

Niall MacMonagle, *'What Lies Beneath: Fly Rearing Ponds Cowichan River Hatchery by Jessie Homer*, The Irish Independent, 11 March 2019



What Lies Beneath: Fly Rearing Ponds Cowichan River Hatchery by Jessie Homer Niall MacMonagle
The Irish Independent March 2019

Fly Rearing Ponds Cowichan River Hatchery by Jessie Homer French Oil on canvas, courtesy of mother's tankstation



New-York-born, California-based, Jessie Homer French sees herself as a regional narrative painter, painting and fly fishing being “major lifetime obsessions”. Art came first.

“You can see my two-year-old pencil scubbings on my dad’s German book of engravings.” And her first painting, she thinks, was “a Beaver Panorama in upstate New York, trying to get the November light. Subjects haven’t changed much. Guess the ‘die was cast’ pretty early”.

Homer French has painted bush fires, Northrop Gruman B-2 Spirit heavy penetration bombers, fish farming, graveyards, trees, roads... and on every work she paints the title and her name.

“The title is important in narrative painting and every time I’ve moved I’ve had to ‘internalise’ a new landscape.”

Her work, she agrees, is political but not in a drum-banging way, believing that “it’s better to sidle up to something sideways, so people can see for themselves”.

This work, from 1999, took weeks. The British Columbia setting, the striking use of blue, black, orange, the still lamppost, the wriggling fish, the turquoise baseball cap at the very centre and Homer French’s handling of perspective all add up. Simple and sophisticated.

Every spring this hatchery releases two million Chinook salmon. “When I can’t fish, I read fishing books. Maybe there’s a similarity between the hunt for the hidden magic in a river and the hunt for ‘something’ in a painting.”

Labelled a self-taught artist, Homer French, now 79, “always made ‘stuff’”, and wonders “how self-taught is one these days, with museums, books, and for me lots of art friends? I always ask Billy Al Bengston technical questions. Don Bachardy and other LA friends helped. Kent Twitchell told me how to paint a wall once. He said it would last for 20 years. It did”.

US, Canada, Hong Kong, Dublin, London, Homer French is shown internationally.

“We were in Dublin years ago. I saw two rainbows a day,” she says.

Her partner Robin French and she thought of retiring to Ireland but “I chickened out. I was afraid I couldn’t learn to drive on the ‘other’ side of the road”.

Paintings 1978-2018 Jessie Homer French at mother’s tankstation, 41-43 Watling St, Dublin, until April 27