

**Donal Moloney, *Painting the Multiverse*** by Sarah Kate Wilson (April 2023)

'...I myself feel impelled to fancy... a limitless succession of Universes... Each exists, apart and independently...'¹ (Edgar Allan Poe)



'Revealed', 2022. Watercolour and acrylic on canvas. 26x31cm

The New York Times reviewed the film *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, 2022, as a 'swirl of genre anarchy.'<sup>2</sup> This description made me think of Donal Moloney's paintings, not because they involve different eras and styles of painting, à la atemporal painting. But, because his paintings draw wildly different objects, creatures and events together on the same picture plane. Gathered together, within the same rectangle yes. However these things do not exist in the same 'realm'. Each depicted thing is painted in a world of its own, isolated. As a result, I have come to think of each element in Moloney's paintings, Hieroglyphics, a bird, men fishing, castles, children playing as self-sufficient fragments. Each fragment (thing) is blissfully unaware of all the fragments painted nearby, there is no interaction between them. Because each thing has its own world, there are now many worlds all laminated together in one of Moloney's head-sized canvases.

These paintings, conjure the concept of the Multiverse!

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<sup>1</sup> Edgar Allan Poe (2015). "Eureka", p.68, Sheba Blake Publishing

<sup>2</sup> [Scott, A. O. \(March 24, 2022\). "'Everything Everywhere All at Once' Review: It's Messy, and Glorious". \*The New York Times\*. Archived from \[the original\]\(#\) on April 18, 2022. Retrieved April 18, 2022.](#)

Frank Swain's description of the multiverse is particularly pertinent, describing it as a 'patchwork quilt of separate universes all bound together by the same laws of physics.'<sup>3</sup> Why the artist has selected and decided to paint, a laughing cat, a brick, a creased shirt, makes little sense to me, but that's the point. These self-sufficient fragments have been selected from Moloney's Multiverse from his position, as a philocalist.

Fascinatingly (and I still cannot figure out the wizardry at work) each self-sufficient fragment, unlocks the visibility of another. A large bird sits on a branch in *Believe me*, something I completely overlooked, but when my eyes settled to focus on the stone wall towards the bottom of the painting, the bird 'appeared', as if by magic! In 'The Amarabella', the walt-disney-esque castle painted across the entirety of the work, remained invisible to me, until the pink hand in the centre of the work came into focus. How? This slow reveal is also brought about through his painterly style, he suspends each item in a 'vapour', created using washes of watercolour and acrylic paint. This mistiness, acts as cushioning for the eye, allowing us to slow down, and peer through rainbow veils of paint that meld, yet hold these universes apart.



'Around again', 2022. Watercolour and acrylic on canvas, 25x30.5cm

The notion of alternate universes is triggered through the motif of doubles.<sup>4</sup> In 'Revealed', a rotund, spectacle wearing man faces us, whilst hunched over a crystal ball. Floating above, they appear

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<sup>3</sup> Swain, Frank (2017). *The Universe Next Door: A Journey Through 55 Alternative Realities, Parallel Worlds and Possible Futures*. London: New Scientist. p. 12.

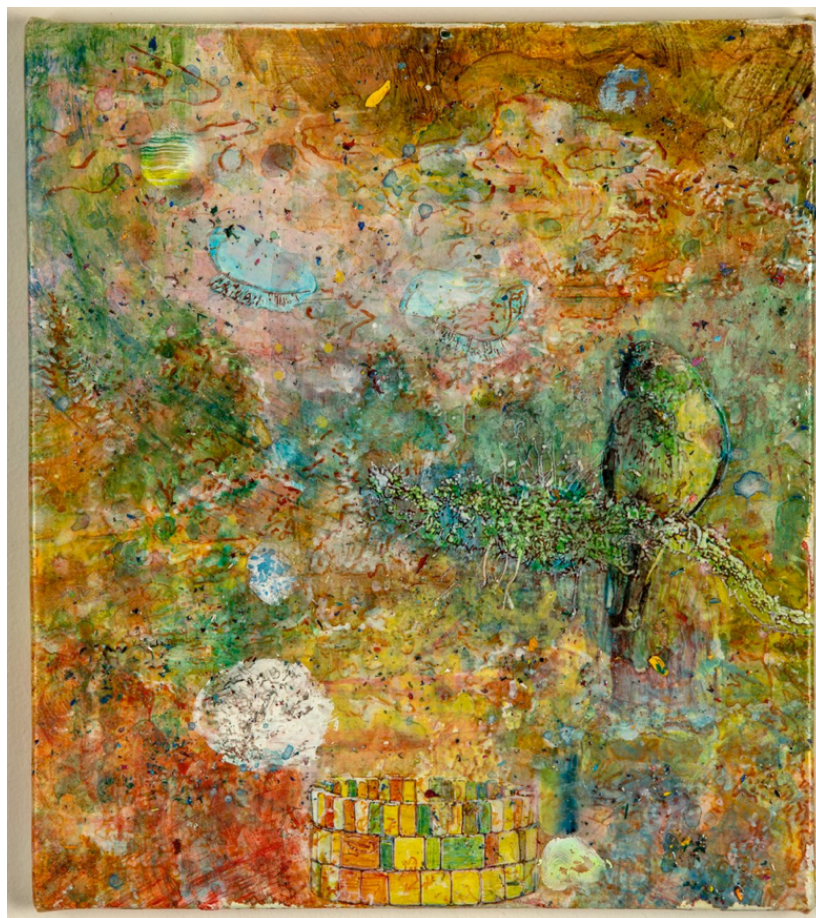
<sup>4</sup> Many of Moloney's 2022 works, contain doubles.

again, now with their back towards us but still gazing into the crystal ball. This time he is ungraspable, nebulous.

In 'Around again', the outline of a woman's profile is repeated. On the left, she is painted with a rainbow ombre body, red, at the top of her head, shifting through the spectrum to green, at her shoulders. Her hair is painted in white intricate lines, as if made of cascading filigree. Her echo is certainly not identical, overtly outlined in white, she appears as a ghost of her 'sister', instead of colour and ornamentation she is formed of fading etched lines. In 'Wait Here', another duo, a blue ladder on the left and a red ladder on the right – perhaps signalling the red pill, blue pill dilemma, which 'reality', which universe do we choose?

In 'Sailing to the middle', two bowls of liquid sit on the same horizon line, they have been upset. The water splashes erupting from the pools of water are identical. What event could have caused this carbon copy moment? Even in synchronised diving, it is virtually impossible to create an identical splash to your partners. As I contemplate this, the bowls of water become eyes, one red the other pink. Now that I have seen eyes, I begin to read the lines that radiate out to the edges of the painting as fingertip ridges transforming into frown lines that melt into the scalp to become strands of hair. I stop myself, this is just pareidolia at work.

Moloney skilfully 'hides' things in plain sight. The task is to hunt for the 'breadcrumbs' he has peppered throughout the works, allowing us to see his multiverse. It is spellbinding.



'Believe me', 2022. Watercolour and acrylic on canvas. 24 x 27cm