

Beneath The Surface

An Exhibition by Paul McGinty

Alloa Hub Maple Court Alloa

25th September to 19th November 2026



Exhibition Booklet



Foreword

Valerie Whyte – Development Officer

The Alloa Hub is run by the community for the community. It provides an exciting and eclectic range of services, including visitor and local information; family learning activities; volunteering and other clubs and groups.

It is also home to the Clackmannanshire Tapestry; hand stitched by 40 locals and depicts the history and heritage of Clackmannanshire. The five panels are dedicated to Glass, Spinning, Weaving, Brewing and Mining.

Mining played such an important part in the history of Clackmannanshire so we wish to promote the exploration and enjoyment of mining history in the present by supporting emerging artists. Straight from The National Mining Museum of Scotland - *Beneath the Surface* is a testament to how contemporary art can inspire audiences to connect with mining history. Through archival research and conversations with former miners, Paul McGinty's artwork presents a new perspective on the social, technological, and cultural aspects of Scottish coal mining. It is a pleasure to celebrate Paul's artwork here in Alloa Hub.

"This exhibition has been curated in conjunction with the National Mining Museum Scotland"

If you wish to hold an exhibition in the future, please email shop@alloahub.co.uk



Paul McGinty

An Introduction by the Artist

I am an abstract painter based in the Kingdom of Fife. My work explores sociopolitical themes including economic inequality, social justice, and climate change. Through expressive and evocative abstract paintings, I seek to reflect on these issues and advocate the need for social change. As an artist with historical mining family connections, my work also seeks to recognise, celebrate, and preserve the heritage of bygone industries such as coal mining. My paintings aim to invite those viewers who 'were there' to reconnect with their own personal memories of mining, while sparking curiosity and connection for contemporary audiences.

The development of my creative practice has involved years of experimentation and continues to evolve. Influenced by artists, such as Frank Auerbach, I work with a wide range of materials and techniques, often reworking multiple layers to create richly textured surfaces. Inspired also by Jackson Pollock, I employ energetic and gestural mark-making that seeks to evoke the narratives that inspire each work.

Through my practice, I aim to create paintings that raise awareness for contemporary social issues and give visual form to the stories, experiences, and ideas that might otherwise remain unseen.

Beneath the Surface

Exhibition Overview

Unveil and rediscover the significant and often overlooked contribution of an industry once known as 'the backbone of the nation'.

Through their daily labour, miners sought little more than to provide for their families and keep them safe, warm, and secure. In doing so, they extracted the coal that powered homes, communities, and industries across the country. Take a moment to reflect on their hard work, sacrifices, fears, and triumphs. Their often-undervalued skills, determination, and resilience shaped generations and left a lasting mark on the communities in which they lived and worked.

Their heritage deserves to be recognised, celebrated, and preserved for future generations.

Consider now what lay 'beneath the surface'.



Beneath the Surface

Artwork Price List

All artworks are sold as displayed.

What Lies Beneath - £495

Acrylic, ink, charcoal, and pastels on board (60 cm x 85 cm)

Winding Gear - £385

Mixed media on canvas (60 cm x 45 cm)

Descent - £295

Acrylic and collage on board (42 cm x 60 cm)

Dook Routes - £595

Acrylic on board (60 cm x 90 cm)

Woodpecker Work - £385

Mixed media on canvas (43 cm x 60 cm)

Humphing Hunnerweights - £385

Mixed media on board (32 cm x 75 cm)

On Their Knees - £495

Mixed media on canvas (60 cm x 60 cm)

Pit Checks - £385

Mixed media on canvas (28 cm x 36 cm both panels)

Pit Canary - £495

Mixed media on board (43 cm x 60 cm)

Snap Tin - £495

Acrylic on canvas (50 cm x 60 cm)

Leak - £385

Acrylic and ink on canvas (40 cm x 50 cm)

Black Lung - £495

Mixed media on canvas (57 cm x 57 cm)

Rescue at the Michael - £385

Mixed media on canvas (30 cm x 40 cm both panels)

Charge of the Blue Light Brigade, Orgreave 1984 - £595

Mixed media on canvas (120 cm x 40 cm)

Winding Gear - £195

Charcoal on board (42 cm x 60 cm)

For any enquiries, please contact the artist at:

