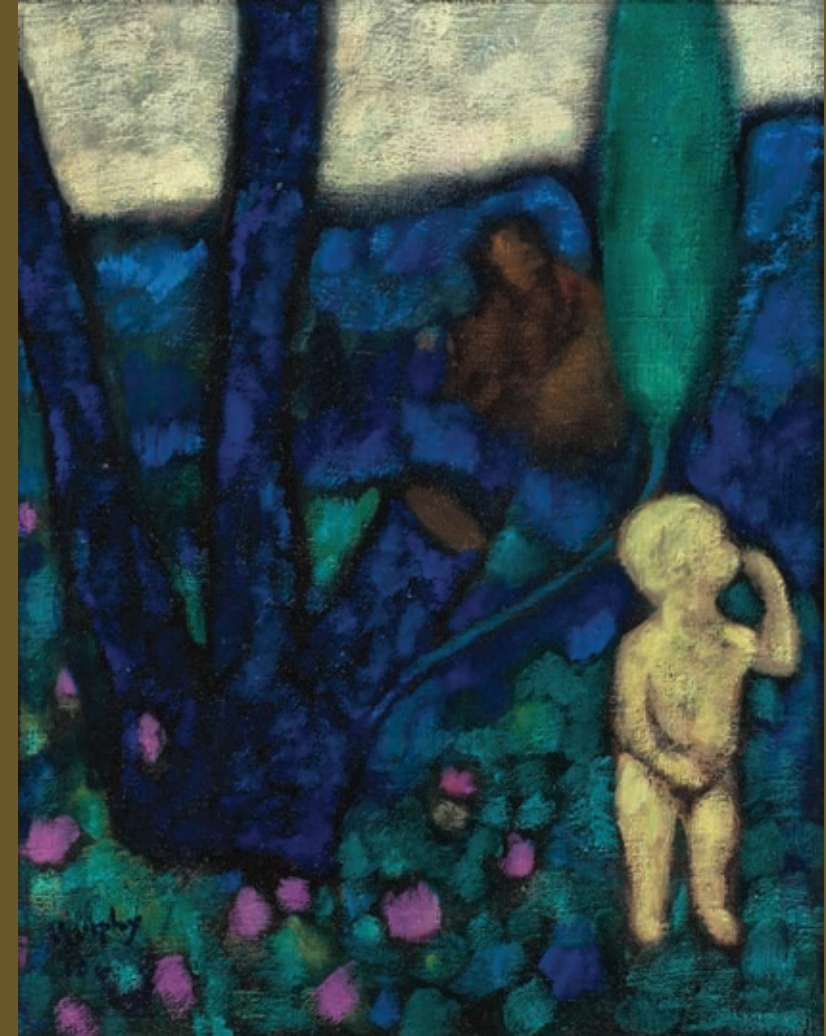
The Wake; Oil on canvas; 2010



A Big Wall; Oil on canvas; 2012



Logos; Oil on canvas; 1999



Innocence; Oil on canvas; 2010

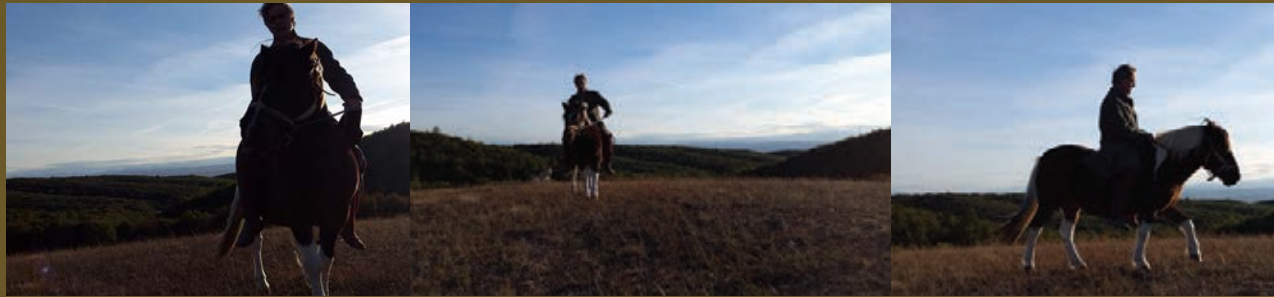
SD: Do you regret your days of excess?

