

Towards

FRITZ DUFFY

Twilight

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This publication is the result of about four years work in ‘*plein air*’ at four different locations. Firstly The Malvern Hills followed by Dungeness, The River Thames (from Deptford to Woolwich) and a short deviation to Greenwich Park.

My practice had always been studio based up to 2016, but I was invited by Tim Cousins with a number of artists to work outdoors in the Malvern Hills and also Dungeness. We made several visits, hiring houses and individually exploring and recording aspects of the surrounding landscapes. I found this quite difficult at first as all I could see was ‘Constable’, but in time I managed to find my own language to express my feelings and emotions towards the differing landscapes.

After this I embarked on my own study of the River Thames in my locality. It seemed pertinent as I have lived in the area since studying at Goldsmiths from 1971 to the present day and I am very familiar with that stretch of water between Deptford and Woolwich.

Also included in the book is an essay by Iain Rutherford who was a fellow student at Goldsmiths between 1971-1974. He has focused on my Irish heritage and Catholic background in relation to my student work and mainly the more recent work included in the contents of this book.

I have not adopted a single stylistic line in my art practice throughout my career. For me there are many existing languages in art to choose from which can be tailored and adapted to one’s own needs. I generally work to a definite theme and devise a style to suit. This is usually achieved by the use of different materials and techniques that are appropriate to the subject matter. The theme can last for a considerable time but at some point it will end, morphing into another topic with a different emphasis. Usually the theme terminates of its own accord when I feel I have fully explored it and find that the same procedures lose their spark. An example of this way of working might be the jazz musician Miles Davis.

Thames

Dungeness

Malvern



River Thames - Deptford (5)

Oil on Khadi Paper
58 x 78 cm, 2020



River Thames - East Greenwich (8)

Oil on Khadi Paper
59 x 79.5 cm, 2020



River Thames - East Greenwich (4)

Oil on Khadi Paper
59 x 79 cm, 2019



River Thames - At Deptford Towards London (2)

Oil on Khadi Paper
59 x 79 cm, 2019



River Thames - Thames Barrier (6)

Oil on Khadi Paper
59 x 80 cm, 2020



River Thames - East Greenwich (2)

Oil on Khadi Paper
76 x 57 cm, 2020



River Thames - Greenwich (7)

Oil on Khadi Paper
58 x 78 cm, 2020



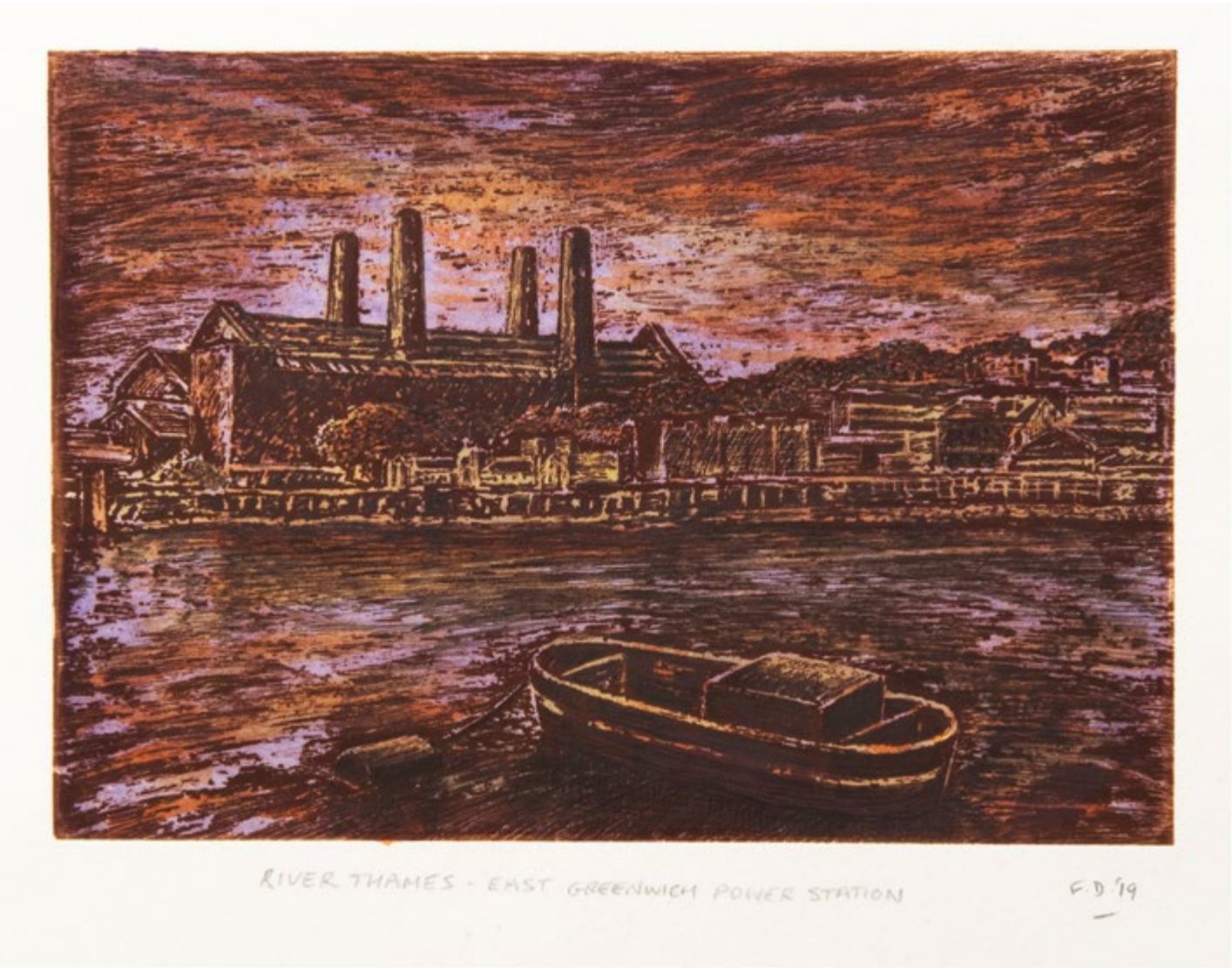
View from One Tree Hill - Greenwich (1)

Oil on Khadi Paper
54 x 70 cm, 2019



View from One Tree Hill - Greenwich (2)

Oil on Khadi Paper
57 x 76 cm, 2018



River Thames - East Greenwich (4)
Photopolymer, Pen & Ink Wash
14.5 x 21 cm, 2020