Email - paul.mcginity@hotmail.com

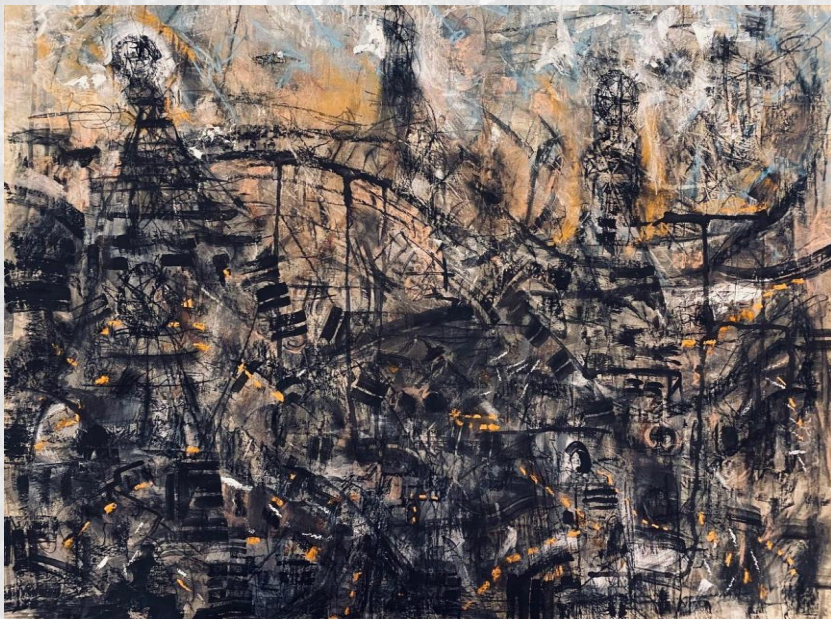
Website - paulmcginityart.com

Facebook/Instagram - [mcginity1604](#)

What Lies Beneath

Acrylic, ink, charcoal, and pastel on board (60 cm x 85 cm)

The phrase 'backbone of the nation' often referred to the historical significance of the coal mining industry, particularly coal mining, in fuelling the national economy, providing a great source of pride for mining communities. This artwork seeks to present an alternative view to the traditional aesthetic-driven landscape painting and instead reminds us of the often-forgotten significant efforts of the miner. Expressive energy evoked through gestural brushwork coupled with abstract shapes, lines, and colours suggest intense industrious mining activities in a subterranean landscape.



Winding Gear

Mixed media on canvas (60 cm x 45 cm)

In coal mining, winding gear, also known as a headframe or winding tower, is the tall structure built over a mine shaft to support the hoisting equipment. Its primary function is to provide a stable platform for the sheave wheels, often known as pulleys. The pulleys manage the cables for raising and lowering cages containing miners, coal, skips, and other equipment between the surface and underground levels.

These strange anthropomorphic structures have become the iconic symbol for mining acting as the vital link between the pit's surface and its deep coal face.



Descent

Acrylic and collage on board (42 cm x 60 cm)

In coal mining, a cage is an enclosed platform or lift used to transport miners, materials, and coal up and down the mine shaft. These cages are suspended on a steel winding rope controlled by a winding engine at the surface. They are an essential part of the winding gear that moves everything and everyone to and from the underground workings.

Recalled memories tell of the thrill and shock of an overspeed winding engine trip, resulting in the cages, and up to seventy miners riding on the top and bottom cage decks, bouncing up and down like puppets on a string, stretching and contracting until balance returned. This fear of grim death was followed by relief and the outbreak of laughter as the cage recovered its normal status.



Dook Routes

Acrylic on canvas (60 cm x 90 cm)

A dook was an inclined roadway in a coal mine and a vital route for men and materials. At Seafield Colliery in Kirkcaldy, Fife, the deepest parts of these dooks went 4,000 feet below sea level.

These underground mazes of dooks, roads, and tunnels are difficult to picture. One can only imagine the increase in heat and humidity as the miners descended. Miners would often remove their orange jackets, sometimes only working in their underpants, boots, and belt.

I am intrigued by how these complex systems of dooks were interconnected like the mining communities they served. The intention here was to avoid overly figurative elements and instead focus on the underground maze as it descends into the black depths.