AM: No. I had no choice. But I've tried to move on, to accept myself, because I'm a master of self-hatred. Luckily the seed of creativity was always there. Emerging from my chrysalis I discovered work – finally – in my art. Like any human being I get a kick out of making things. That's my Heaven. When I got sober I said to the unknown powers in the universe, that I could do without drugs if I could live my life as a painter. That power taps me on the shoulder every now and then to remind me that it didn't break its word. Excess was my pathway to this creative life. I had to suffer to grow.

Horses

“Unless there is wildness around you, something terrible happens to the wildness inside of you. And if the wildness inside of you dies I think you’re finished.”

John Moriarty



Murphy and Shaman; The Languedoc; 2016

SD: Horses feature strongly in your work – is that an Irish connection?

AM: I spent time in early recovery working in a dressage yard. I discovered a love for horses, which remains to this day. The spirit of a horse is a healing force. If you come to them with an open mind, they are a mirror allowing you to see yourself right-sized. If you buy a stallion to prove yourself – you’ll soon find out who you really are. I had my wild days in Ireland proving myself by bashing teeth out on stone walls with the Galway Blazers. Nowadays, I look for intimacy, and hacking in the hills about home is good enough for me.



Ballinasloe Fair, Oil on canvas; 1999



Out at Grass; Pastel on card; 2014



Ballinasloe Fair; Oil on canvas; 2016



Willy Leahy's Yard; Pastel on card; 2008



Galway Races; Oil on canvas; 2016



Galway Races, Oil on canvas; 2015



Ireland



Murphy, hang-gliding in Co. Clare, Ireland; 1978



Murphy painting walls in Dublin

“Child of empire, fish, fowl, shape-changer, shaman, myriad-minded man, Anthony Murphy’s paintings brim with life. They leave the viewer in no doubt that they’re inhabited by someone very real and vibrant. The best of artists are men, or women, of universal mind. We have of course great public exemplars like the late Seamus Heaney (no mean appreciator of the visual arts), and my own author John Moriarty, a writer-poet and mystic, whose sayings Anthony has blazoned across derelict walls in Dublin and Bristol, like an impassioned Banksy. ‘Walk naked to Tara and inherit your royalty’...” (contd.)



The Dubliners; Oil on canvas; 2015

“...I get a sense that AM will die in harness; he’s our Cézanne out there in the quarry, painting his heart out until a fever brought on by the rain does for him. He’s got a few years in him but at some stage Nature will call time on his restless, prodigious talent. And then his studio – eyrie at Les Jasses looking south to the snow-capped Pyrenees will cease to speak its mysterious metalanguage – erotic, Theosophical, intimate. As someone who flew microlites in his youth, Anthony was a member of the dangerous sports club. He’s still a risk taker, riding to hounds and throwing himself off cliffs, an Icarus, his canvases soaring and dazzling in their passage towards the light. They have an adventurism at play that lifts the spirit.”

Antony Farrell; Publisher; Lilliput Press, Dublin.



The Cross at Cong; Oil on canvas; 2013



The Card Players; Oil on canvas; 2015



Three Guinness; Oil on canvas; 2013



The Turf Cutter; Oil on canvas; 2012



The Bar; Oil on canvas; 2009



O'Malleys, Connemara; Pastel on board; 2010



Belfast girls; Pastel on card; 2014



“The moment we placed the first painting in the gallery window, a spark ignited and viewers were drawn to the glow. The man behind those brushstrokes is the embodiment of his paintings – original, charismatic, chromatic. The Oriel is all the more alluring with the inclusion of his work in the collection.”

Mark and Mandy Nulty
The Oriel Gallery, Dublin 2016



Mrs Egan by her Range; Oil on canvas; 1995

A Sense of Place



SD: You've lived abroad now for some time. Were you running away when you went to France, or exploring pastures new?