River Thames - East Greenwich (3, 2, 1 - Clockwise from Left)
Photopolymer, Pen & Ink Wash
14.5 x 21 cm, 2020



River Thames - Deptford (2 - Above, 7 - Below)

Photopolymer, Pen & Ink Wash
14.5 x 21 cm, 2020

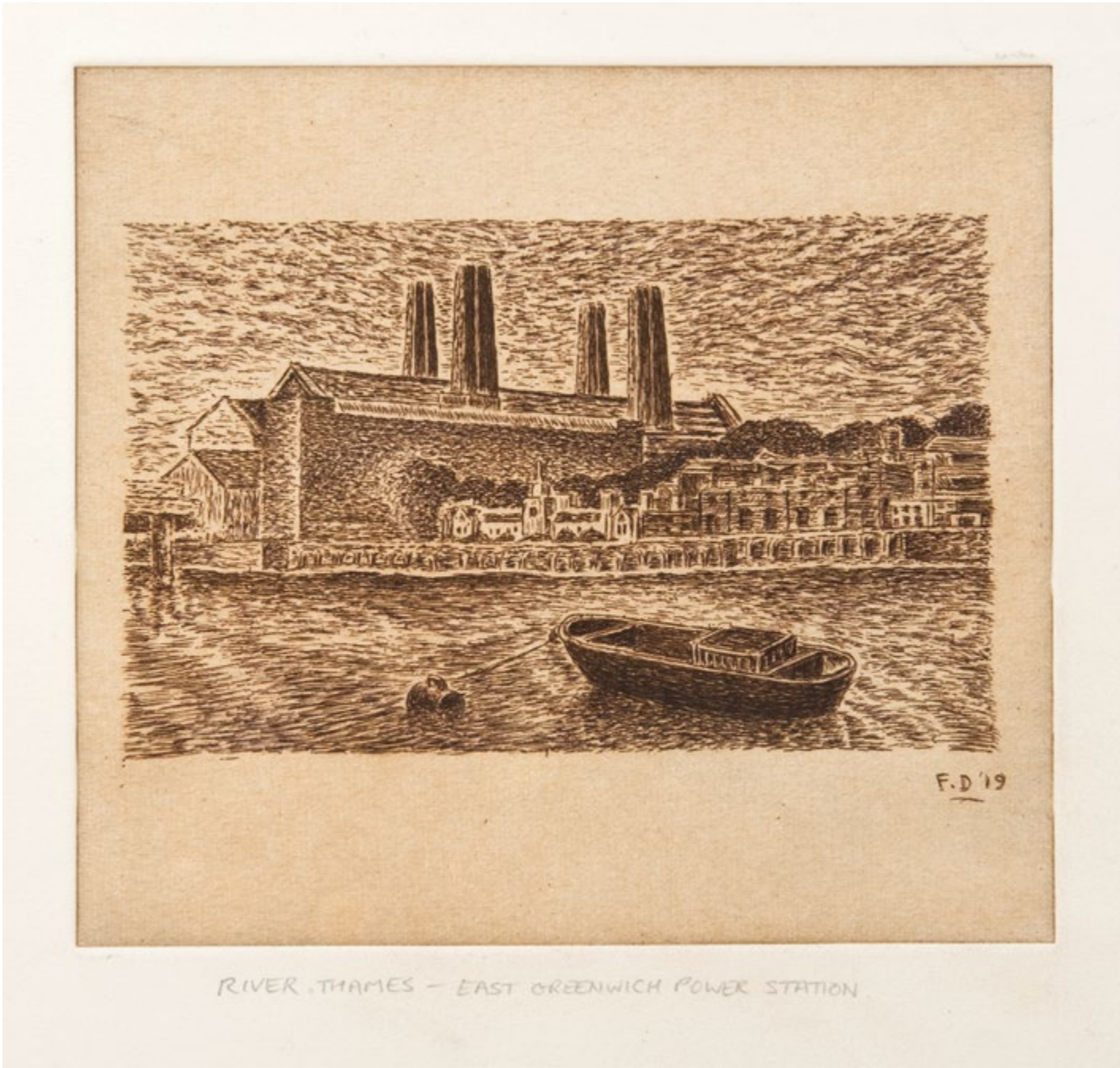


River Thames - Deptford (1 - Above, 5 - Below)

Photopolymer, Pen & Ink Wash
14.5 x 21 cm, 2020



East Greenwich Power Station
Etching, Pen & Ink Wash
16.5 x 18.5 cm, 2019



East Greenwich Power Station
Etching
16.5 x 18.5 cm, 2019



River Thames - Thames Barrier
Photopolymer & Ink Wash
21 x 14.5 cm, 2020. Edition of 20



River Thames - Thames Barrier
Photopolymer & Ink Wash
21 x 14.5 cm, 2020. One Off



