

Ivy, Nettles, Twisted Bramble



The Ark

Activities created by Duffy Mooney Sheppard



In the autumn, I take a bowl and go out looking for blackberries. Even in the city you can find places where they grow - overgrown parks, abandoned lane ways. On a quiet dirt road, I found myself alone, peacefully hunting ripe berries, when I heard a rustling sound. Probably a black bird I thought, but I leaned down to find out. Crouching I peeked into the shadows, under the twisting brambles. At first nothing - but then - I see it. A dark hazel brown eye, wide and staring. A black glossy coat of fur...

Meeting The Púca

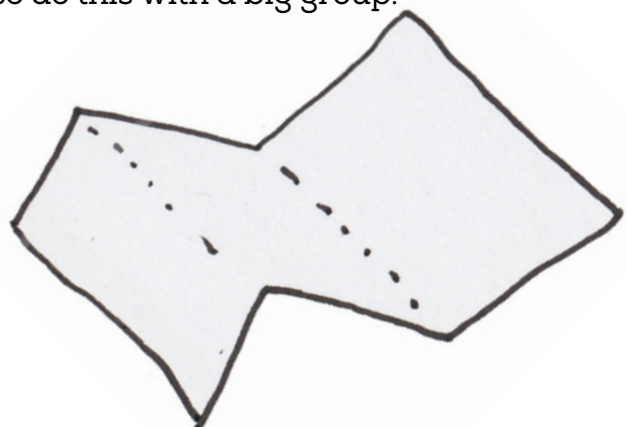
Some might say that what I saw was a dark black, wild rabbit. A big and beautiful one. So completely amazing and then gone in a flash. But there was something otherworldly about it. Eddie Lenihan is an old Irish storyteller and I believe he might tell us that this wasn't a rabbit at all. This was a meeting with the Irish fairy - The Púca.

The Púca is a shapeshifter, a mischievous trickster fairy. Sometimes appearing as part animal and part human or a mix up of all sorts. Let's play a drawing game to start.

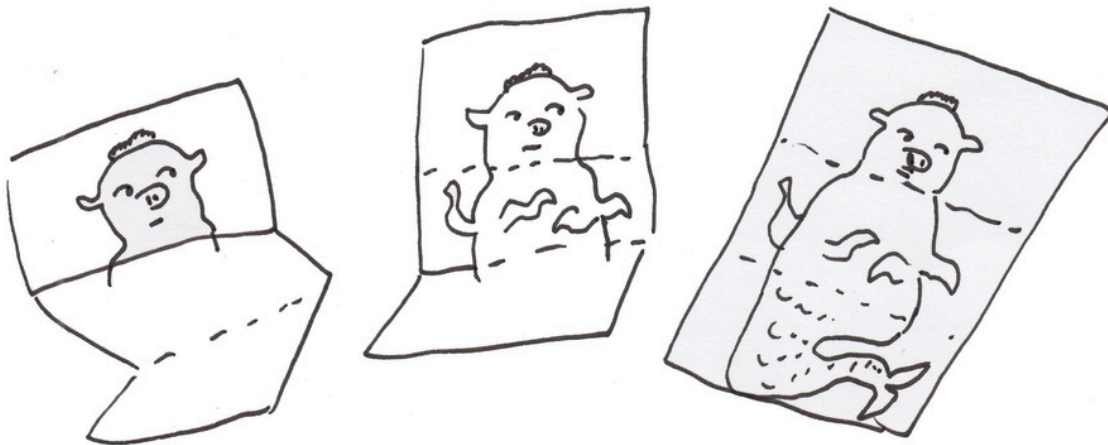
Exercise 1: The Exquisite Corpse

This exercise was made famous by The Surrealist art movement. It is called The Exquisite Corpse, which means the Wonderful/Amazing Body. You will need at least two people to do this drawing, You can also do this with a big group.

First fold a piece of paper in 3 like this. . .



