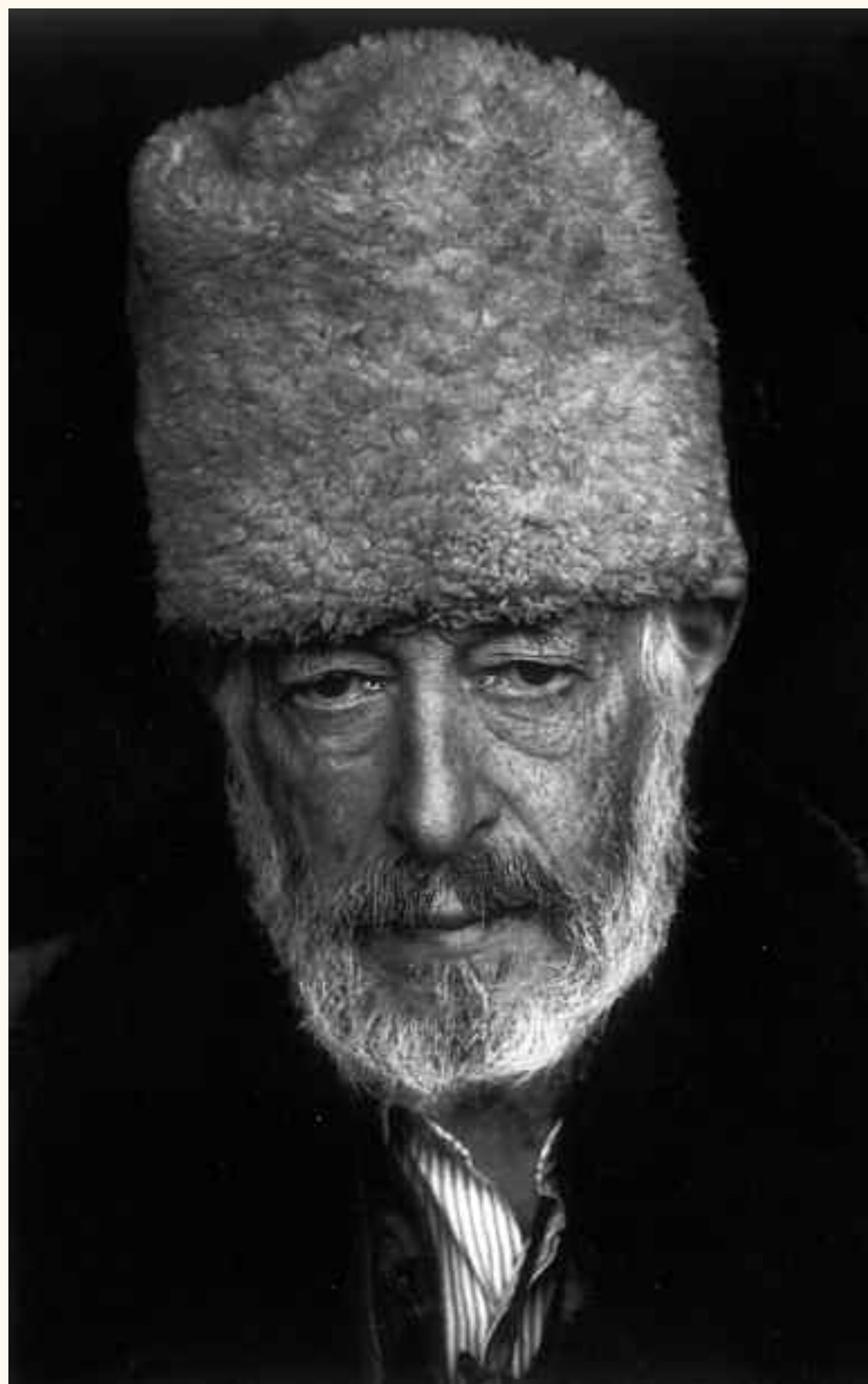




J.P. Donleavy



DAMIEN MATTHEWS FINE ART

Visions in the Vernacular

J.P. Donleavy

30 April - 9 May 2008

at

The Molesworth Gallery

16 Molesworth Street

Dublin 2

01 679 1548

www.molesworthgallery.com

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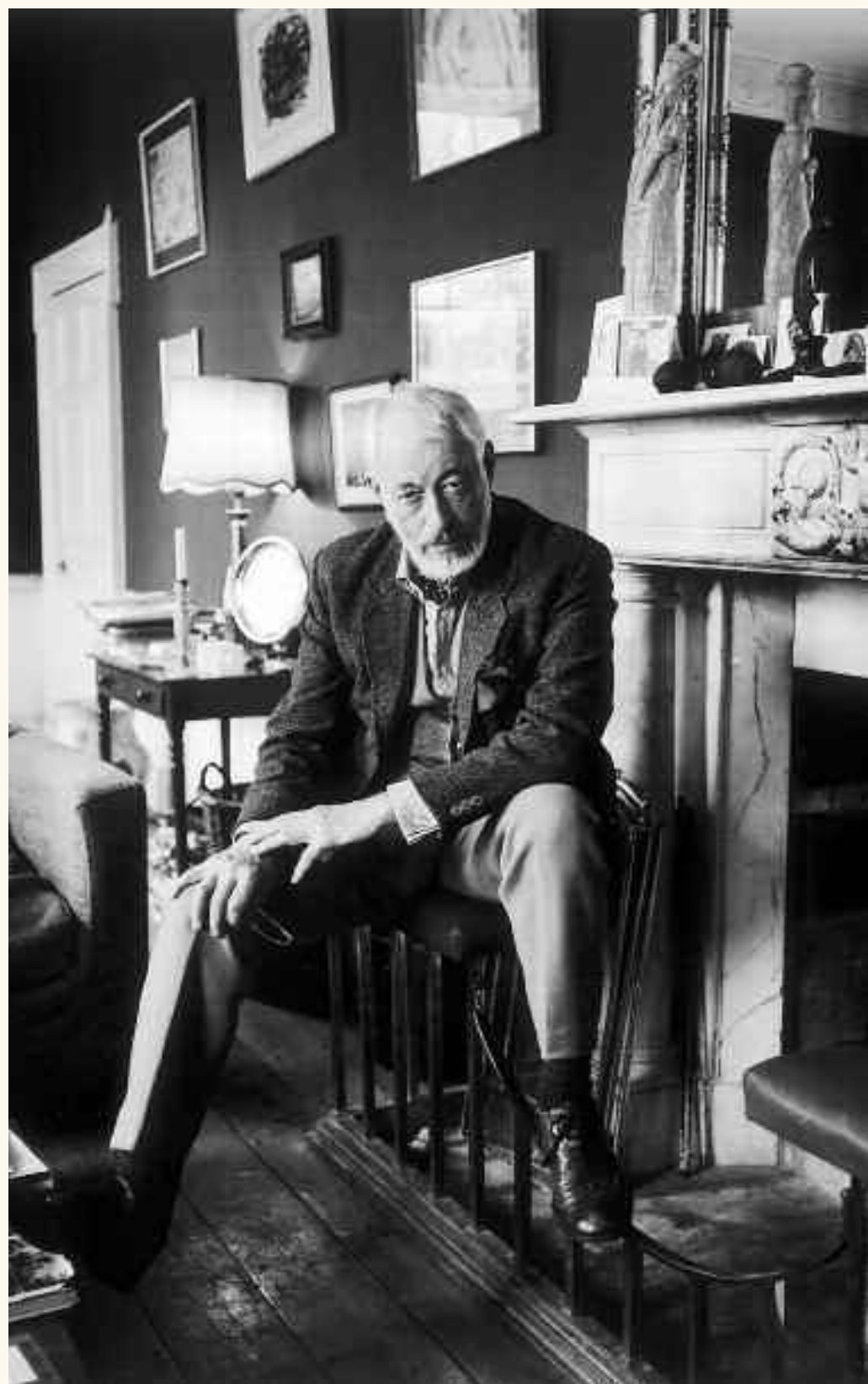
Foreword

Organising these exhibitions of witty and stylish creations by J.P. Donleavy has become a source of enormous enjoyment to me and a part of my business I look forward to with great pleasure.