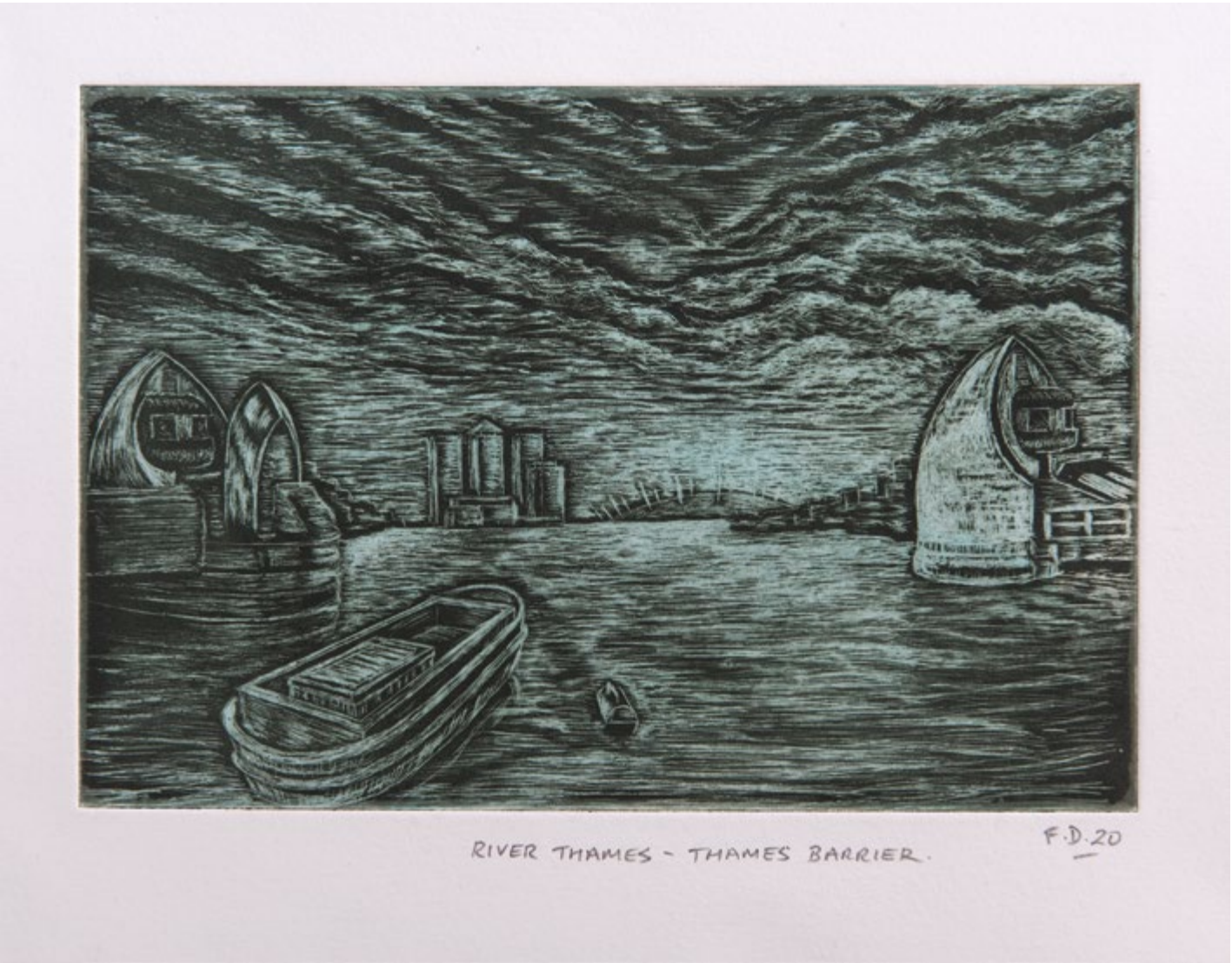
River Thames - Canary Wharf
Photopolymer & Ink Wash
14.5 x 21 cm, 2020. *One Off (Above)*

River Thames - Canary Wharf
Photopolymer & Ink Wash
14.5 x 21 cm, 2020. *Edition of 20 (Below)*



River Thames - East Greenwich
Photopolymer & Ink Wash
14.5 x 21 cm, 2020. *Edition of 20 (Above)*

River Thames - East Greenwich
Photopolymer & Ink Wash
14.5 x 21 cm, 2020. *One Off (Below)*



River Thames - Thames Barrier
Photopolymer & Ink Wash
14.5 x 21 cm, 2020. Edition of 20



River Thames - Thames Barrier
Photopolymer & Ink Wash
14.5 x 21 cm, 2020. One Off



View from One Tree Hill - Greenwich

Photopolymer & Ink Wash
14.5 x 21 cm, 2020. *Edition of 20*

Correspondence

To You, Fritz,

it may feel that progress comes very slowly, but as a visitor, I was impressed by the amount of work, the way ideas about light and space have developed and how your prints have grown in confidence and technique.

I find the new work very moving, full of yearning for the evening light to last, to see further into the distance.

The work is rich and deep. You can look at it a long time. The feel for deep space - letting your eye travel further and further back, far, far, past rippling water, banks of distant trees, giant buildings miniaturised by distance, past broken lines of cloud, and brilliant sky. Deep space - deep in several senses. Things are opening up in your work, you can see further.

When you said today, ‘They are what they are’, meaning, that the ambition in these wasn’t to blow apart the art world, that felt to me like an interesting, Buddhist-like acceptance. Without ambition, you make the most ambitious work. They are about saying something meaningful in the most appropriate way, in the simplest way. That makes them real, true and personal.

Anyway, they certainly work for me.
Symbolic, atmospheric, inventive, brilliantly observed, glowing, emotive, specific images.

Sasha Leech

Artist & Teacher
2022

Thames
Malverns
 Dungeness



Eastnor Estate - Malvern (1)

Oil on Khadi Paper
 56 x 76 cm, 2019



Malvern Hills (8)

Oil on Khadi Paper
59 x 80 cm, 2020



Eastnor Estate - Malvern (5)

Oil on Khadi Paper
56 x 75 cm, 2019



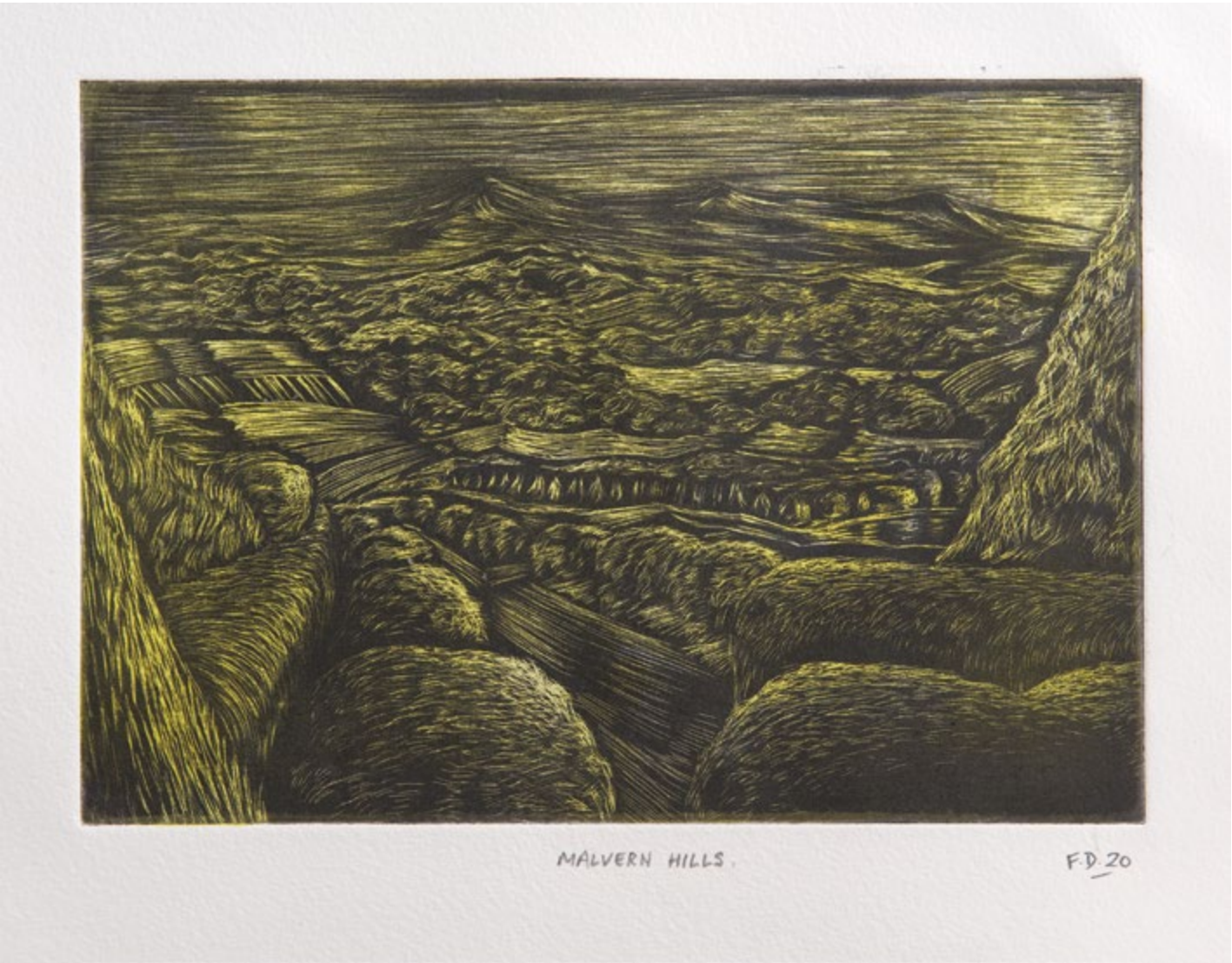
Eastnor Estate - Malvern (7)

