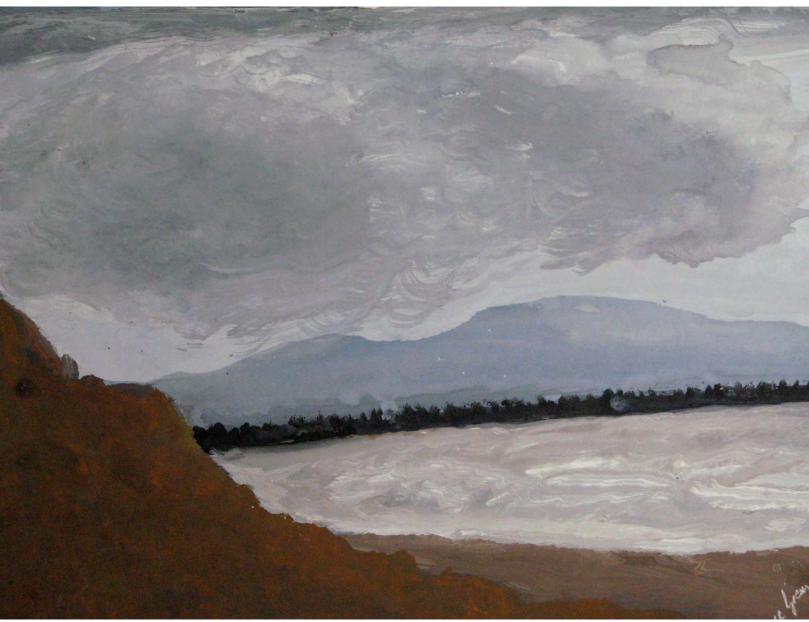
JOSIE GRAY

Painting in the Rain, 2013 watercolor, 16 x 20 in



courtesy the artist

TESS GALLAGHER

To an Irishman Painting in the Rain

He is a force against nature, stroking stain on raw boards between showers. Yesterday sun blasted him free and he knew enough to develop a bad back, though, in fact, he had wrenched it enough for reprieve. How often his joke during a downpour: "It's a great day, isn't it? Let's go to the beach." Now between lashings of rain his brush lavishes hope on the boundaries of my garden. Between fresh attacks he smokes under the eaves and squints out across a forest to Bricklieve as if to say: wait long enough and things will turn, will wear themselves out.

But even hope and industry are no match for Irish rain. The paint washes down the white pier like rust or the teapot's leavings. He musters a fourth coat in defiance, as if this misunderstanding between work and weather could be cured by holding out against a glower of sky. Not to be beaten he suddenly remembers an errand and is away. Rain washes the boards clean and is nobody's handmaiden. Later, when the air is mizzling like cat's whiskers against my cheeks, I'll take in his drowned brush, wishing always to remember this day, on which the certain beauty of the human will appeared to me as an Irishman painting in the rain.

Now let me stand in this poem with him, washed back into girlhood by this drowned pen.

—for Malcolm

Tess Gallagher lives a third of the time in a cottage near Lough Arrow in the North-West of Ireland with her painter companion Josie Gray. The latest of her nine books of poetry is *Midnight Lantern: New and Selected Poems*, reviewed in a recent issue of *The Yellow Nib* from The Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry.

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