Each time I meet with Mr. Donleavy to try and gather up enough works for a show he continually displays his great flair for picture titles, as only a master of fiction can. As each drawing emerges from a folio or from behind an old desk his immediate verbal response to it is so apt that later one could hardly perceive that particular work without the title he instantly christened it with. These drawings and watercolours are not only illustrative of his character but are, quite literally, his inside outside.

Although his watercolours from mid-career onwards are mostly drawn in the confident spirit of fun and effrontery, what may be lost is the absolute seriousness of the earlier work. Although they may now have titles that suggest a lighter nature they are possessed of such serious and elegant penmanship as to be on a par with the best works of their time. I could of course be accused of bias but I write this with real belief. Donleavy's name does belong amongst the great draughtsmen and hopefully this exhibition not only goes some way towards illustrating this but also gives you, the viewer, at least some of the enjoyment it has given me.

Damien Matthews
March, 2008.



Reminiscences of a Friendship

When Damien asked me to write this piece my first thought was what words could I write, especially about someone considered one of the world's greatest writers. Later, just as I began to type that sentence the phone rang and it was J.P. Donleavy himself calling me in New York. I told him about the coincidence and asked his advice. He suggested I write from my own personal experience, so here it is.



Johnny Depp, J.P. Donleavy & Robert Mitchell.

I first became aware of J.P. Donleavy at boarding school in Connecticut when my best friend ran breathlessly into my room and handed me a well-worn copy of *The Ginger Man*, saying that I had to read it. Starting immediately I read past curfew and into the dawn. Skipping classes next day I kept on reading and was simply mesmerized by the book, its protagonist Sebastian Dangerfield, its inimitable style and the deep wisdom of the author. Through my laughter and tears this great book taught me important life lessons about women, money, hidebound institutions like schools, the church, the 'system' and the insidious nature of authority itself. I also realised immediately that I had been neglecting other key aspects of my educational experience; like meeting more girls and drinking finer wine! *The Ginger Man* changed my life, as it did many others.

Immediately, I began to read all that could be found by J.P. Donleavy and couldn't believe how any one author could write so many truly great works. I was to occasionally come across his drawings in some of these books and it seemed to me, even then, that they fit in so well and had, in ways, the same style as his writing. They live and breathe their own unique personality, as do the characters in his books. Yet even in his books that do not contain his drawings, I could see that Donleavy novels are very visual, very cinematic. His books abound with the literary equivalents of flash-backs, zoom shots, traversing shots, even close-ups. His pioneering technique of cutting back and forth between first and third person is highly cinematic. He has indeed a very highly visual sensibility.



The foreboding notice!

I had been aware that he was an artist before becoming a recognised writer. But I had yet to set eyes on any of his paintings or any of his fully worked-up drawings. This would not happen until much later, after I had the great good fortune to meet and become friends with his son, Philip.

When I was later invited by Philip to visit his father in Ireland, we arrived at the massive, but closed front gates to an imposing Georgian house on a large estate. Getting out of the car to open the gates I read the following rather foreboding notice: BEWARE BULLS AT LARGE WOLFHOUSES DO NOT ENTER WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE. I turned away to get back into the car. Aware that he was a very private man, I felt our visit was over before

it had even begun. However, Philip reassured me the notice was there at all times and not just for me! A relief. And fortunately I was to discover, in very short order, that J.P. Donleavy is simply the most charming generous host. And the funniest raconteur I have ever had the pleasure of meeting.

Mike, as he is known to his friends, insisted on carrying my heavy bag up to my room. As I followed him down a long hallway and up a massive stone staircase to yet another long corridor, I marvelled at the paintings hanging on the walls, all of which I recognised as being by him. After showing me to my room, in which hung yet more of his artwork, Mike invited me to join him and some other guests for drinks and dinner at seven. When the appointed hour arrived I got lost trying to find my way to the drawing room and heard what sounded like machine gun fire coming from behind a door. After carefully opening it I found Mike, in what turned out to be the kitchen, in a bespoke tweed jacket with bright red silk handkerchief madly bobbing away in his breast pocket as he shadow boxed around the room. The loud gun-like reports came from Mike's fists as they snapped back at the end of each punch! Neatly, and in less than a second, Mike popped off a few more punches with attendant gun shots and then, after seeing me, stopped and said "Oh. Hello Bob." Grabbing some bottles of chilled champagne he graciously escorted me into the Green Room where Philip and guests were gathered in front of a blazing log fire set within an impressive white marble fireplace. While being introduced to the other guests I noticed the walls adorned with yet more of Mike's paintings, including two very beautiful cemetery pictures with gravestones about to topple over. They seemed to be telling me to enjoy life now before it might be too late!



J.P. Donleavy, Woodlawn Cemetery, 2007.

As Mike uncorked a never-ending flow of champagne, heaped platters of Irish smoked salmon appeared through the doorway accompanied by ever more beautiful women. The salmon sat on buttered Irish brown bread sprinkled with tiny piquant capers and was accompanied by juicy slices of lemon. After enough salmon was eaten, I was able to see that the serving platters were actually rough hewn planks, entire cross sections of a tree trunk! For those preferring Guinness to champagne, perfectly poured pints were offered fresh from the tap in Levington Park's very own pub. After a few more planks of the delicious smoked salmon were polished off, Mike ushered us all into the magnificent dining room where another fire was ablaze in yet an even finer fireplace. This one of ancient black marble spotted with white fossilised molluscs. As Mike carved we feasted upon an ancient dining table on deliciously rare roast beef, from his own herd, accompanied by vegetables from his organic garden. The conversation and laughter never ceased to flow, nor did the fine claret and ancient port from the cellar. An evening I will never forget, almost like a scene out of one of his books, except that it really happened and I was actually there, a part of it!

Throughout my visit, Mike's paintings moved me deeply. I again, and more acutely, noticed that Mike's artwork has a great deal in common with his writing. His paintings, full of life, action and unique character, are alternatively poignantly moving or hilariously funny. They often depict interesting characters and tell a story while being highly intelligent and earthy at the same time. Perhaps most affecting is the sense of mystery that Mike somehow imbues all his work with. In both his writing and his painting, Mike's keen eye for the sensual detail shines forth. Holding wisdom about life's lessons, they often possess a marvellous sense of humour, causing the reader, or viewer, to sometimes laugh aloud. At other times the wisdom he imparts can be rather more sad and it is this work charged with poignancy which can sometimes move one to tears. No matter what the effect, both his writing and his painting possess elegance and a lilting lyricism. And it is immediate. As the author V.S. Naipaul noted, J.P. Donleavy's work has "that immediacy that all good writing has." It is this same immediacy that is to be found in all his drawings and watercolours.

Nine years ago, after a terrible car accident, I was laid up in hospital for weeks and Mike, very considerately, would frequently telephone to inquire about my progress. Once, after my confessing to not being in the best of moods, Mike quickly warned me, “When you are sad, you don’t want to fight the system. And when you stop fighting the system, it’s time for the big sleep.” These words steeled my resolve. However, they were quickly followed with this: “But you don’t want to get too happy in there either, you just need one break that’s not your neck!” This made me laugh. So from personal experience I can attest that Mike can be the funniest person, particularly at the gloomiest of times.

If I were forced to use a single word to describe J.P. Donleavy, it would be the word ‘gentleman’. Mike is a gentleman in the true sense of the word. A picture of Mike in the dictionary should be next to that word. When I first ran into Billy Connolly, a great fan of his and an old friend who starred in Mike’s play *The Beastly Beatitudes of Balthazar B* in the West End in London, his first comment to me about Mike, which he repeated three times, was “Mike is such a gentleman.” J.P. Donleavy, in his books, his artwork and his own life, proves that true nobility is a matter of character, integrity and spirit rather than of birth, formal schooling or inherited money.