Woodpecker Work

Mixed media on canvas (43 cm x 60 cm)

Woodpecker Work refers to the old, labour-intensive method of extracting coal by hand before mechanical and explosive methods became standard. This slow process of chipping away at the coal face with small hand tools draws a comparison to the repetitive, pecking motion of a woodpecker. The term is now used to evoke the difficulty and physical strain endured by coal miners in the past.

This artwork seeks to emulate the coal extraction task by chipping at the canvas support to reveal the underlying layers. The occasional splashes and sprays of bright colour is intended to suggest that, despite their strength-sapping efforts, the miners were nonetheless happy and intensely proud at their work.



Humphing Hunnerweights

Mixed media on board (32 cm x 75 cm)

Before the Mines and Collieries Bill of 1842, women and children played a big part in extracting coal from the mines. The narrowest shafts were as little as eighteen inches wide meaning children as young as four years old were forced to crawl into these tight spaces to retrieve the coal. Women were also employed to carry large and heavy baskets of coal on their backs as they climbed the numerous steep flights of ladders to reach the pithead.

The narrow and vertical dimensions in this artwork aim to offer a sense of vertigo and danger when looking at the zigzagging ladder system with its staging platforms. The suggestive small climbing figures represent the women hauling the backbreaking coal to the surface.



On Their Knees

Mixed media on canvas (60 cm x 60 cm)

Coal miners wore knee pads for protection while working in cramped low-seam mines where they had to crawl or kneel for extended periods. They also prevented minor cuts, scrapes, and more serious issues like bursitis, a painful inflammation around the joints caused by prolonged pressure. The sponge-like material provided essential padding to help absorb impact and make the work less painful.

This artwork's title could also be considered as an analogy for the significantly exhausting and brave efforts of the miner in the bowels of the earth to earn a living for their families.

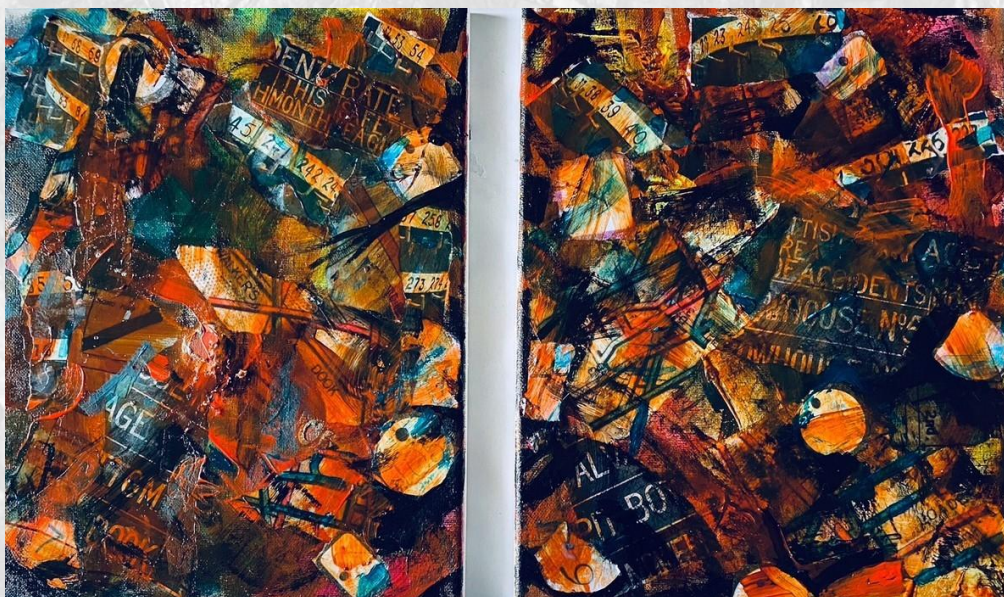


Pit Checks

Mixed media on canvas (28 cm x 36 cm both panels)

Pit tokens or checks were metal discs, often brass, issued to miners as a form of identification and to track their presence underground. Two tokens were issued to each miner at the start of a work shift. One would be placed and retained in a box at the pit surface, while the other would be kept safely by the miner until his eventual return to the surface. Any discrepancies in the token numbers at the end of a shift would trigger investigation as to the whereabouts of the missing miner.

