

What Lies Beneath: As Above, So Below

As Above, So Below by Marie Connole Watercolour on archival paper

Niall MacMonagle

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Irish customs, piseogs and bowls of shamrock are to the fore this week. The shamrock thing began in 1952 when Harry Truman was sent, by Ireland's ambassador to the US, a little box of the stuff. Now, St Patrick's Day expands and grows. Obama was the first to turn the White House fountain green and for Enda Kenny trade deals and the illegal Irish are now all in the conversational mix.

President Trump, in crisp white shirt, blond quiff and that bunch of shamrock, will fit in perfectly: green, white and gold.

Clare-based artist Marie Connole has explored local folk beliefs and in her new show, just opened in New York. This painting tells of Connole's fascination with the submerged village in Liscannor Bay, the drowned, mythical village of Cill Stiophain [Kilstipheen] which can be seen just for one day every seven years. Those who see it will not live to see it again.

"The key to Cill Stiophain," says Connole, "was lost by its chieftain. The village sank beneath the waves but the prophecy states that a six-fingered girl from Liscannor will find the lost key in a reef, unlock the waters and the village will rise once more." Connole grew up on a small farm close to the Cliffs of Moher and "local fairy and folk tales, told to me by my mother and grandmother, are huge influences.

Like Christ, the girl here follows a predestined path. The briars reference the crown of thorns; the seaweed-patterned tunic, the importance of seaweed for survival; the Mummer's hat links in with making straw crosses for St Brigid's Day; the Child of Prague stance because devotion to it was strong during the famine and today the little Jesus statue if buried in the garden brings good weather for weddings".

And this girl's expression? "She's an outsider. Her face is mine from a childhood photo, her hands my adult hands; her sixth finger becomes a metaphor for my paint brush, my sixth digit! The four raised fingers represent earth, air, fire, water." Is this a dystopian, apocalyptic work?

For Connole, "climate change, coastal erosion are realities. There was a tsunami in Clare in 804 AD, killing 1,010 according to the Annals of Ulster." No wonder Trump wants that sea wall at Doonbeg.

Irish Arts Centre, New York until April 3. www.marieconnole.com