One other time, the summer of 2004, holds a special place in my memory. This was when I visited Mike with my two sons, who later ranked it as their favourite vacation ever. One beautiful, hot sunny day our host suggested that we organise a great picnic and invited over some old friends to meet us. With provisions in readiness, he led the way down through the fields, where his herd of contented cattle graze, up a big hill that long ago had been a Celtic fortification (and later an ancient burial ground for monks) and then down again to the shores of Lough Owel. We carried with us a large barbecue grill together with blankets, plates and utensils, dozens of delicious fine Irish sausages, mounds of chopped beef, loaves of brown bread, bricks of sweet Irish butter, jars of Dijon mustard and, yes, I admit it, bottles of fine American ketchup. Not to mention numerous bottles of even finer wine from his seemingly inexhaustible cellar. Next to the lake, under two

towering beech trees (at the same spot where James Joyce is also said to have picnicked) we laid the blankets down and set up camp. I volunteered to do the grilling and took everyone’s orders. Right after the first sausages and steaks had been placed on the grill, Mike all of a sudden shot off towards the far off hill at full sprint. He continued to sprint all the way to the very top, turned and sprinted all the way back again. Just, as he said, to work up an appetite!



J.P. Donleavy, Lough Owel, 2007.

Our long laughter-filled picnic over, we returned to the main house and Mike invited me to his study to choose two paintings to take home with me to New York, a reward for some legal work successfully completed. Needless to say I was thrilled and chose a grinning priapic dog along with a portrait of a smiling, slightly crazed looking

man. Looking at my final choices, Mike said, “I thought you might choose those, Bob, they suit you.” When my sons and I returned to New York those two watercolours were immediately hung in my apartment. I’m looking at them right now. They bring me great pleasure every day and provide a constant reminder of not only a most memorable picnic but also of a great writer and artist who changed my life for the better in countless ways. J.P. Donleavy - a thoughtful, generous, wise, charming and very funny gentleman, especially at the gloomiest of times.

Robert A. Mitchell
February 2008

Bob Mitchell is a lawyer and film producer based in New York City.



1. Concert Credenza
Watercolour
11" x 15"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1960



2. Deeply Purple Beastly Beatitude
Watercolour
10" x 14"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1975



3. Enshrined Image
Watercolour
10" x 15"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1955



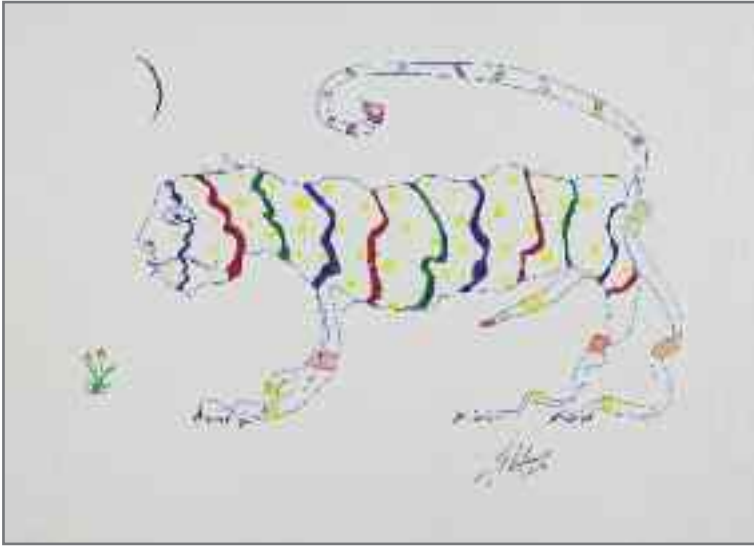
4. Morning At The Washstand
Pen & Ink
12" x 8"
Signed Lower Left
Circa 1947



5. To Stretch A Point
Watercolour
11" x 15"
Signed Lower Centre
Circa 1970



6. Bouncing Colours
Watercolour
10" x 14"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1985



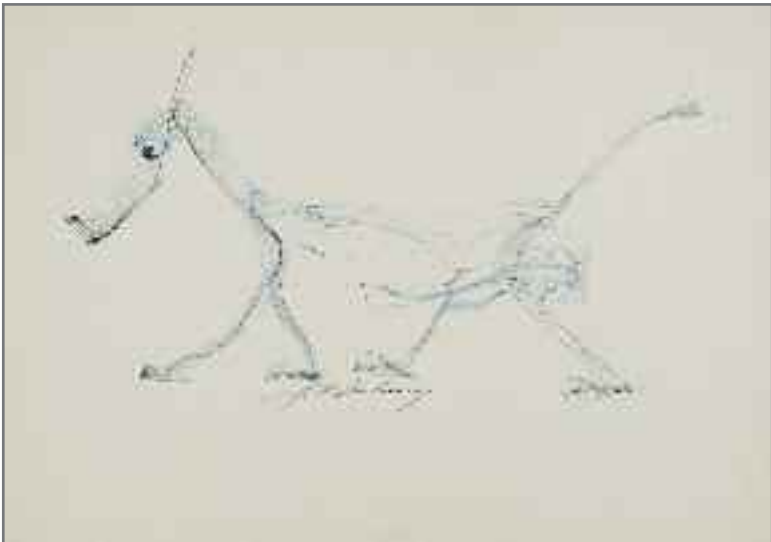
7. A Question Of Parentage
Watercolour with Pen & Ink
12" x 16"
Signed Lower Right
Dated 2007



8. Coloured Windows
Watercolour
16" x 11"
Signed Lower Centre
Dated August '68



9. Windows On The Canal
Watercolour
10" x 14"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1975



10. One Does Occasionally Go On Parade
Watercolour
10" x 14"
Signed Lower Centre
Circa 1970



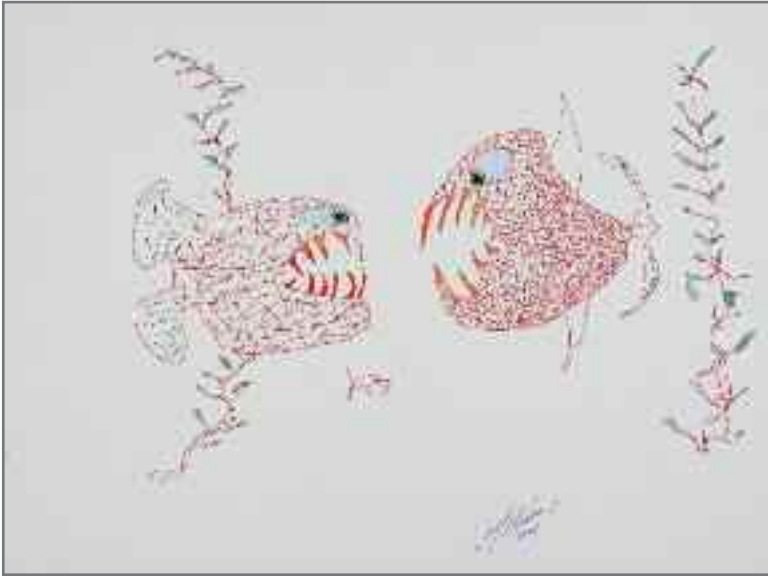
11. Portrait of A.K. Donoghue

Watercolour
15" x 11"
Signed & Inscribed
Circa 1968



12. This Is The Star Cinema

Watercolour
14" x 12"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1950



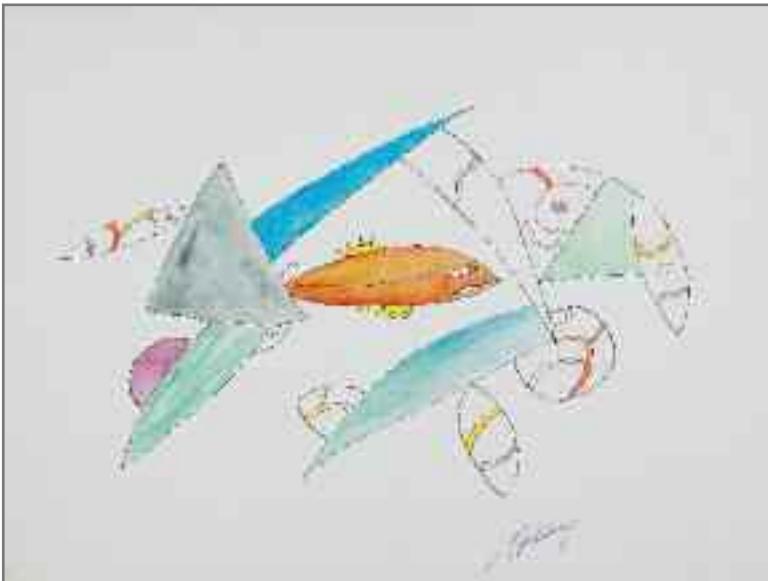
13. Have You Made Up Your Mind Yet

Watercolour

12" x 16"

