

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.