Oil on Khadi Paper
58 x 79 cm, 2020



Eastnor Estate - Malvern (2)

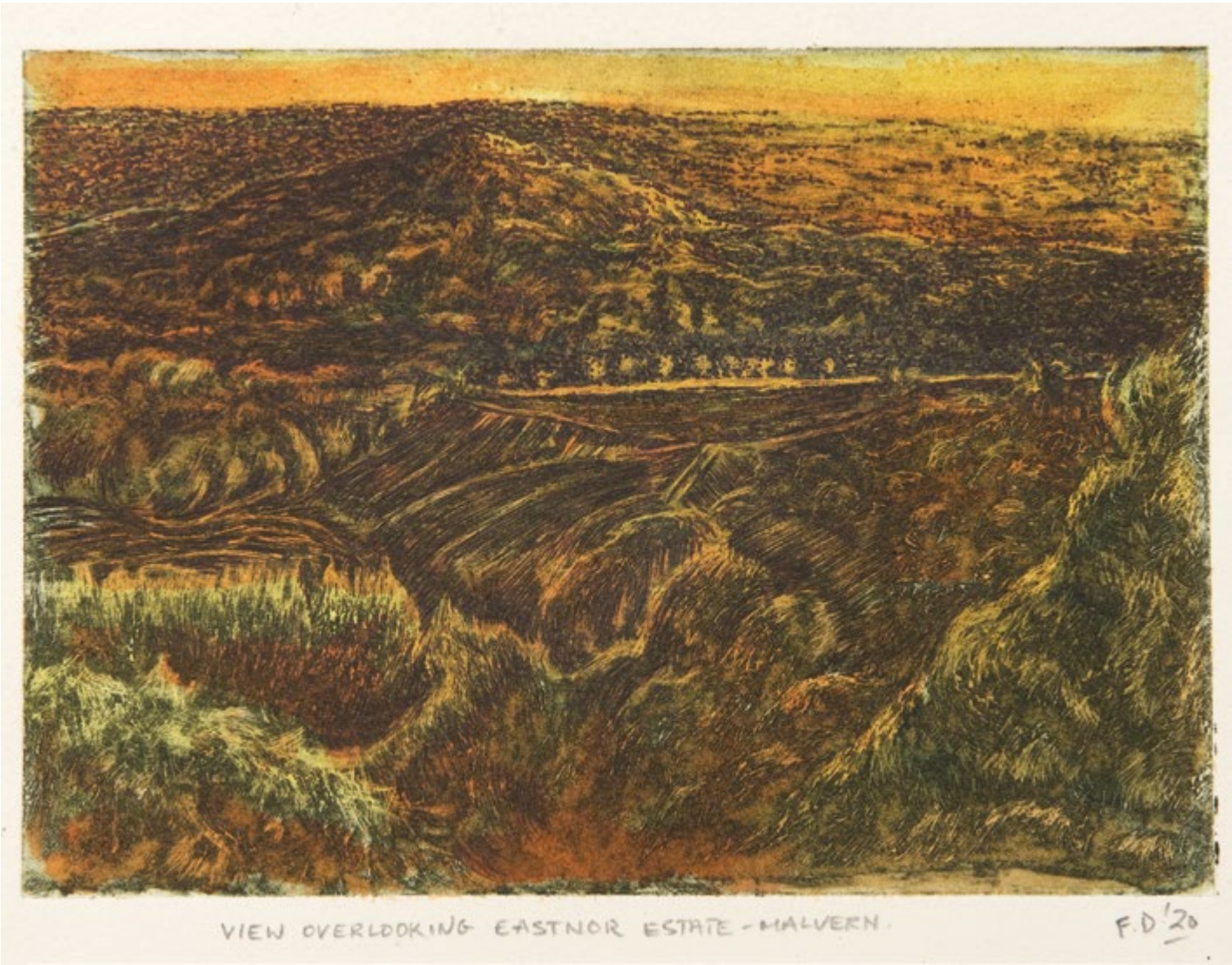
Oil on Khadi Paper
56 x 79 cm, 2018



Malvern Hills
Photopolymer, Pen & Ink Wash
14.5 x 21 cm, 2020. *Edition of 30*



Malvern Hills
Photopolymer, Pen & Ink Wash
14.5 x 21 cm, 2020. *One Off*



Eastnor Estate - Malvern (6)
Photopolymer, Pen & Ink Wash
14.5 x 21 cm, 2020



Eastnor Estate - Malvern (1, 3, 8, 5 - Clockwise from Left)
Photopolymer, Pen & Ink Wash
14.5 x 21 cm, 2020



Eastnor Estate - Malvern (4)
Photopolymer, Pen & Ink Wash
14.5 x 21 cm, 2020



Eastnor Estate - Malvern (5 - Above, 8 - Below)
Photopolymer, Pen & Ink Wash
14.5 x 21 cm, 2020



1. *Untitled (Left)*
Hinged Gloss Painted Canvasses
+ Wooden Plinth with Paint Globule
50 x 50 x 50 cm, 1972

2. *Untitled (Below)*
Mixed Media
Dimensions Variable, 1972



On the Art of Fritz Duffy

Iain Rutherford

M.A., Dip. A.D., A.T.C. Artist. 2021

A spiral of yellow paint suggestive of ice cream or excrement sits on a wooden pedestal surrounded by four canvasses, hinged together, painted with gloss house paint. Nearby is a canvas painted blue with yellow stripes and a wooden ‘headstone’ enclosed by a cordon of blue braided ropes similar to those found at a church altar (1,2). There is here the influence of the Godfather of Conceptual Art, Marcel Duchamp, with his ‘ready-mades’ of found objects and his later anti-retinal philosophy.