Signed Lower Right

Dated 2007



14. Don't Worry I'll Find Out Who Did It

Watercolour

12" x 16"

Signed Lower Right

Circa 1980



15. Bird Observing There's Nothing There

Watercolour
11" x 15"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1990



16. The Friend You Once Knew

Watercolour
15" x 12"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1952



17. The Fish Trap
Watercolour
10" x 15"
Signed Lower Centre
Circa 1970



18. The Serious Scientist
Pen & Ink
14" x 10"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1947



19. Island Churchyard

Watercolour

12" x 10"

Signed Lower Right

Dated 1992



20. Number One On A Dublin Road Near the Sea

Watercolour

11" x 15"

Signed Lower Right

Dated 1953



21. A Lonely Hill On The Island

Watercolour
15" x 11"
Signed Lower Right
Dated 1969



22. Seascape In The Vertical

Watercolour
12" x 16"
Signed Lower Left
Dated 2007



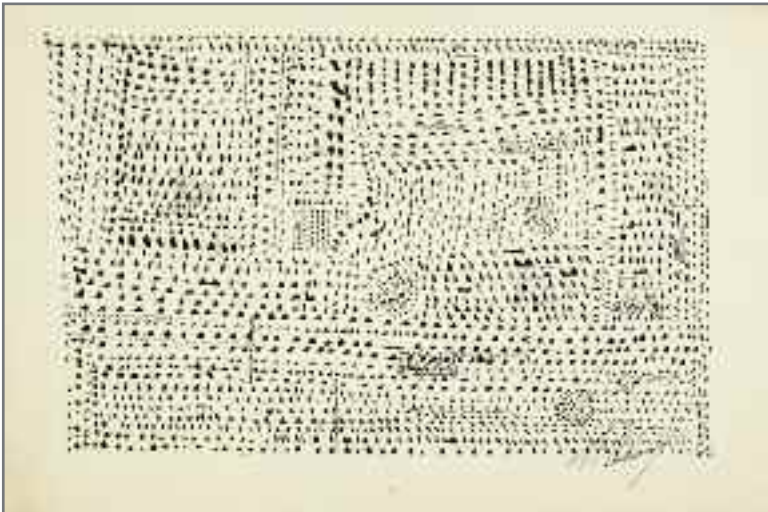
23. The Sugar Loaf Co. Wicklow
Watercolour
10" x 14"
Signed Lower Centre
Dated 1950



24. That's How She Once Stood
Watercolour
15" x 11"
Signed Lower Right
Dated 1950



25. Get Along Get Along Little Doggy
Watercolour
11" x 15"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1980



26. Find Me I'm There
Pen & Ink
10" x 14"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1950



27. I'm Heading Up The Amazon Next
Watercolour
11" x 15"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1980



28. Hey I'm Here Where's The Party
Watercolour
11" x 15"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1975



29. A Lady In The Height of Fashion

Watercolour

15" x 11"

Signed Lower Right

Circa 1960



30. The Beginning Of The Race

Watercolour

10" x 14"

Signed Lower Right

Circa 1985



31. Self Portrait
Watercolour
15" x 11"
Signed Lower Left
Dated 1950



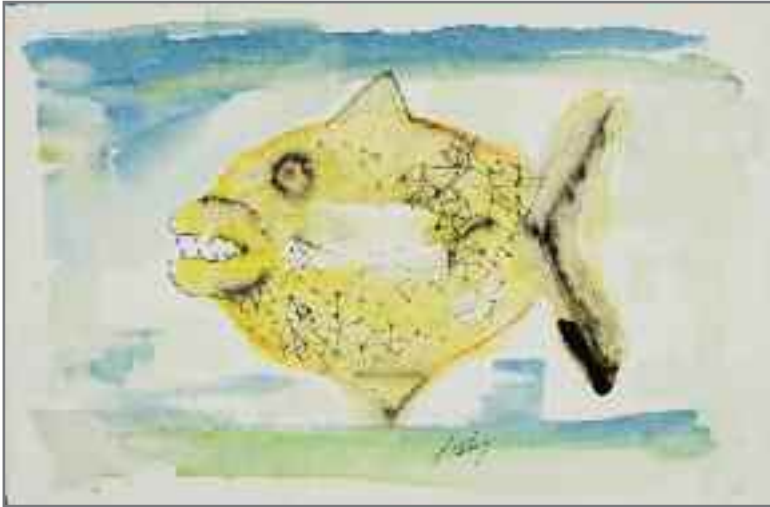
32. It Escapes My Mind
Watercolour
11" x 15"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1960



33. Brendan Behan
Watercolour
15" x 11"
Signed Lower Left
Dated 1953

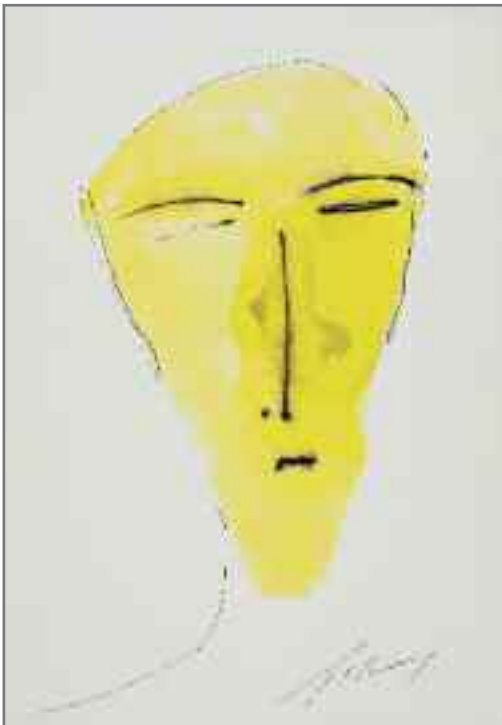


34. A Perspective Of Light
Watercolour
11" x 15"
Signed Lower Right
Dated 2001



35. Find Me In The Depths

Watercolour
10" x 14"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1965



36. My Lips Are Sealed

Watercolour
14" x 10"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1975



37. The Picture Fish

Watercolour

7" x 13"

Signed Lower Right

Circa 1985



38. Sabres Of The Fallen In The Sunset

Watercolour

9" x 12"

Signed Lower Left

Circa 1950



39. The Jewel Fish

Watercolour

9" x 13"

Signed Lower Right

Dated 1986



40. In The Moon Machine

Watercolour with Pen & Ink

12" x 10"

