

# PROFILE

Hugh Lane both give their coveted stamp of approval.

In 2006, the title painting in Martin's *Storm* exhibition at the Green on Red was bought by The Hugh Lane. This led to a new solo show, at The Hugh Lane, which opens on October 15. On top of that, Martin will unveil a new permanent sculpture, "The Size of Vision", commissioned by the Irish Museum of Modern Art to sit on its gateposts. This month, his work is also part of a group show in Brussels, in the *Yo, Mo' Modernism* exhibition at the Centre for Contemporary Non-Objective Art (CCNOA).

**A**t the moment, hanging in Fergus Martin's studio is a sister painting to the one bought by The Hugh Lane. Elegant and elongated, the rectangular format is painted in a moody brown and white. "I made a colour that scared me," he says. "I'm quite often scared of things. It wouldn't mean you'd run away from it, you just work with it, being scared."

The foreboding evoked by the painting is certainly unnerving, but Martin's fear seems to be something he has learnt to live with. Quite literally, in some ways. The window from his bedroom opens out very suddenly – anyone with vertigo could find themselves in a faint. Back at the painting, meanwhile, the depth of colour he has created is something that a viewer is also in danger of falling into.

"Even on close-up inspection you see marks, I love flat depth," he says. "I know people associate that with minimalism, and people talk about that in terms of what you have removed. But I don't ever think of my work in terms of what's removed, I think about my work as simply I can't get enough. I'm greedy for things. Even if the end shape or result is a very bare piece of work."

It's this contradiction which gives Martin's work its dynamism – although the compositions are bare and stark, when he finds an expressive colour, he uses it hungrily. This is where his greed comes in: he says that he paints layer after layer, and will sometimes find he has gone too far, and the work is ruined.

On another wall is a piece of work that also gives Martin the creeps. It's a close-

## ALL ABOUT FERGUS

In October, IMMA unveils a new sculpture by Fergus Martin called "The Size of Vision". Commissioned to sit on the gate columns at the museum entrance, this will be a permanent fixture. According to IMMA, "The work has a timeless quality designed to unite the museum's historic setting with its function as the country's leading centre for modern and contemporary art."

Also in October, Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane opens a solo show with new works by Martin. "[Director] Barbara Dawson told me, when she saw the painting they bought, it was the colour she was bonded to," says Martin. "I said, 'You couldn't have made me happier.'"

Martin has had a long relationship with the Green on Red Gallery, owned by Jerome Ó Drisceoil. "There is a deep emotional content to his work, but its effect can be spiritual and calming," says Ó Drisceoil. "His forms, such as the long, elongated paintings, have to be looked at a bit more carefully – this testing of the eye is very intentional."

up photograph of a car headlight. Protruding and ogling, there is something quite violent about the shapes, along with the antiseptic, reflective surface.

He describes the process. "I woke up one morning and looked across and thought, I'm scared," he says. "Can I show that? I'm scared. I've never felt so exposed. It's an emotional thing. It's not because it's new, I'm never afraid of showing anything if it's right."

"That is scaring me, because I had one of those rare moments of being very exposed. I don't care what people think, it's more like I have a cut and the cut is healing, but I open the cut. And I don't mean that in a psychological way, going back into my childhood. I mean that I'm tender, I'm open. It made me feel very open. I'm very excited by it."

Throughout the interview, Fergus Martin reiterates that he dislikes neatness – not in the physical sense. He lives in a serene space, serving up tea in a beautiful china cup. What he really means is neatness in interpretations of his work. He seems to dislike the idea that someone could say he created X because of Y.

Nevertheless, he does accept that some of his new work has been influenced by his physical condition – Martin has had chronic glaucoma for the past ten years and, as a consequence, has difficulties seeing out of one eye.

"I've called [the photograph of the car headlight] 'Oedipus'," he says. "It has hugely to do with experiences of mine to do with eyesight. I was talking to a friend who said, 'it's making me think of that Greek legend where the figure blinded himself'. Of course, it was Oedipus. I thought, I'm on a high with this. It's not even a high, it's some kind of exposed energy with this piece."

I loved the drama of that notion and I just thought, that's right."

**F**ergus Martin was born in Cork, but spent his earliest years in Brighton – his father, a doctor, was English, and moved the family there. He died when Fergus was seven, however, and his mother moved the family of four boys back to Dublin. She was a physiotherapist and continued to work while bringing them up.

"My mother is curious, she's very interested in the history of religion, she reads and she studies – she wants to find out things, which I think is wonderful," he says. "I remember once we were on holiday in Italy and she came in and said,

**ABOVE** "Storm", 2006, acrylic on canvas, Collection Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane

'I'm really happy now, I see how they empty those dustbins.' That excited me because I love that thing. You wouldn't want to rely on me to fix something in your house, I just love looking at the mechanics of things behind the scenes."

On his father's side, Martin's uncle was a talented caricaturist – he recalls a room in his grandparents' house being lined with



PHOTOGRAPH BY DENIS MORTELL

**"I HAD ONE OF THOSE RARE MOMENTS OF BEING VERY EXPOSED. I DON'T CARE WHAT PEOPLE THINK, IT'S MORE LIKE I HAVE A CUT AND THE CUT IS HEALING, BUT I OPEN THE CUT."**