Nearby there is a very large colour-field painting on canvas with a nod to Mark Rothko (3). This painting is a sounding-board for human emotions. Indeed, Rothko’s sensuous yet conspiratorial emblems of both harmony and discord must have been an influence on Duffy and Rothko’s statement:

I am not interested in the relationship of colour or form or anything else. I’m interested only in expressing basic human emotions - tragedy, ecstasy, doom and so on. And the fact that a lot of people break down and cry when confronted with my pictures shows that I can communicate those basic human emotions... And if you... are moved by their colour relationships, then you miss the point

is spiritually enveloped in the work of Duffy.

In 1964 Rothko was commissioned to paint a series of large scale murals for a chapel in Houston, Texas which became known as the Rothko Chapel. Rothko’s contemplative and meditative paintings were most appropriate for a chapel. The octagonal building

designed by the architect Philip Johnson was originally Roman Catholic which, as a Catholic, would be of interest to Duffy. The chapel eventually became multi-denominational.

These works were assembled as a tableau (1-3) in Duffy’s 1974 degree show at Goldsmiths College and was an epistle, homage and threnody to his late father. Forty-six years on I am still haunted and fascinated by this work, which like much of Duffy’s subsequent work, bestows a complex Irish Roman Catholic religious content.

There is, for me, a resonance of Catholic transubstantiation in this installation where, in the Holy Communion, the bread and wine are transmuted into Christ’s flesh and blood respectively. I also refer to another theological term, that of kenosis. This word, derived from the Greek language means the act of self-emptying. In Christian theology kenosis is the ‘self-emptying of Jesus’ own will and becoming entirely receptive to God’s divine will.’ Duffy was symbolically self-emptying his emotions at losing his father at the age of twelve and I suggest that in a more literal sense, the spiral of yellow paint on the pedestal was indicative of the body’s self-emptying through defecation.

Soon after leaving Goldsmiths Duffy utilised a more figurative, direct and literal exposition of religious veneration in his meticulous pencil drawings of the *Fourteen Stations of the Cross*, also known as *The Way of Sorrows* (4, 5). There is, in fact, a fifteenth station which is the Resurrection of Jesus, but this is not traditional and is used on very rare occasions.





3. *Untitled*
Oil Paint on Canvas + Painted Toy,
244 x 183 cm, 1971



4. 5. *Stations of the Cross*
Jesus Made to Bear the Cross, 39 x 55 cm (Above)
Jesus Meets the Sorrowing Women, 39 x 49.5 cm (Below)
Pencil on Paper, Dimensions Framed, 1982



Years later Duffy produced paintings of skips containing rubbish. This subject of waste and discarding is perhaps a return to the kenosis of self-emptying and pouring out, seen, in his degree installation and revisited in his *Facade*, *Fragmentation* and *Dungeness* series, which I will discuss below.

The writer and theologian C.S. Lewis wrote in his book *Mere Christianity* published in 1952, the year of Duffy’s birth, ‘that a painter pours out his ideas in his work, and yet remains a quite distinct being from his painting’.

Duffy’s real name is Francis, named after Saint Francis of Assisi. Fritz is a nickname that has stuck from his school days. Duffy’s Irishness and religious identity are intertwined where one cannot exist without the other. He often embraces Irish culture itself in terms of fragility, contradiction, humour, resilience, mortality, emigration and redemption in both his art and conversation.

Since leaving Goldsmiths Duffy’s art has made a prism which reflects a plethora of visual languages and content both figurative and abstract. It is, however, during the last few years that he has found his metier and raison d’etre.

In 2012 Duffy visited Consett, County Durham where his late mother was born. In the same road and quite near to the house where the family had been brought up, he noticed the facade of a derelict building which revealed the walls, staircases etc of the interior rooms. From this memory he made a series of paintings called *The Durham Suite* (6) and exhibited them at Art Hub Studios in Deptford.

He also made transcriptions of houses in the process of demolition in the vicinity of Lewisham, where he lives. These memento mori invested in his Catholic notion of mortality (which we see again in his recent paintings) were executed with oil on corrugated cardboard placed on canvas.

The fragility of the corrugated cardboard echoes the fragility of dilapidation, demolition and life itself. Some of the works include funeral inscriptions and plastic, which accentuate mortality. These fragmented pieces (7) are a visual, archaeological excavation of history and place which recall antiquities, manuscript parchment and the reliefs and frescoes to be found in the British Museum.