Signed Lower Right

Dated 1994



41. I Know That My Redeemer Liveth
Watercolour
12" x 10"
Signed Lower Right
Dated 1994



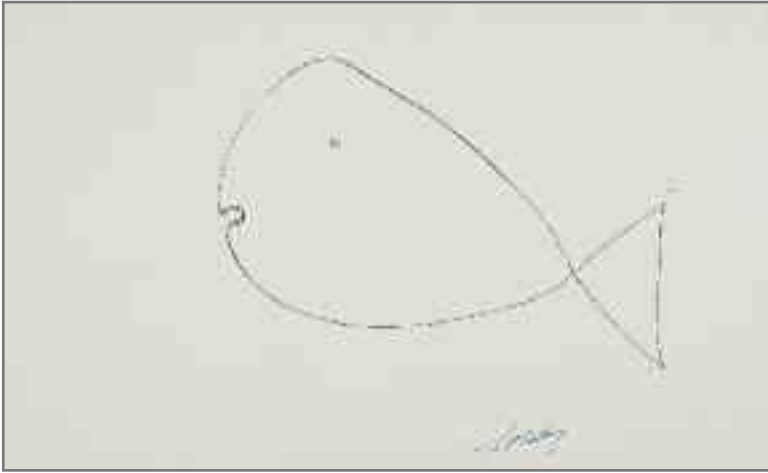
42. Nude In The Morning
Pencil
12" x 8"
Signed Lower Left
Circa 1947



43. I Was Bred To Win
Watercolour
13" x 8"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1990



44. Shall I
Watercolour
9" x 12"
Signed Lower Left
Circa 1980



45. I'm Contemplating It Now

Pen & Ink

8" x 13"

Signed Lower Right

Circa 1952



46. Mother Earth

Watercolour

12" x 10"

Signed Lower Left

Circa 1980



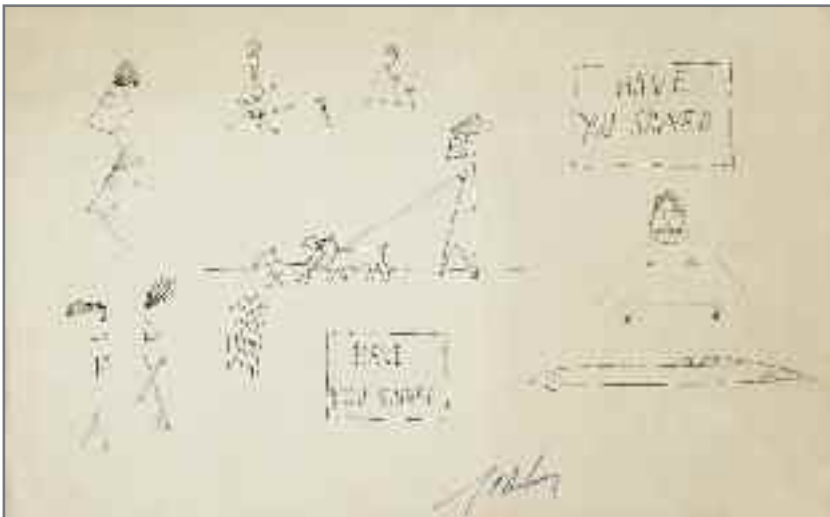
47. Soon The Harvest Starts

Watercolour

10" x 12"

Signed Lower Centre

Circa 1980



48. Have You Sinned

Pen & Ink

7" x 12"

Signed Lower Right

Circa 1950



49. Along The Liffey Dublin

Watercolour

10" x 12"

Signed Lower Right

Circa 1960



50. The Forgiving Wife

Watercolour

11" x 10"

Signed Lower Right

Dated 1988



51. My Mother Is An Intellectual

Watercolour
8" x 10"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1990



52. A Lady Out Of The Purple Past

Watercolour
11" x 8"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1985



53. Model Taking Rest

Pen & Ink
12" x 8"
Signed Lower Left
Circa 1947



54. It Behooves Me To Prance Proud

Watercolour
11" x 15"
Signed Lower Centre
Circa 1965



55. I Can Still See Half Of You

Watercolour
10" x 7"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1985



56. Once In A Blue Moon

Watercolour
7" x 10"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1970



57. The Inhabitants Communicating The News Of The Presence Of Terrestrials
Watercolour
13" x 17"
Signed Lower Right
Dated 1988



58. That Makes You Think Doesn't It
Pen & Ink
8" x 10"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1965



59. Thinking About That Fence

Pen & Ink

8" x 10"

Signed Lower Left

Dated 2007



60. Insectivore In The Purple Garden

Watercolour

8" x 11"

Signed Lower Right

Circa 1980



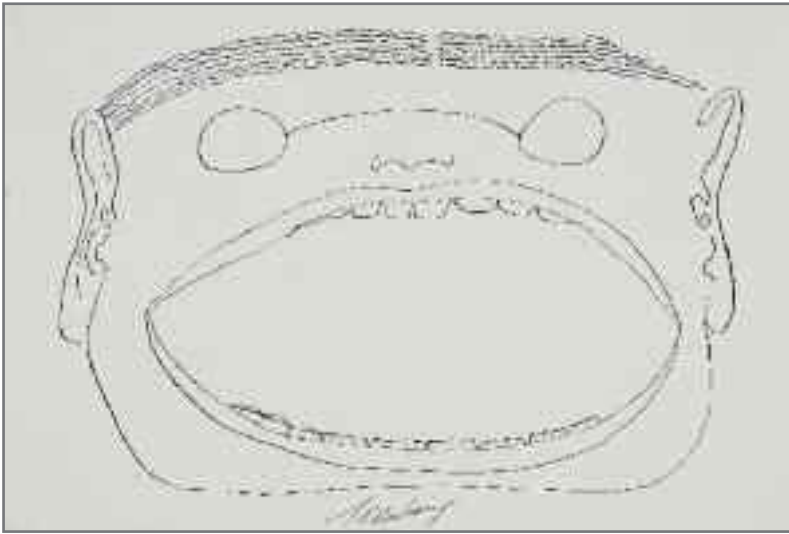
61. Gardiner Street Dublin

Pen & Ink
8" x 7"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1947



62. The Visiting Bird

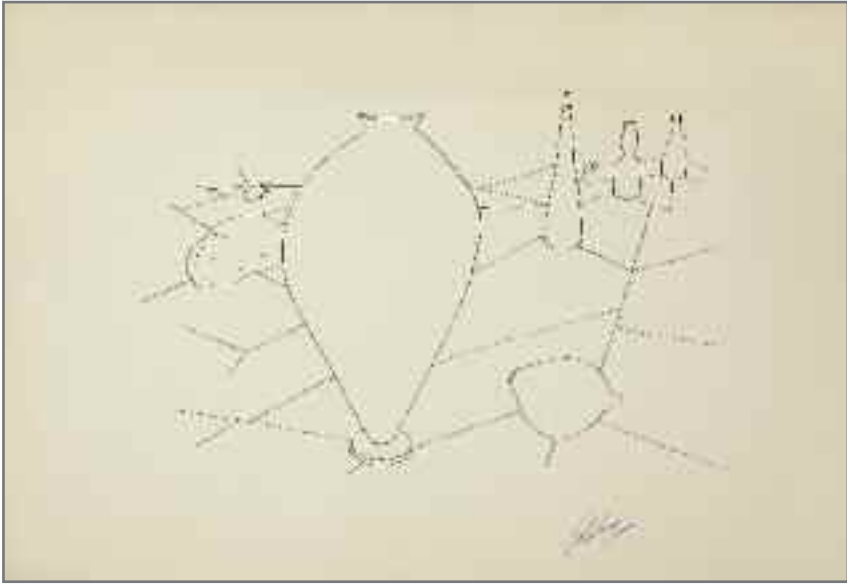
Watercolour
6" x 8"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1970



63. You Heard Me
Pen & Ink
5" x 8"
Signed Lower Centre
Circa 1965



64. Mind You I've Said Nothing
Watercolour
20" x 14"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1975



65. Upon A Table In Kilcoole Long Ago

Pen & Ink

14" x 20"