- One person draws the head, neck and shoulders of the Púca. Making sure to hide your drawing from everyone else.
- Then fold it to hide your drawing so the next person will draw the body in the next blank section. Before you hand it to them, draw the edge of the shoulders down a little bit from the top of the page as a guide so they know where to start their drawing.
- They draw the body and then they fold it and the next person draws the legs (tails, tentacles, claws or whatever).
- When you open the page you will find a very surprising mixed up creature.



You can do this exercise again and again. I have played it for 20 years and it is always fun and interesting!

Exercise 2: Blackberry Ink

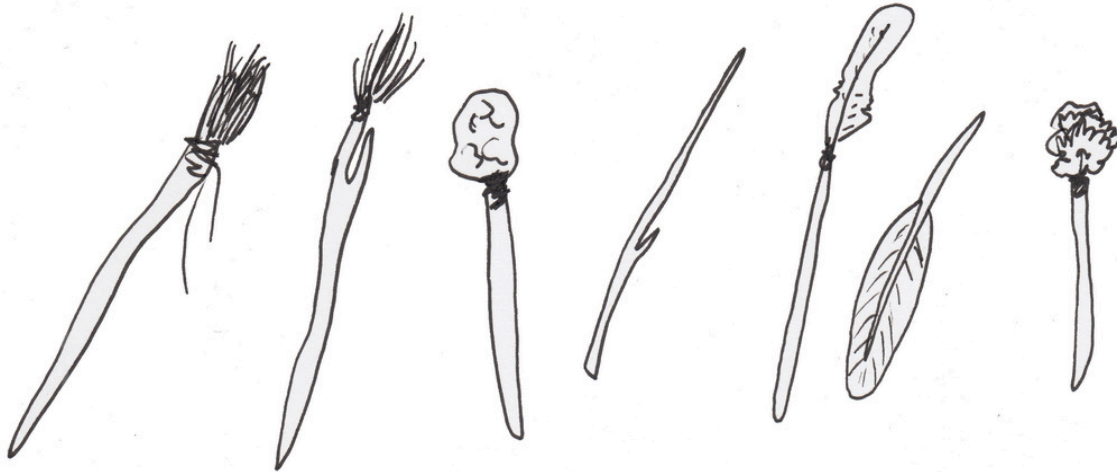
Materials:

Blackberries, gloves, pot, potato masher, jars with lids, sieve/cheesecloth, household vinegar, salt. Optional: gum arabic (available in good art supply shops)

- Pick a bowl full of Blackberries, out of season you can buy frozen blackberries and they work great too.
- Simmer the berries in a saucepan with a small amount of water to prevent them from burning, cook them gently for about fifteen minutes.
- Once soft, mash the berries using a potato masher, a fork, or any tool you have available.
- Next, strain the mixture through a sieve into a bowl to remove the pulp, then pass the liquid through a muslin cloth (or coffee filter) to achieve a smoother consistency. It's a good idea to wear gloves during this step, as berry juice can leave stubborn stains on your hands.
- For every cup of liquid you obtain, stir in one teaspoon of salt and one teaspoon of white vinegar. You can add half a teaspoon at a time of gum arabic to thicken the ink, this is optional.
- Pour it into a sterilized glass jar and store it in a cool, dark place away from direct sunlight—your ink should stay usable for around six months.

Exercise 3: Make a paint brush**Materials:**

- Collect sticks - a few different ones that are very long or short can be fun to try.
- To make the bristles: forage for different materials to experiment with, this will depend on where you can forage. Examples: A tuft of grass, feathers, sheep's wool, moss (Sphagnum moss is particularly good), seaweed.
- If collecting bird feathers, it's important to wash the feathers with washing up liquid and always remember to wash your hands afterwards.

**Exercise 4: A Púca Portrait****Materials:**

- A big sheet of paper - A3 or bigger
- Homemade ink & brushes
- Your exquisite corpse sketches for reference

Test out your brushes and ink before you start. Get a feel for which ones you like or how you might use them in your painting.

Try drawing lines, wobbly shapes, dots, swirls, faces....

Now on a big sheet of paper, draw a portrait of the Púca. You can copy from your earlier drawings or just use them to inspire you. The Púca is always shifting shape so you can always shift your ideas. There are no 'wrong' ideas, nothing is too strange, so go wild!

