

## Jim Savage Essay

Jim Savage is an artist and curator. In 2006 he curated *'Into Landscape'*, and in 2005 *'From Landscape'*, two major touring exhibitions of drawing by contemporary artists. In 2005, he organised an exhibition of the drawings of John Berger and Marisa Camino in Cork city and edited the book *'Berger on Drawing'*, an anthology of John Berger's writings on drawing, published by Occasional Press. He lives in Co. Cork

The artist David Lilburn is without doubt a formidable draughtsman – he is excited by the impulse to draw, to harness the raw, direct energy of drawing as a means of engagement with the world around him. When you look at the marks he makes in his drawings you can see the liveliness and excitement that went into their making. These qualities are visible - literally - in the traces left on the paper. There is an exhilarating sense of freedom about the way he draws and about the way he structures images.

Working directly and at speed, he trusts implicitly to his first response. Whether it is with a pencil or, as in the case of these dry point prints, with a sharpened steel tip, scoring into the surface of a sheet of zinc, he strives to make that 'first-time line', packed with the energy of focussed concentration and sudden release. There is no stopping to erase and rebuild. The drawings are produced with immensely skilful bursts of fast line. Such drawings are only made by someone who draws continuously.

It is a process that allows him to arrive at images in which there is nothing static, nothing still and where lively visual fragments tangle in complex, animated pictorial spaces. Exploring them, your eye is not permitted to rest, instead it is pulled this way and that into an exuberant flux and flow of dextrous and remarkably articulate graffiti.

The Bloomsday map, *In Medias Res*, is the most recent work in an extensive series of map - pictures made by David Lilburn for many years now. It is a major work. In it we can see the artist immersing himself in his subject - by which he is clearly enthralled - and we can see him enjoying his engagement with a graphic procedure which he is totally at ease experimenting with.

In previous works he has used the visual format of 'the map' as a vehicle for recording and organising his own day-to-day experiences, thoughts and feelings. He has personalised and subjectivised this usually 'objective', publicly utilitarian form - writing himself into the latitude and longitude of a lived-in place, turning a map into something that exists halfway between geography and diary, and in the process, producing a self-portrait of a life. These maps are crammed not only with topographical and geographical facts but also with historical references, personal biography, literary references, personally observed incidents and portraits, all skilfully layered and juxtaposed in the complex visual mix of the overall work.

How appropriate it seems to bring this endeavour to bear on another imagined but placed life: Joyce's vivid 'odyssey' of Leopold Bloom as he moves through the three-dimensional map of Dublin and its environs - and through his own internal labyrinths - on a June day in 1904. The wonderful visual image that has been conjured from this encounter presents a rather rare, perhaps even unique, visual artifact. It is nothing less than the heroic attempt to make a drawing of an entire book.

*In Medias Res* is a marvellously rich image, full of exciting and surprising detail, produced by someone lovingly engrossed in his subject matter, who explores that subject matter with great wit and passion. What he offers you is a map - but not a map to find your way by, rather it is a map in which to get thoroughly and enjoyably lost.

*Jim Savage*