AM: I moved from London to west Ireland in my twenties and then Paris after that...so it was a small step heading south into the wilderness...Leading or being led? Who knows. It was and still is very rural where I live in France. I feel comfortable with that, what I see now is that wherever the chain stores appear, there is a stripping away of the Christian and Pagan past, and the environment becomes a neutered one in some way. There are no cracks or splits, nothing to tell you the character, nothing to remind you of history. When I was travelling in the Pyrenees at eighteen, I had a premonition I would live near these mountains. At the time I thought that the most unlikely thing. But here I am. I love Ireland – have family there, and in London too. I have a kind of threesome going with the English, the Irish and the French. But some of the old magic still remains here in the Languedoc. Life moves to older, slower rhythms. You might still hear the spirit world if you listen hard enough. You can feel something in the dark untamed corners...



Pin Parasols; Oil on canvas; 2009

“In his search for colours that move, Murphy speaks poignantly of much of a picture ending up ‘as rags around my feet’. Just as he tries to correct and alter his images, it seems to me, he tries to correct and alter his life.”

Sile Connaughton Deeny; Curator



Sunflowers; Oil on canvas; 1994



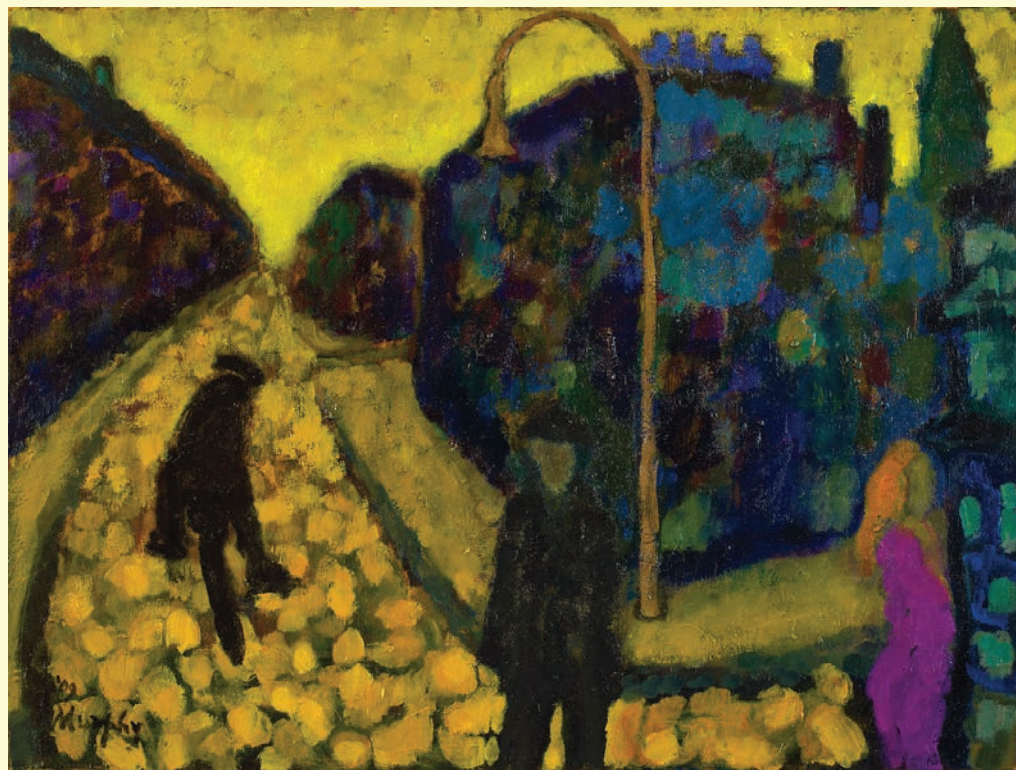
The Flowerseller; Oil on canvas; 2010



The Harbour at Essaouria; Oil on canvas; 2010



The Bastille; Pastel on paper; 1992



Returning Home; Oil on canvas; 2010



The Chefs; Oil on canvas; 2015



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SD: There is a way that your paintings are entirely Murphy'esque – your bold manipulation of colour, the shimmering trees and landscapes, and the almost sculptural quality of the forms you revisit. Your paintings demand attention – are your themes conscious?

AM: I suppose what may be recognizable in my work is the unconscious meditation that overtakes me when I stand at my easel. I went again to the Niaux Cave this year and was transported by repeated images of horses that had been painted on the same rock wall over the course of thousands of years – as if a prehistoric sect of artists had been trying to achieve the perfect line. There are archetypes – totemic images really – that fascinate and engage me in the same way.