Signed Lower Right

Dated 1948



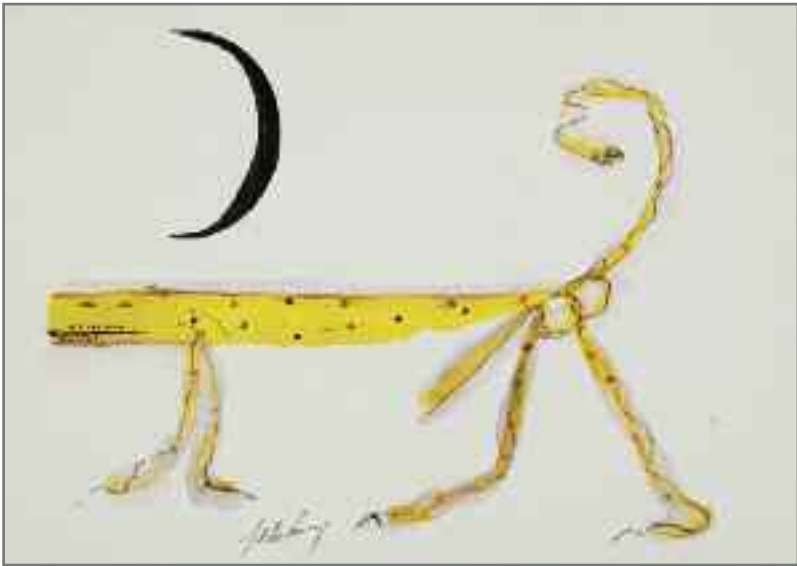
66. The Magic In The Garden

Watercolour

16" x 20"

Signed Lower Right

Circa 1955



67. Ill Met By Moonlight

Watercolour

7" x 10"

Signed Lower Left

Circa 1970



68. My Tennis Partner

Watercolour

21" x 15"

Signed Lower Right

Dated 1956



69. Faces In The Abstract
Watercolour with Pen & Ink
16" x 19"
Signed Lower Right
Dated 1987



70. The Flowering Planets
Watercolour with Pen & Ink
16" x 19"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1985



71. Manhattan Skyline

Watercolour
17" x 14"
Signed Lower Right
Dated 1952



72. Would You Mind Repeating That

Watercolour
20" x 14"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1955



73. The Grinning Bowl

Watercolour

14" x 17"

Signed Lower Right

Circa 1955



74. The Intellectual

Oil on Board

28" x 24"

Signed Lower Right

Dated 1950 Verso



75. Four Parts To The Future The Rest Is Greek

Watercolour in 4 Parts

14" x 22"

Each Signed Lower Centre

Circa 1978



76. They Said Get Lost When I Counter-Offered

Watercolour with Pen & Ink

14" x 19"

Signed Lower Right

Circa 1980



77. On The Prowl
Watercolour
15" x 11"
Signed Lower Right
Circa 1965



78. Well I'll Be Damned I Can't Believe It's You
Watercolour with Pen & Ink
14" x 20"
Signed Lower Left
Circa 1980



79. Don't Mind Me I'm Another From The New World
Oil on Board
38" x 32"
Signed
Dated Verso 1952

Chronology

- 1926** Born 23 April at Holy Family Hospital, Brooklyn, New York. Christened James Patrick, son of Irish immigrant parents. Called Pat by family and friends. Father: Patrick, from Longford, the orchid grower for the Ritz-Carlton Hotel on Central Park and later fire inspector for the FDNY. Mother: Margaret, from Galway, who before marriage was a social secretary to a world-travelling American heiress. The Donleavy family home, at 8 Willow Place in the well-to-do neighbourhood of Brooklyn Heights with a view of the Brooklyn Bridge, is a Federal Style red brick terraced house circa 1850 (now listed on the historic registry).
- 1929** Family moves from 8 Willow Place to East 232nd Street, the top of a hill, the Wakefield section of the Bronx.
- 1931** Family moves again into a bigger house upon another hill on 238th Street in the small isolated community of Woodlawn, also the Bronx, and near the famed Woodlawn Cemetery where Herman Melville is buried.
- 1931-1940** Attends St. Barnabas Elementary School, Woodlawn. Briefly delivers *The Bronx News* in 7th grade. Writes “editorials” on the front page of the papers of customers behind in payments: “How does it feel to cheat a child?” Fired by the circulation manager but the experience will be material for a scene in a future novel. Graduates Class of 1940. Enrolls that fall as a frosh at Fordham Preparatory School.
- 1941** Invited to the New York Athletic Club by Woodlawn friend Thomas Gill. Enjoys the workouts and the buffets, joins as a junior member. Takes up amateur boxing – welterweight class – under the tutelage of the legendary referee and coach Arthur Donovan, who refereed the 1936 and 1938 heavyweight title fights between Max Schmeling and Joe Louis. (Schmeling won the first fight; Louis the second).
- 1942** Founds fraternity at Fordham Prep sophomore year, making himself Supreme Brother Master. Takes fraternal brothers to a nearby saloon for first and last meeting, which was reported to the Prefect of Discipline. Expelled from Fordham.
- 1943** Transfers to Roosevelt High School, although public, then very much a co-educational country club, Yonkers, Westchester County (attends one year). Classmates call the boy from Woodlawn “Preppie.” Teachers call him “Sunshine Boy” because he often sits at the window and looks at the surrounding countryside.
- 1944-1945** Transfers for senior year to Manhattan Preparatory School, Riverdale, the Bronx. Graduates Class of '44. Enlists in the U.S. Navy, assigned to the Amphibious Corps, Little Creek, Virginia. Receives Fleet Appointment to Annapolis, assigned to Naval Academy Preparatory School, Port Deposit, Maryland. Discovers James Joyce in the Naval Academy Prep library, ghost-writes essays for classmates, teacher detects an anonymous writer of talent.
- 1946** Honorably discharged as Seaman Second Class. Asks mother if there are any universities in Ireland. “Yes,” she says, “Trinity College Dublin.” Enters Trinity for the Michaelmas Term on the G.I. Bill of Rights. Strikes up friendships with Gainor Stephen Crist, Arthur Kenneth Donoghue, and Brendan Behan. To avoid confusion with the many fellow students named Jim and Pat, newfound friends decide to refer to Pat Donleavy as “Mike” – his Confirmation name being Michael. The nickname sticks and by which his closest friends know him. Mike attends a Jack B. Yeats exhibition, where the painting prices are impressively high. Encouraged by Phyllis Hayward (member of the White Stag Group) and John Ryan to take up painting. Decides to try painting in his rooms at No. 38.
- 1948** First art show, Exhibition of Paintings by J.P. Donleavy, No. 7, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin, 6-13 December, including still-wet paintings executed at Trinity the day of the opening to fill up the gallery. Some exhibition attendees test for suspected wetness, leaving fingerprints on canvases. Ernest Gébler's then lady partner acquires two Donleavy paintings. Ernest uses them on his farm to plug holes in a fence to keep his neighbour's sheep out. Only after the show does the upstart painter learn that the master who inspired him, Jack Yeats, was there. Generous in