6. Medomsley (Opposite)

Oil on Canvas
155 x 155 cm, 2013

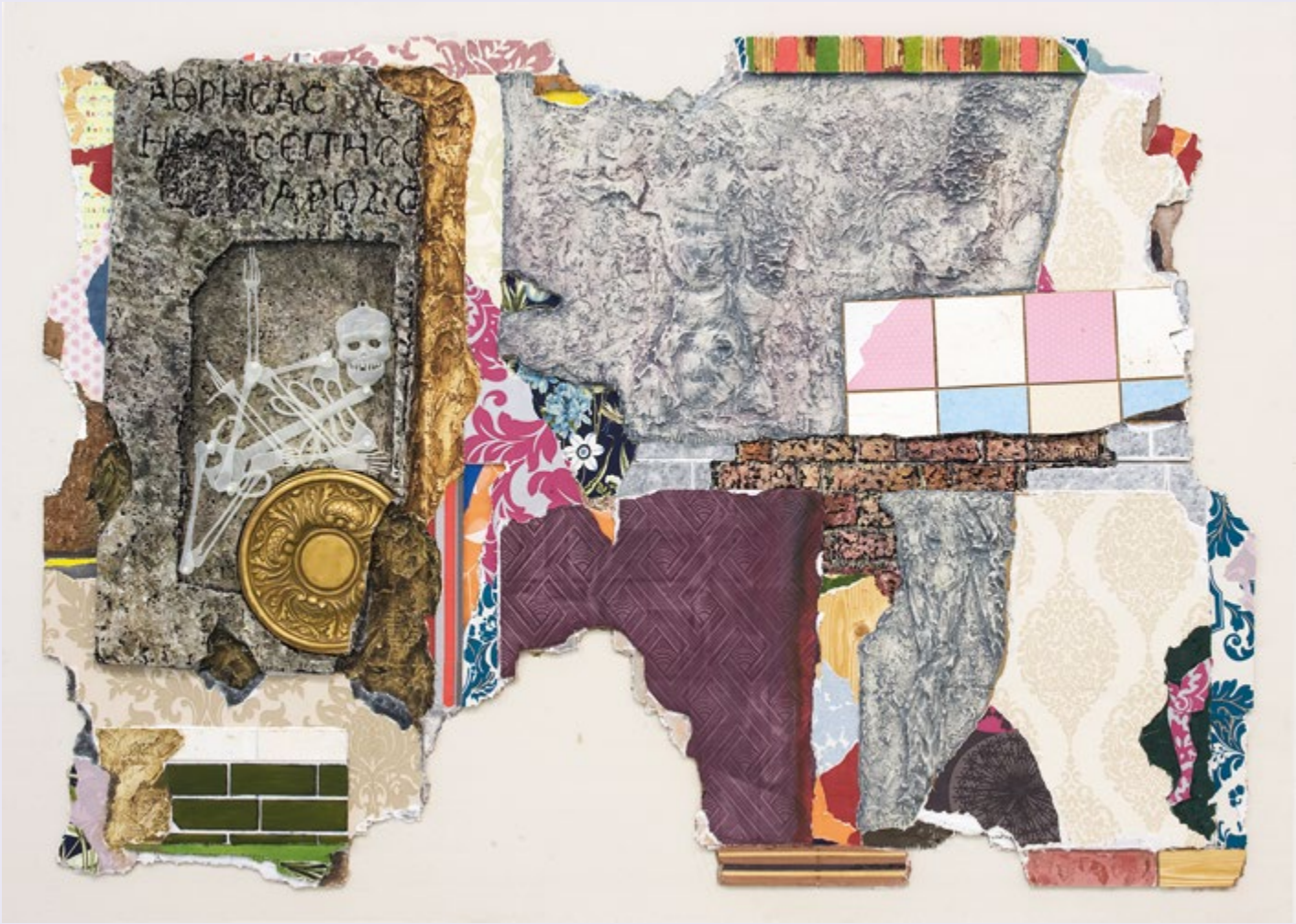
In 2016 a shift in emphasis occurred in Duffy’s art. The artist Tim Cousins, who founded the *‘plein air’* Sharing a View group of artists, of which I was a member from 1999 until its close in 2006, invited Duffy to work *‘plein air’* with other artists in the Malvern Hills. Duffy was used to studio art and was somewhat tentative *‘in front of the motif’*, as indeed was I on joining the Sharing a View group. Duffy produced oil paintings and prints (p28-39) which remind me of the visual language in his much earlier *Stations of the Cross* drawings.

With growing confidence at working *‘plein air’* Duffy moved on to images of Greenwich Park and the River Thames (p4-26). Here, he worked alone. His media now involved monochrome oil paint on deckled edge, rigid handmade paper, sized with traditional rabbit skin glue. He did not employ modern white acrylic primer but coloured them to resemble parchment paper. This accentuates the passing of time reminiscent of his previous *Fragment* series of dilapidated buildings. Duffy’s language is impasto but reversed as he builds up thick layers of paint and etches out his imagery with a palette knife, gradually exposing the image as in an archaeological dig.

The Greenwich Park and the Malvern series remind me of the visionary Romanticism of Samuel Palmer and the poetic lighting effects of Claude Lorrain’s landscapes.

In 2017 Tim Cousins invited Duffy to another *‘plein air’* workshop utilising the symbiosis with other artists. This was held in the surreal, austere, eerie, melancholic detritus of the Dungeness *‘desert’*. Dungeness is not literally a desert due to its rainfall but, nevertheless, is a desert in terms of acres of gravel and broken shells, with the abandonment of the *A’* power station and the memento mori waste of machinery from the bygone fishing industry and assorted dwellings. The desolation and detritus is reminiscent of T. S. Eliot’s 1922 poem *The Waste Land*:

...What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish?
Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water...



Duffy’s visits to Dungeness in both 2017 and 2018 resulted in paintings and prints (p48-65) which are placed in the romantic tradition but are imbued with a more metaphysical ‘otherness’. Here, Duffy had reinvented himself and this renaissance is the pinnacle of his artistic career so far. In terms of today’s catch phrases, Duffy displays candid ‘renewable energy’ and ‘transferrable skills’ which lance the boil of much current contemporary art, which espouses platitudes of the same theme or motif for decades, depleted of any imagination or verve.

Duffy’s metaphysical *Dungeness Power Station and Lighthouse* (p49) oil on canvas using a palette knife has echoes of Monet’s search for verisimilitude in his *Haystack* series especially with regard to the changing light. The foreground, in particular, also has echoes of Paul Nash’s lyrical, poetic and visionary shattered landscapes, created when he was an official war artist in World War I.

Moreover, Duffy’s painting is a metaphor for Giorgio Morandi’s metaphysical still lifes. The musty, monochromatic browns of the foreground resemble a Morandi table top with the ‘objects’ of Power Station and Lighthouse in the distance, transmuted from Morandi’s bottles on the edge of a table or the brink of a precipice. The austere muted monochrome browns and greys together with the modelled plasticity of Morandi, who was influenced by Cezanne, imbue Duffy’s painting. Morandi also produced a few deserted landscapes and reduced his repertoire of objects in his still-lives to just two as in the Duffy painting.

I now wish to discuss Duffy’s Dungeness, *The Dying of the Light* series (p54-61) oil on paper paintings which have the subject matter of the obsolete remains of a bygone fishing industry, the power station, lighthouses, dwellings and power lines. The titles reference the Dylan Thomas poem entitled ‘Do not go gentle into that good night’.

There appear to be two layers to these works with a yellow/orange/red translucent background retaining the quality of the rabbit skin glue size, then overlaid with a sombre monochrome (raw umber) into which the image is etched with a palette knife revealing shades of the lighter colour underneath. This gives the appearance of ancient parchment manuscripts with a dualism of modernist, painterly abstraction and figurative representation.