1. Molly on Hard Water; Oil on canvas; 2010

2. Sunday Morning, St Sulpice; Oil on canvas; 2016



Couvent de La Mercie; Oil on canvas; 1997



Villazzel du Razes; Oil on canvas; 2012



Boule Players Limoux; Oil on canvas; 1997



The Lock Keeper; Oil on canvas; 2004

"Murphy is an outstanding colourist, skilled at creating mood..."

Barbara Stanley
Barbara Stanley Gallery



The Coliseum; Oil on canvas; 2016

Woman

“Women are mysterious and I like a mystery. Courtship is the only theatre in the world and women are sorceresses – there really is magic, so I’m casting spells for all I’m worth...”

AM



Surrender; Pastel on paper; 2012



Apple and Eve; Oil on canvas; 2011

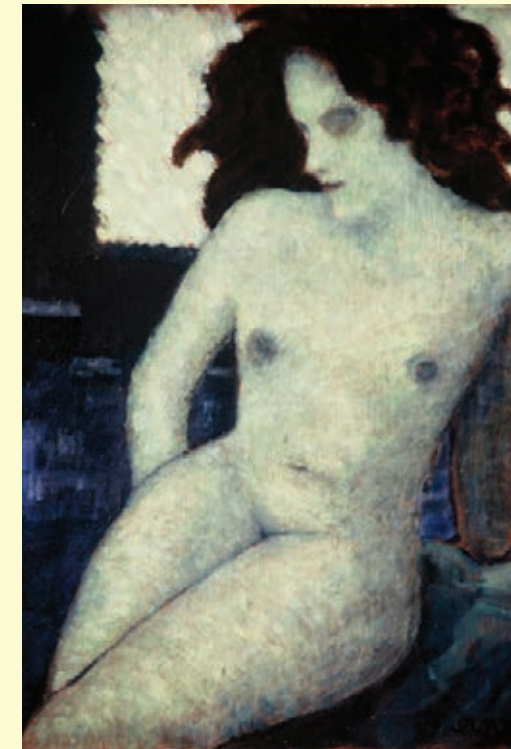


The Two Sisters; Oil on canvas; 2011

The Artist's Mother; Oil on canvas; 2011



The Bathers; Oil on canvas; 2010



Une Muse; Oil on canvas; 1999



The Laundry; Oil on canvas; 2015



La Toilette; Oil on canvas; 2016



The Magdalene Adored; Oil on Canvas; 2009

SD: The women in your paintings often confront the viewer, but there is a sadness too – a far-awayness – as if they are being observed from a great distance. Is that a personal connection?

AM: You can't always go head on, you can't stare at the girl you love – you have to look away or steal a glance. A guess is always more exciting than a fact. I see the feminine spirit of woman most clearly in the persona of Mary Magdalene and her relationship with Christ. How did the Magdalene love, for example? The human relationship can be a source of the divine. That's the tremor I try to capture.



Chagrin; Oil on canvas; 2015

SD: How has your attitude to art and painting changed over the course of your career?

AM: I suppose painting used to be about escape, now I think of it more as a way of confronting life. But I do go up to my studio sometimes to find a freedom from the modern way of thinking; the empty comparisons with other people's lives, and the sad impossibility of helping those who won't be helped - the people banging their heads against the corridor wall. There's nothing more real to me now than painting. I like the Jack Yeats answer on being asked what an artist was: "...there is only one art and that is the art of living. Painting is an occupation that is in that art..."



Cailhau; Pastel on paper; 2009

“When I first started as a dealer in early English watercolours some 40 years ago, it was possible to buy a drawing by Turner for a few hundred pounds. That is no longer the case. The art market is a Chimera, a confusion of noise and shadow, exacting and bewildering to artist and art dealer alike. But away from the din of fashion and money, the artist mines his talent and excavates his soul, and with a brush and pigment expresses himself on a blank canvas. Murphy does this with originality and distinction. Where Turner spun his magic in painting landscape, Murphy references family, religion, woman and nature, his colour intense and his fluid rhythmic composition demanding the viewer’s involvement. We react to his art because we are aware of the danger and the courage of his ambition.”