- his support for and indulgent of young artists, Yeats would visit Donleavy's next three Dublin exhibitions. Marries Valerie Heron, moving to a Wicklow cottage near the sea at Kilcoole. Drives back to classes in a small red farming van. A junior dean advises the commuting student to leave his farm equipment back in the countryside.
- 1949** Leaves Trinity College without a degree.
- 1950** Second Dublin exhibition, No. 7, St. Stephen's Green, 15-26 March. Sees his first short story published, "Party On Saturday Night," appearing in the April issue of John Ryan's *Envoy: A Review of Literature & Art*. Third Dublin exhibition, No. 7, St. Stephen's Green, 8-22 June. That show's catalogue contains one of the earliest Donleavy essays, which is hopeful in tone. While the byline beneath the short story reads "J.P. Donleavy," the covers of the exhibition catalogues for this year and next proclaim the paintings are simply "by Donleavy."
- 1951** Fourth Dublin exhibition, No. 7, St. Stephen's Green, 11-25 January. Artist's essay in the catalogue explores "art and artifice ... lie and compromise." Irish scholar and critic Arland Ussher responds to harsh reviews in the press, praising Donleavy paintings as reminiscent of Paul Klee in a letter to the editor published in *The Irish Times*. The struggling artist, with a lot to say to a wider audience, begins writing a novel, eventually giving it the working title *S.D.* for its hero, Sebastian Dangerfield. Brendan Behan, the first ever to read the manuscript, says: "This book is going to go around the world and beat the bejasus out of the Bible."
- 1952** Visits America with wife, Valerie, staying briefly with his family in Woodlawn, the Bronx, submits early part of manuscript to Charles Scribner's Sons. Then off to a cabin in the Connecticut woods. Turns down an invitation to ocean cruise on a private yacht in order to continue writing *S. D.* in Boston's West End, a poor Europeanised, multi-ethnic enclave. On a final submission of the manuscript, Scribner's John Hall Wheelock acknowledges the work's quality. But Scribner's rejects the work on grounds of its inviting prosecution for obscenity.
- 1953** Leaves America in February discouraged, returning initially to the Isle of Man. He then buys a house containing two flats in working-class Fulham section of London. And as Fulham's first middle-class settler, continues to paint and make the rounds of the galleries without success.
- 1954** Brendan Behan, who's wandering London in the company of "Lead Pipe Daniel The Dangerous," suggests contacting The Olympia Press, Paris. The author sends a query letter dated 7 September. Receives a response from publisher Maurice Girodias, expressing interest in *S.D.* Donleavy's short pieces have been published in the eminent *Manchester Guardian*. And another piece in *Punch*.
- 1955** The author submits the manuscript. Upon the urging of Girodias, he renames his novel *The Ginger Man*. Asked if he wants to use a pseudonym, the writer says no, choosing to be identified on the cover and title page as J.P. Donleavy, the name by which tens of millions would eventually know him. The Olympia Press publishes *The Ginger Man* in June as No. 7 in its pornographic Traveller's Companion Series, the work's literary merit being ignored. The author strenuously objects to the inappropriate inclusion in this series. He expected publication in Olympia's belletristic Collection Merlin which published Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett.
- 1956** Seeks publication by mainstream publishers in U.K. and U.S. in order to establish the novel as serious writing and be so read and reviewed. Directed by Derek Stanford and Muriel Spark to Neville Spearman Limited. The London publishing house agrees to publish a revised edition with Arland Ussher's introduction vouching for *The Ginger Man* as "a book of quality." Girodias threatens suit to block publication, claiming that, according to his correspondence with the author, The Olympia Press holds U.K. rights. But the author is by counsel advised that he is the copyright owner. Spearman publishes *The Ginger Man* in December.
- 1957** Neville Spearman's solicitors warn of impending Girodias suit. Writ of Summons issued by the High Court of Justice: "Witness, David Viscount Kilmuir Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain, the 21st day of June in the year of Our Lord ... This Writ is to be served ..." Thus begins the 21-year-long, unforgiving literary battle of all time, whose preamble is outlined by the author in the 517 pages of *The History of The Ginger Man*. Starts writing a novel set in New York City, initially titled *Helen*, which is soon put aside but later revived as the play *Fairy Tales of New York*.
- 1958** Despite threats from Paris by The Olympia Press, New York publisher McDowell Obolensky publishes the Spearman edition of *The Ginger Man* in the U.S. in May.
- 1959** First American exhibition, Bronxville Public Library, Bronxville, New York, 2-28 February. In this exhibition catalogue and subsequent catalogues, the painter now identifies himself as J.P. Donleavy. That autumn, Richard Harris stars as Sebastian Dangerfield in *The Ginger Man* stage production. Boffo smash in London, winning raves and praise – "the wind of genius." A disaster in Dublin, where members of the audience shout

- protest, theatre owner wants cuts, the director and playwright refuse, Archbishop John Charles McQuaid orders the play to be stopped and the play closes after the third performance. Harris tells the press he wants to fly to Rome with the script to show the Pope.
- 1960** Most Promising Playwright, Evening Standard Drama Award, for the play *Fairy Tales of New York*, starring Barry Foster as Cornelius Christian, with Susan Hampshire, Robert Ayres and Harry Taub in supporting roles.
- 1961** Seeking a quiet place to write in peace, the author buys an apartment, decorated in “dentist’s modern” on the fifteenth floor of a central London high-rise he calls “Tax Dodger’s Towers.”
- 1963** *A Singular Man*, set in an unnamed city that is New York, published by Atlantic-Little Brown. At the direction of editor Seymour Lawrence, an artist does a drawing for the dust jacket that recreates the covers of the manuscript the writer submitted: card boards with the title and author name in uneven stick-on letters, all bound together with discoloured tape and nuts and screws. Lawrence eventually loses his job over the book that top brass feared might provoke prosecution for obscenity. It doesn’t. Meanwhile *The Ginger Man* play, after standing room only at 10 previews, opens in New York City at the Orpheum Theater, 2nd Avenue, 21 November, the day before President John F. Kennedy’s assassination. In coming days, audience attendance dwindles in a city in mourning. Production forced to close after 52 performances.
- 1964** First collection of short pieces published, *Meet My Maker The Mad Molecule*. Gainor Stephen Crist, inspiration for *The Ginger Man*, dies 5 July, and is buried in Tenerife, the Canary Islands, according to the U.S. Embassy. But the author is unconvinced, having fleetingly caught sight of Crist alive. And noting the grave’s headstone has a cross, he maintains Crist the arch non-believer, although long a champion of The Blessed Oliver Plunkett, would not have countenanced such at his final resting place.
- 1965** Following difficulties over *A Singular Man*, the author urges Seymour Lawrence not to work for publishers but to become his own publisher. “All it takes is one desk, one phone, one author. I’ll be your author.” Lawrence launches Seymour Lawrence Books with the publication of the first unexpurgated U.S. edition of *The Ginger Man*, co-published with Delacorte Press.
- 1966** *The Saddest Summer of Samuel S*, a novella inspired by Trinity College pal Arthur Kenneth Donoghue, published. Back in New York for the book’s launch, the author visits the New York Athletic Club to go a few rounds in the ring. The boxing coach invites him to join the club team as its welterweight for an upcoming match. The opponents: cadets of West Point. The 40-year-old author declines the opportunity.
- 1967** Lord Chamberlain’s Office reviews stage script of *The Saddest Summer of Samuel S*, objects to more than 40 “disallowed” words, including: farting, balls and arse. Without a rewrite particularly of Act II, the Lord Chamberlain will not issue the required license for the planned London production. The playwright refuses. The show does not go on.
- 1968** First marriage ends in amicable divorce.
- 1969** Learns from his London wine adviser, Mr. White, at Fortnum & Mason, of a new law in Ireland exempting artists and writers from taxation on income from their work. He becomes an Irish citizen. Sells his London apartment high up in “Tax Dodger’s Towers”. He moves back to Ireland with second wife, Mary, buying Balsoon House, County Meath, site of the Ussher family castle ruins. Sends wife to purchase bullocks to graze the land, she buys heifers and J.P. has to buy bull.
- 1970** The author’s wife is sent with his secretary Phyllis McArdle, both beautiful women, to Paris, to buy The Olympia Press at the company bankruptcy auction. Girodias attends, hoping to reacquire his company. But outbid, he fails, then writing to Mary Wilson Price (Mrs. Donleavy) 18 May, jokingly asking if she would like to publish his autobiography. He then suggests they talk about her purchase of the company, which he believes was on behalf of another author. But soon enough Girodias discovers to his horror that J.P. Donleavy is now the owner.
- 1971** Sees *The Ginger Man* return to the Dublin stage – this time without controversy, in a designed run at the Eblana Theatre Club. Sets designed by John Ryan. Elected a Knight of Mark Twain by Cyril Clemens, of The Mark Twain Journal, for “your outstanding contribution to Modern Literature.”
- 1972** Sells Balsoon House. Buys Levington Park, built by Sir Charles Levinge in 1742, in Mullingar, County Westmeath. Once visited by James Joyce, who describes his arrival at the house in *Stephen Hero*. Original herd brought from Balsoon continues to graze the 170 acres on the shores of Lough Owl. Country life now provides the background of the Darcy Dancer novels.
- 1973** The unpublished novel *Helen* that evolved into the play *Fairy Tales of New York* is published as the novel *A Fairy Tale of New York* by Delacorte Press / Seymour Lawrence. While the author has long lived abroad, he clearly remembers and vividly presents his hometown in his latest work of fiction.