7. Equality in Death (Opposite)

Mixed Media on Canvas
210 x 150 cm, 2016

There appears to be a contradiction here but the paintings effuse a pivotal balance. The two paintings are ethereal, but due to the underlying colours employed, also suggest a brio of fire on the brink of an inferno.

I am reminded of Jean-Francois Millet’s *The Angelus* painting of 1857-1859 formally known as *Prayer for the Potato Crop* when I view these paintings. *The Angelus*, Latin for angel, is a Catholic devotion commemorating the Incarnation and is recited three times a day in many Catholic establishments and on radio in Eire.

Duffy’s Dungeness, *The Dying of the Light* paintings suggest Millet’s dusk rolling in and evoke a similar veneration and sense of contemplation. The church tower seen on the horizon in Millet’s work has become transmuted into the lighthouses on the horizon in Duffy’s No.6 (p58) work. This is similar to the transmutation of Morandi’s bottles into Duffy’s *Dungeness Power Station and Lighthouse* painting on canvas. This transmutation offers, again, a notion of Catholic transubstantiation in his work as discussed at the beginning of this essay.

Whilst discussing an eclectic range of artists who influence, and share similarities with Duffy, I now wish to mention a contemporary of Duffy with similar roots, namely Hughie O’Donoghue, whom I met in 1984 when he was Artist-in-Residence at the National Gallery, London.

O’Donoghue’s complex historical exegesis and emotional espousal of both abstract and figurative visual languages have an affinity with Duffy’s art. O’Donoghue has often produced images of abandoned cottages from his mother’s native County Mayo in Ireland which remind me of the abandoned dwellings in Duffy’s *Dying of the Light* series. Furthermore, O’Donoghue’s *Entering Jerusalem III* triptych of 1994 has a similar ethereal mood to Duffy’s *Dying of the Light* series with its chiaroscuro tones, sense of dying light and its consummate use of dark browns, reds, oranges and yellows.

During the journey of this essay I have attempted to thread together Duffy’s art, his Catholic upbringing, endemic Irish roots and the history of art context in which he sits. The apparent contradictions in Duffy’s art reflect both Irish culture and the Irish persona; a world of both hope and struggle together with the balance or interplay of light and dark.

Thames
Malvern
Dungeness



Dungeness - Power Station & Lighthouse

Oil on Canvas

51 x 71 cm, 2017



Dungeness - Houses & Power Lines

Oil on Canvas
55 x 70 cm, 2017



Dungeness - Fishing Hut & Boat

Oil on Canvas
58.5 x 78 cm (Framed), 2017



Dungeness - Containers (Above)

Oil on Canvas
47 x 76 cm, 2017

Dungeness - Boats (Below)

Oil on Canvas
62 x 71 cm, 2017



Dungeness - Fishing Hut

Oil on Canvas
71 x 69 cm, 2017



Dungeness - The Dying of the Light (3)

Oil on Khadi Paper
51.5 x 70 cm, 2018



Dungeness - The Dying of the Light (11)

Oil on Khadi Paper
69.5 x 89.5 cm (Framed), 2018



Dungeness - The Dying of the Light (10)

Oil on Khadi Paper
57 x 76 cm, 2018



Dungeness - The Dying of the Light (5)

Oil on Khadi Paper
57 x 76 cm, 2018



Dungeness - The Dying of the Light (6)

Oil on Khadi Paper
52 x 70 cm, 2018



Dungeness - The Dying of the Light (4)

Oil on Khadi Paper
51 x 70 cm, 2018



Dungeness - The Dying of the Light (1)

Oil on Khadi Paper
51 x 70 cm, 2018



Dungeness - The Dying of the Light (7)

Oil on Khadi Paper
57 x 76 cm, 2018



Dungeness - The Dying of the Light (1)

Photopolymer, Pen & Ink Wash
14.5 x 21 cm, 2019



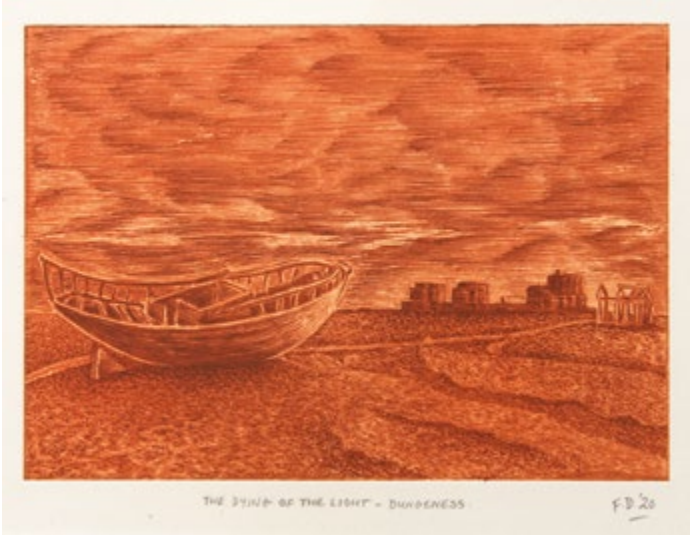
Dungeness - The Dying of the Light (2 - Above, 3 - Below)

Photopolymer, Pen & Ink Wash
14.5 x 21 cm, 2019



Dungeness - The Dying of the Light (6)

Photopolymer, Pen & Ink Wash
14.5 x 21 cm, 2019



Dungeness - The Dying of the Light (3, 1, 2, 4 - Clockwise from Left)

Photopolymer, Pen & Ink Wash
14.5 x 21 cm, 2019

A Visit to the Artist

To step into the artist’s studio, redolent with the aroma of paint, is to step into a mind uncovered. It is to be a privileged witness to the steady unfurling of thoughts and feelings, taking shape on canvas and paper, manifesting in forms, textures, colours.

You become aware of a stillness, akin to a chapel. Standing there, absorbing sights and smells, an emotion builds; you gaze at a canvas of a bleak Dungeness landscape, and within you there rises up tears you had not thought you’d brought with you, which spill out spontaneously, taking you by surprise.

How can this happen merely with the application of pigment to a surface? It is made with the marks of a hand that knows so much, has lived so much, which cannot be spoken, yet does speak to you, without need of words. These works establish a mysterious connection that, like music, bypasses the mind and reaches straight to the heart.

You wonder how it can be that you are still standing, and not felled in the face of these visions, bathed in twilight colours, animated by the artist’s touch. You are still standing but wiser. You know that all things end, and all things continue; and the dark that we attempt to hide from has an inner light all its own. And this we are now able to acknowledge, thanks to the artist’s touch, passed on from one soul to another.