The underground tokens also served a more sombre purpose. In the event of a fatal accident or explosion, the tokens were used to identify the bodies. Informed by the same narrative as *Rescue at the Michael*, this painting incorporates some contextual collage imagery of pit accident boards, underground maps, and pit checks to reflect the daily danger of working in the mine.



Pit Canary

Mixed media on board (43 cm x 60 cm)

From the late nineteenth into the twentieth century, canaries were taken into coal mines to detect dangerous gases, such as carbon monoxide. Canaries being more sensitive to these gases than humans, their distress signals, like reduced activity or gasping, alerted miners to evacuate. This painting recognises and celebrates their invaluable contribution to the health and safety of miners.

Perhaps there is an element of fortune for the purposes of this artwork in that canaries are yellow by nature. This yellow can be considered symbolic of potential danger, particularly when coupled with the surrounding use of black making it a symbol of caution and warning. The hazard in this scenario, of course, refers to the perpetually dangerous mining environment.



Snap Tin

Acrylic on canvas (50cm x 60 cm)

Snap tins were known in Scotland, particularly in Fife, as piece boxes used to carry the men's sandwiches. The snap tin was perfectly shaped and curved at the top for the Mothers Pride Scottish plain or square bread.

A traditional miner's piece was a sandwich typically made with cheese and jam with the boxes usually containing two pieces. The tins were rodent proof as the top part slipped over the bottom part was sturdy enough for the conditions. The piece, often dirty as a result of the surrounding coal dust, was usually washed down with cold tea contained in a metal water bottle, latterly replaced by the vacuum flask.



Leak

Acrylic and ink on canvas (40 cm x 50 cm)

Mixtures of flammable gases in coal mines were known as firedamp, primarily consisting of methane. When ignited by a naked flame, a violent explosion might occur, potentially raising a coal dust cloud and a greater explosion. Major tragedies include Blantyre (215 deaths), Udston (73 deaths), and Valleyfield (33 deaths). These disasters demonstrate the lethal threat of underground gas accumulation for miners.

This work aims to capture the raw, destructive energy of a firedamp explosion through a highly chaotic composition and heavily layered use of materials. A deliberately restricted colour palette has been used to evoke the suffocating, underground environment of a mine shaft. The fine, energetic splatters of fiery orange and specks of white mimic the chaotic release of sparks. The pops of bright blue provide a stark, eerie contrast, embodying the volatile chemical nature of the gases that trigger the sudden disaster.



Black Lung

Mixed media on canvas (57 cm x 57 cm)

Black lung, known as pneumoconiosis, is caused by the long-term inhalation of respirable coal dust. This led to irreversible lung inflammation and scarring. The chronic disease slowly suffocated miners causing thousands of untracked, premature deaths across Scotland.

The focal point of this artwork represents a chest X-ray drawing attention to the devastating long-term health impact of working in mining environments. The paint has been applied thickly to create an impasto effect using a dark colour palette to set a gloomy scene.

The materials used in this work are integral to its meaning, creating a direct, physical connection with the realities of coal mining. Embedded within the surface are pieces of coal, coal dust, shards of wood, wire mesh, and blood-soaked bandages, each evoking the constant danger and physical risks faced by miners underground.

