

A ROOM OF HER OWN

Artist Mary Rose Binchy starts the year with a solo show



Mary Rose Binchy in her studio. Above: *Snow Mountain 1*. Top: *Sailing Descended 2*, both from the new exhibition.

ON JANUARY 13, *New Paintings - 'An Elsewhere World'*, Mary Rose Binchy's first solo show in seven years, will open at the Cross Gallery on Francis Street. The title is borrowed from a poem by Seamus Heaney, 'A Herbal', where he recalls a series of sensory experiences, which intensified his sense of being, and how he seeks to find those sensations again, "in an elsewhere world, beyond maps and atlases". "These paintings are a reflection of those moments when I suppose I responded to the landscape in a certain way," says Binchy, "and reflect a year in nature." In the 'Spring Descended' series, the head of a white snowdrop on a base

of green is followed by the tip of a blue grape hyacinth, then the emergence of a deep pink camellia. The *Inis Meain* paintings are big abstract landscapes suffused with the intense blue of sea and sky and deep ribbons of bleached sand, inspired by the heatwave of last May. "It was like being on a Greek island," she says, "the heat, the stillness." Objects and landscapes are simply expressed in bold colour. Painting in layers, wet paint on wet, creates texture.

Binchy didn't set out to be an artist - she was a practising solicitor and expecting her first child when she decided to do a foundation course at night before being



accepted at The National College of Art and Design. She would cycle into Thomas Street after she had dropped her little boy to his crèche. "It was a very happy time, even if as a mature student you are plagued by self-doubt. Am I any good? Am I too old to start? That worry, the dread of opprobrium, never goes away." Binchy laughs, saying, "I always thought it would be pretentious to call myself an artist. But now I feel I am a painter, that it is

real." Binchy's paintings have been acquired by, among others, UCD, the OPW and several corporate firms, like Goodbodies and McCanns. Architect Ronnie Tallon is also a collector.

The creative process begins long before she takes up a paintbrush. It begins with time spent drawing, thinking, looking, concentrating, reading poetry, "what the painter, Cy Twombly, called 'the condensed phrase'. I read poetry all the time."

For years Binchy painted in a Victorian outbuilding next to her house, a damp, unheated place. Three more children followed and Binchy continued to work at home, snatching time when they were at school and working around their schedules. "The luxury was that I could be here but I could work." At the end of 2008, Binchy asked architect Joe Lawrence from Dublin practice Lawrence and Long to convert the structure into a purpose-built studio, with a gallery ceiling and mezzanine study. The new studio is a spanking white, light-filled box with double-height doors and floor-to-ceiling windows. Paper is arranged in drawers, paints ranged on shelves, a deep sink stacked with clean jam jars - upstairs, a small desk, littered with books and sketchbooks. You can imagine Binchy, hanging paper on the wall, painting directly on to it, letting the layers of paint dry, Italian mezzo-soprano Cecilia Bartoli on the CD player. When the painting is finished, she repaints the wall. While the studio is not out of bounds for the children (her eldest has his eye on it as a party venue) she has laid claim absolutely to the space. "It's mine," she says unequivocally. "This is my office." **SM&D** *New Paintings - 'An Elsewhere World' opens January 14 at the Cross Gallery, 59 Francis Street, Dublin 8.*