Gordana Lazic-Duffy

For your support and encouragement over many years, giving me the confidence and determination to produce and exhibit my artwork.

Colin and Jenny Pink

For their enthusiastic support and by continually collecting my artwork. Colin has also kindly endorsed the book by use of an evocative prose poem.

Iain Rutherford

For generously investing both his time and energy into producing a unique and insightful essay on my artwork, which features in this publication.

Sasha Leech

For writing a very profound text on his reaction to seeing the '*plein air*' paintings and prints in my studio prior to this publication.

Tim Cousins

For opening my eyes to the joys of '*plein air*' painting by inviting me to participate with a group of other artists at Malvern and Dungeness. Without him none of this would have been possible.

Luke Merryweather

For being the driving force behind this publication. He has helped me produce something which would have remained a dormant thought in my mind.

All Images © Fritz Duffy, 2022

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Design & Additional Photography: Luke Merryweather

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1952	Born Uxbridge, Middlesex
1968-69	Hounslow Borough College, London
1969-70	Hornsey College, London
1971-74	Goldsmiths College, London
1974-75	Goldsmiths College, London

Exhibitions *(Selected)*

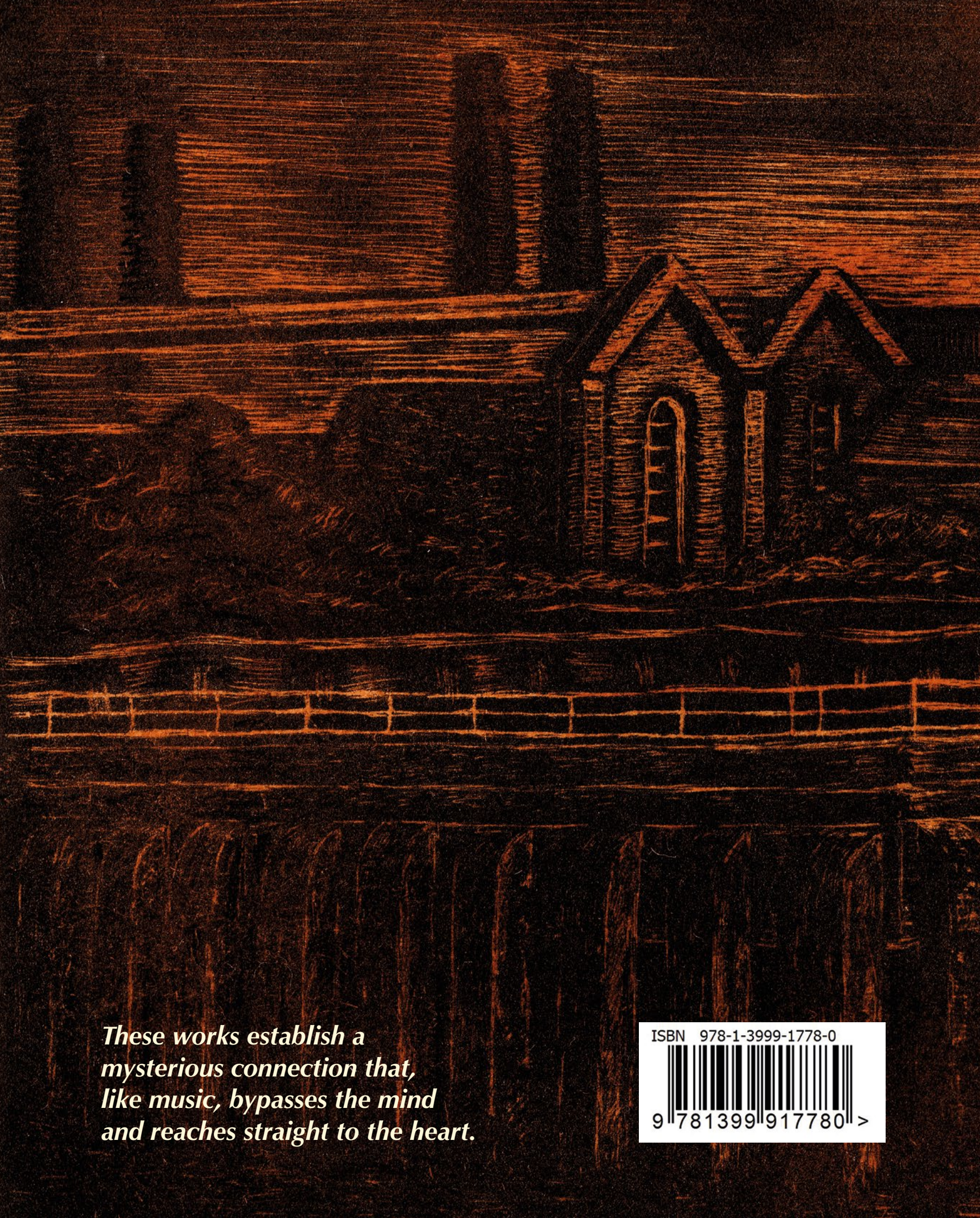
2019	Dungeness Desert, Horsebridge Arts Centre, Whitstable Visitors Centre, Dungeness B Power Station
2018	Art Hub Studios, London
2018	Malvern, On A May Morning, Art Hub Studios, London
2018	Plumstead Open Studios, London
2016	308 Years, Thames Side Gallery, London
2015	APT Open Studios Show, London
2015	Passage of Time, APT Gallery, London
2014	Street Trip-Tick, Bermondsey Project Space, London
2013	Art Hub Studios, London (Solo)
2009	White Space Gallery, Taunton (Solo)
1998	The Millinery Works, London
1992/5	Childers Street Studios, Open Exhibition, London
1991	Cable Street Studios, Open Exhibition, London
1990	Air Gallery, London (Solo)
1987	Greenwich Theatre Gallery, London (Solo)
1987	Warwick Arts Trust Collection, London
1986	Warwick Arts Trust, Starting a Collection, London
1986	Royal Academy of Arts Summer Show, London
1985	Vortex Galleries, London (Solo)

Curation

2019	Dungeness Desert, Visitors Centre, Dungeness B Power Station
2015	East Meets West, CIC, Taunton
2014	From Here To There - Paintings of Sasha Leech
2014	A Glance Back - Paintings of Tim Cousins (Both Art Hub Studios, London)

Collections

Gonville & Caius College Cambridge, Stephen Hawking Building



*These works establish a
mysterious connection that,
like music, bypasses the mind
and reaches straight to the heart.*

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