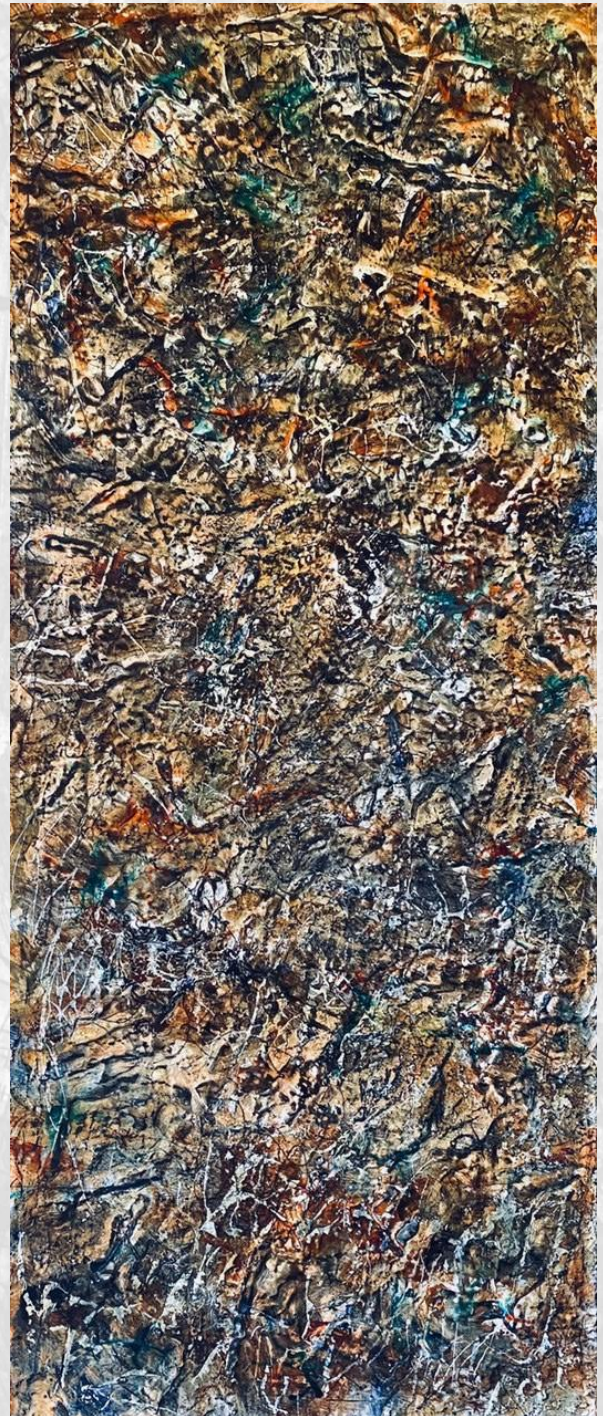


Beneath

Acrylic on board (32 cm x 75 cm)

This artwork avoids the incorporation of mining elements with texture being the sole subject matter. The hope however is that it will still resonate with the experienced miner. The tactile qualities perhaps triggering deeply hidden memories and emotions of the raised three-dimensional surfaces, colours, and shapes encountered in this underground landscape.

From the bitter taste of coal dust lingering in the mouth to the loud grinding of the shearers cutting the coal face, this artwork invites the viewer to consider the smells, sounds, textures, and tastes that surrounded the miner as they clocked into work and descended into the underground mine.

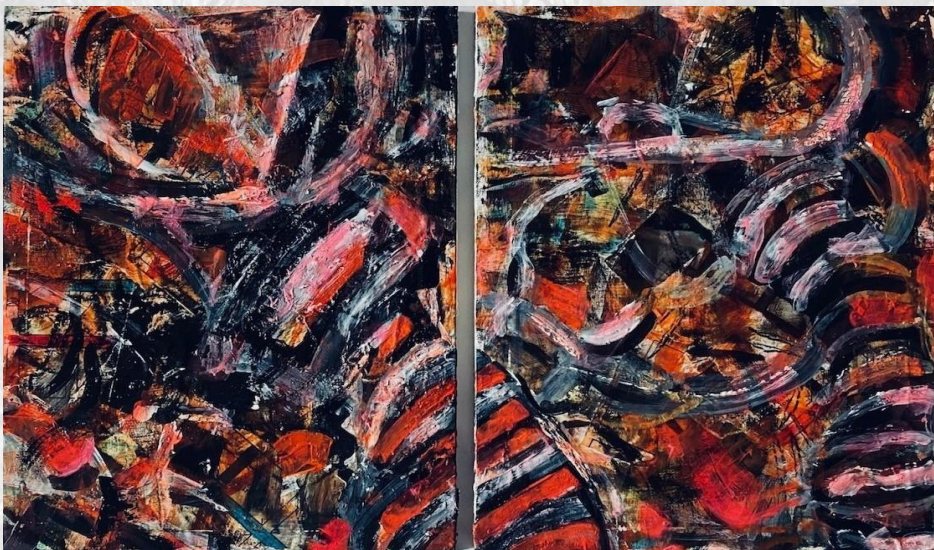


Rescue at the Michael

Mixed media on canvas (30 cm x 40 cm both panels)

In September 1967, the nation united in grief following the pit disaster at the Michael Colliery in East Wemyss, which marked the darkest day in Fife's mining history. Nine miners lost their lives to this accident, including three men whose bodies were never recovered. Following the official accident investigation, the pit was closed down for economic reasons. The closure ultimately left the families of the lost miners condemned to a sense of perpetual grief and caused collective devastation for the mining communities who lost their livelihoods.

