This summer I traveled to Ireland. I was in Ireland for about six weeks. I spent the majority of my trip in Ballyvaughan, a tiny coastal village on the west coast of Ireland. Two weeks of my stay in Ballyvaughan were spent as an artist in residence at the Burren College of Art. I would like to sincerely thank the School of Art & Design for making this opportunity possible and the Rackham Graduate School for the award of a Rackham Research Grant and additional funding.

During the beginning of my trip, I focused on learning about Irish folklore. I visited the Centre for the Study of Irish Art at the National Gallery in Dublin and met with curator Niamh MacNally who showed me art works from the 2007 show "The Fantastic In Irish Art." I was able to see some rare works that depicted fairies (the Sidhe in Gaelic).

I also visited the National Folklore Collection at the University College of Dublin. I met with Dr. Rionach Ui Ogain, whose research centers on the connection between the Sidhe and Irish music, and with Professor Dr. Kelly Fitzgerald who explained the connection between the Irish landscape and the Sidhe.
After learning about Irish folklore and the Sidhe from an art historical and academic viewpoint, I met with a man who is keeping folklore alive in Ireland, Eddie Lenihan. Lenihan is one of the last traditional Irish storytellers (Seache in Gaelic). He has been featured on both NPR and in the New York Times and is the author of seventeen books of Irish folklore. He has been collecting local folklore for over 50 years and has an extensive private archive. Eddie was incredibly generous with his time: I met with him three times while I was in Ireland. He took me to some locations of local fairy lore that appear in his book Meeting The Other Crowd. I was also able to attend one of his incredible storytelling sessions.

This is a picture of Eddie on our road trip looking at fairy trees. He is peeking out from under his hood because it was raining quite hard that day. He lent me his wellies.
This is one of the most famous fairy trees in Ireland, located on the Hill of Tara. The ribbons and keepsakes tied in the tree are offerings to the fairies.

The evening I arrived in Ballyvaughan, I decided to go for a walk. I walked the two blocks of the village and onto one of the trails that is part of the Burren Way (a national protected trail). When I was walking back home along the coast road, I came upon a wonderful event. A donkey was giving birth.
Ballyvaughan and the Burren College of Art are located in the Burren, a wide expanse of limestone rock formed as sediments from fish bones, fossil corals, and sea urchins compacted when Ireland was under a tropical sea millions of years ago. The Burren is one of the finest examples of a Glacio-Karst landscape in the world. I hiked daily during my time in the Burren and fell in love with the land. On one of my hikes, I met Patrick McCormick, a local farmer who lived close to Ballyvaughan. He invited me for tea and to see his land and was one of the most influential people I met on my trip. He had a great knowledge of Irish folklore and a deep connection to the land.
When I was in Ballyvaughan, I stayed in a cottage with other artists in residence at the Burren College of Art. I was there for three weeks before my studio time at the College started. I wanted to have time to hike and take photos of the land, and to get to know some local people before spending time in my art studio. I had access to the College's library and spent a significant amount of time researching contemporary drawers and painters and reading collections of Irish folklore.
The Burren College of Art is very small, with capacity for only about 60 students and residents at one time. While I was at the College, there were six other residents and about 40 undergraduate and graduate students taking classes at the Burren. It was a perfect mix of a stimulating yet peaceful environment. I experimented with photography, and worked with both drawing and watercolor while at the Burren.
Series of drawings completed during residency at the Burren College of Art
My experience in Ireland was absolutely magical: the people are incredibly friendly and welcoming, the landscape is extraordinarily rich and varied and my time at the Burren College of art was invaluable to my artistic practice.

Hiking the Gap of Dunloe