Nicholas Bowlby; Fine Art Dealer
www.nicholasbowlby.co.uk

A direct descendant of Henry Tate, creator of the original ‘White Cube’, Nicholas Bowlby has been dealing for over 25 years, specializing in fine art from the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries. He is a director of the Koestler Trust, the foremost UK Charity encouraging prisoners, secure patients and detainees to participate in the arts.



Ecce Homo; Oil on canvas; 2012

“The British have drawn and painted in France since the eighteenth century. But France is so varied that there is always something new to explore, something different to express. Murphy has both the intellectual astringency and the technical gift to do so.”

Francis Russell, Director – Old Masters
Christie’s, London

Pastels



The Chefs; Pastel on card; 2008



2. Ballinasloe Fair; Pastel on card; 2003



The Chess Player; Pastel on card; 2008



Road to Montsegur; Pastel on card; 2008



The End of the Line; Oil on canvas; 1991

SD: Your work has been widely lauded and is now bought by collectors from around the world – where do you want to be in 20 years?

AM: I like to keep things fresh, to keep alive the immediacy of my work. I've found that it's in the act of creating that I achieve satisfaction, because the art of living for me, is to live with surprise. All I know is that I have to do the next right thing, and right now that is going up to my studio, lighting a fire and making another picture.

Anthony Murphy

Biography

Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1956

Education

1970/1975 Westminster School, London
1973 Emmy award for best actor in the starring role
of TOM BROWN'S SCHOOLDAYS,
BBC, Television Academy Awards, Los Angeles
1975-1978 New College, Oxford,
BA degree in Philosophy, Psychology and Physiology
1982 High Holborn, London, BA degree in Law
1984 Lincoln's Inn, London, called to the English Bar
1985-1987 Temple, 2 King's Bench Walk & 6 Pump Court
1988-1990 Lawfirm of Clifford Chance, Paris, France



Solo Exhibitions

2016 Box Gallery, Kings Rd, Chelsea, London
2015 Oriel Gallery, Clare St, Dublin
2014 Barbara Stanley Gallery, Connaught St, London
2013 Gilmore Fine Art, Belfast
2012 Ib Jorgensen Fine Art, Dublin
2011 Barbara Stanley Gallery, Connaught Street, London
2010 The Orangery, Holland Park, London
2009 Ib Jorgensen fine art Dublin
2008 The Orangery, Holland Park, London
2007 Ib Jorgensen fine art Dublin
2006 The Orangery, Holland Park, London
2005 Ib Jorgensen fine art Dublin 2
2003 The Orangery, Holland Park, London
2002 Galerie Aalders, Golfe de St Tropez
2001 The Orangery, Holland Park, London
2000 Jernigan Wicker Fine Arts, San Francisco, USA
1999 The Orangery, Holland Park, London
1998 Jernigan Wicker Fine Arts, San Francisco, USA
1997 The Orangery, Holland Park, London
1995 Park Walk Gallery, Chelsea, London
1993 Park Walk Gallery, Chelsea, London
1991 Park Walk Gallery, Chelsea, London

Group Exhibitions

2010 Art London, Royal Hospital
2004 Ib Jorgensen fine art, Dublin, Ireland
2003 Ib Jorgensen fine art, Dublin, Ireland
2000 Toronto Art Fair, Canada
2000 The Arts Club, Dover Street, London
1999 École Supérieure de Commerce, Toulouse, France
1995 Galerie Municipale, Castelnau-dary, France
1994 À la recherche du Comte de Foix, Gaston Fébus. Foix, France
1991 Drouot – L'Hermine, Paris, France



Perry Ogdan

Anthony Murphy has travelled a long road in his thirty years as a painter. As his uncle, the poet, Richard Murphy, wrote, *“his painting transfigures the tensions, pain and glory of his time...of his Irish, English and Jewish heritage, of the addict within the survivor.”* Rich with colour, bold in sculptural form – and executed with a craftsmanship that takes much from the immediacy of his finely observed pastel sketches – Murphy’s paintings are instantly recognizable and demand our attention. In this intimate portrait of the man and his work, the artist talks about his demons and angels, exploring the inspirations and dialogues that have always been present in his now highly collected work.

“Anthony Murphy’s paintings will seduce all those for whom, like me, the world and Nature are sources of endless amazement.”

Philippe NOIRET