This artwork reflects on the constant risk of danger and potential accidents miners were subjected to on a daily basis as they tried to make a living for their families. At the same time, the artwork recognises the heroes involved in any rescue attempt, who routinely and unselfishly put their own lives at risk to save the lives of others.



Charge of the Blue Light Brigade, Orgreave 1984

Mixed media on canvas (120 cm x 40 cm)

One of the major narratives continually rising to the surface of my research is the so-called Battle of Orgreave. This relays the events of 18 June 1984, when a massive injustice was perpetrated on a field beside the Orgreave Coking Plant near Sheffield. A fundamentally peaceful picket by miners was bulldozed by a form of public-order policing to which many demonstrations have since been subjected. Hundreds of police carrying short and long riot shields targeted unarmed miners with truncheons and inflicted serious injuries.

Key graphic moments included miners being dragged and throttled on the ground, mounted police on horses charging through crowds, and batons being mercilessly and deliberately aimed to cause serious injury. As one of the most significant recent examples of social injustice, such a powerful narrative deserves to be retold. This painting offers my personal representation.

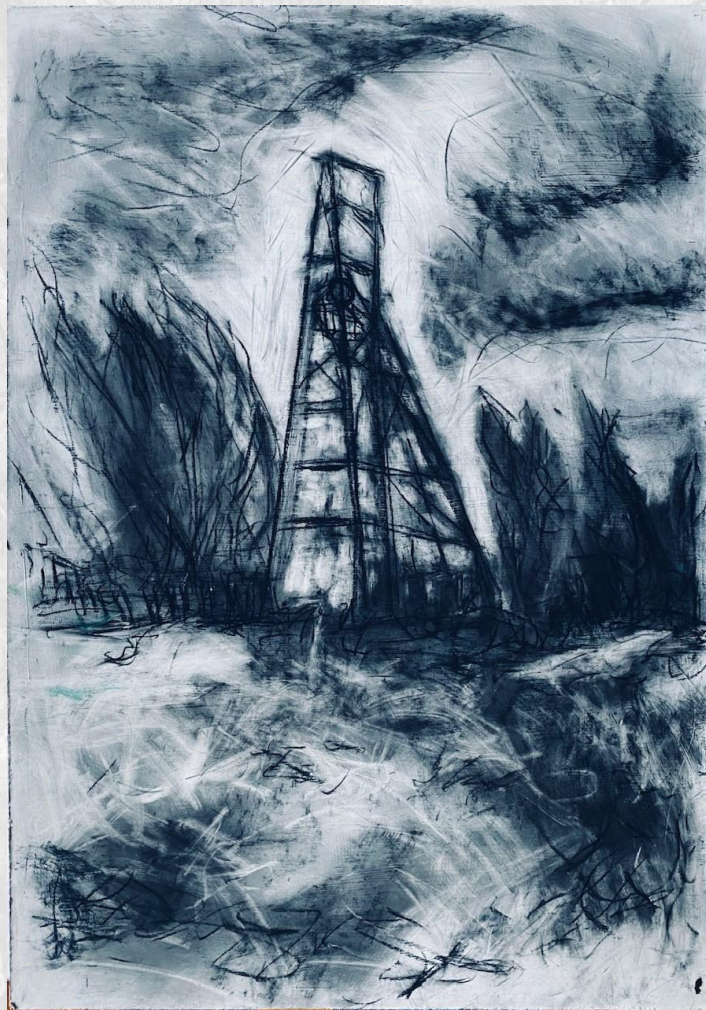


Winding Gear

Charcoal on board (42 cm x 60 cm)

When the pits closed in Scotland, headframes were typically demolished and scrapped. Miners were left unemployed and felt betrayed by these closures, viewing them as personal attacks on their culture and communities.

Today, the few winding gear structures that remain act as towering monuments to commemorate the miners who fought fiercely to preserve Scotland's rich coal mining heritage.





Link to STV news coverage of Paul McGinty's first exhibition.