- 1975** *The Unexpurgated Code: A Complete Manual of Survival & Manners* published. Among the guests at the publication party at Levington Park are Mick Jagger and then-wife Bianca. Work proscribed and banned in some quarters, and kept out of print. Book removed from woman reading it on an airplane because she kept falling into the aisle laughing. Upon landing she quits her job, divorces her husband and ends up “enjoying my life.” First Donleavy book illustrated by the author, contains 36 drawings. First London exhibition of paintings and illustrations from *The Unexpurgated Code* at The Langton Gallery, 30 September- 14 October. Award for creative work in literature, National Institute of Arts and Letters.
- 1978** Wins the final victory over Maurice Girodias, whose appeal is turned down by the French court. Word comes from the author’s French attorney, who writes 20 March: “J’ai le plaisir de vous faire savoir que j’ai obtenu le rejet du pourvoi de l’adversaire.” (English translation: “I have the pleasure of telling you that I have obtained the throwing out of the adversary’s appeal.”) Thus ended one of the longest legal battles in literary history. Girodias writes the author one last letter 2 August, asking a favour – that The Olympia Press be given back to him free of charge. The author does not respond.
- 1982** Comedian Billy Connolly mid-year joins the cast of *The Beastly Beatitudes of Balhazar B*, starring Patrick Ryecart and running at the Duke of York’s Theatre in London’s West End since 30 September, 1981.
- 1984** *De Alfonse Tennis: The Superlative Game of Eccentric Champions* published. Second book illustrated by the author, containing 25 drawings. Game actually played internationally by a devoted group of athletically elitist adherents.
- 1985** Bob Precious, a transplanted New Yorker running a bar in Houston, renames it after his favourite novel, *The Ginger Man*, by his favourite author, J.P.D., whom he will later visit at Levington Park where they and others compete against each other throwing javelin and discus about the parklands.
- 1986** Le Tennis De Alfonse, match de démonstration entre J.P. Donleavy v. Phillippe Sollers, Gymnase de l’Eglise américaine, Paris, 27 Mai. J.P. wins headline in Paris newspaper: “J.P. Is Better Than John McEnroe.” *J.P. Donleavy’s Ireland: In All Her Sins And in Some of Her Graces* published in July, containing photos and an account of the first Dublin exhibition of his still-wet paintings. Sixth exhibition, Godolphin Gallery, 5 Molesworth Place, Dublin, November.
- 1987** Exhibition, Tom Caldwell Galleries, Belfast, 3-21 November.
- 1988** Accepts challenge to play De Alfonse Tennis match at the Pentagon, losing to John Lehman, then U.S. Secretary of the Navy who had become an outstanding player.
- 1989** Exhibition, Anna-Mei Chadwick Gallery, London, 22 February-11 March.
- 1990** Joint exhibition with daughter Karen Donleavy of her pottery, now produced in Caldwell, Idaho, and her father’s paintings, Anna-Mei Chadwick Gallery, London, 5-16 March. Divorce from second wife finalised.
- 1991** Exhibition, The Alba Gallery, Kew, Surrey, England, 16-28 July.
- 1992** Writes and narrates the script of *J.P. Donleavy’s Ireland: In All of Her Sins and Graces*, which is broadcast on the Discovery Channel and Ireland’s RTE. Wins the Worldfest Houston Gold Award for the programme, now in international video release.
- 1993** CINE Golden Eagle Award as writer/narrator of *J.P. Donleavy’s Ireland*.
- 1994** *The History of The Ginger Man* published by Houghton Mifflin / Seymour Lawrence on St. Patrick’s Day – 10 weeks after Lawrence died at age 65, ending a 31-year literary friendship. The book, with 10 drawings by the author and illustrated by 30 photographs, is regarded as being an outstanding physical example of trade publishing. Exhibition, Anna-Mei Chadwick Gallery, London, 7-18 June.
- 1995** Exhibition in Dublin, organised by the designer Rachel Murray, The Lounge, 33-34 Parliament Street, 29 October.
- 1996** *The Lady Who Liked Clean Rest Rooms*, first in what the author calls his New York series, published by Thornwillow Press, in a finely-bound, limited, signed edition printed on handmade paper. Bob Precious, back in New York, opens *The Ginger Man* pub at 11 East 36th Street. The author receives an honorarium for each of Bob’s authorised pubs so named, plus free drinks and comestibles on each visit for himself and a lady guest.
- 1997** Trade editions of *The Lady Who Liked Clean Rest Rooms* published in New York by St. Martin’s and in London by Abacus. Second collection of short pieces, *An Author and His Image: The Collected Short Stories* published in London by Viking.
- 1998** *Wrong Information Is Being Given Out At Princeton*, second in the New York series, published. Release of the audio book of the author’s reading of *The Ginger Man*. Accepts challenge of Sir Rocco Forte to a doubles match of

- De Alfonco Tennis to be played in the ballroom of Sir Rocco's Balmoral Hotel, Edinburgh, 28 September. Sir Rocco and partner Wimbledon veteran Annabel Croft upset the top-ranked author and partner Sally Jones, a former Real Tennis world champion. Rematch is planned.
- 1999** Sees *The Ginger Man* revived in Dublin by The Dublin Theatre Company and the summer run extended. Troupe plans to take the play to New York. *The Ginger Man* ranked 99 on the list of the 100 Best Novels of the 20th Century.
- 2000** *The Ginger Man* returns to New York in a revival by The Dublin Theatre Company. Tour sponsored by the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Irish government, which until the 1970s was banning the author's books.
- 2002** Exhibition at Damien Matthews' Walton Gallery, London, 20 March-6 April.
- 2004** President of Fordham Preparatory School writes to say he's sorry J.P.'s Prep experience came to such an abrupt end long ago. (See 1942 entry). Prep president suggests J.P. visit campus when he's in town and assures the Prep would be pleased to include one of J.P.'s books in the school library's alumni authors collection.
- 2005** June, the 50th anniversary of the publication of *The Ginger Man*. Never out of print, sales top 45 million, legally translated in two dozen languages, with countless illegal pirated editions. Published for the first time ever in Ireland by The Irish Independent as No. 6 in the Great Irish Writers series.
- 2006** Retrospective organised by Damien Matthews, 7-20 February at The Molesworth Gallery, in Dublin, where it all began in 1948. Attendees are enthusiastic, no begrudgers in evidence, reviews are positive. Bruce Arnold, dean of Ireland's art critics and biographer of Jack Yeats, writes in The Irish Independent newspaper: "Jack Yeats talked of 'the living ginger' – the magic that made art come alive. J.P. Donleavy has it." Opens the Barry Flanagan sculpture exhibition at the Irish Museum of Modern Art 27 June with a controversial but well-received talk titled: "Lobbing Hand Grenades: Remarks On Barry Flanagan." *The Ginger Man*, published in a new Italian edition, makes Italy's best-seller list.
- 2007** Finally and for the first time, the artist turned writer, born in Brooklyn (the Heights) and raised in the Bronx in the sylvan suburbia of Woodlawn, has an art exhibition in his hometown, which he calls "the king of cities," *New York, New York* at The National Arts Club, 11-22 May. The artist is a guest on *Desert Island Discs*, BBC Radio 4.
- 2008** Returns to The Molesworth Gallery for another exhibition organised by Damien Matthews, 30 April-9 May. Meanwhile, the author is writing the third and fourth volumes in his New York series of novels, *The Dog On The Seventeenth Floor* and *A Letter Marked Personal*. His readership now extends to the Internet where the J.P. Donleavy Compendium (www.jpdonleavycompendium.org), an independent web site designed and maintained by David L. Hartzheim, has had more than 10 million hits since its launch some 7½ years ago. There are plans for a Retrospective in Paris this autumn.

Bill Dunn
March 2008

Archivist, J.P. Donleavy papers.

