

Donation of James McKenna Works to IMMA

The donation of two works by leading Irish sculptor James McKenna to the Irish Museum of Modern Art, made by Desmond, Vivienne, Kate and Bebhinn Egan, was celebrated today (Thursday 18 November 2010) at an event at the Museum. The more recent donation *Aisling*, Scariff, 1964, is one of McKenna's early works, showing his focus on the human body expressed using classical means. It is currently on show as part of the Museum's hugely popular exhibition, *The Moderns: the Arts in Ireland from the 1900s to the 1970s*. This generous gift follows a donation by the Egan family in 2007 of McKenna's granite sculpture *Ferdia for nÁth/Ferdia at the Ford*, 1989, which is on permanent display beside the west avenue at IMMA. The lunch at IMMA, which was attended by many of McKenna's associates, also marked the tenth anniversary of his death in 2000.

Born in Dublin in 1933, **James McKenna** was a leading figure in both visual arts and literary circles in Ireland from the 1960s until his death in 2000. He studied at the National College of Art, was a founding member of the Independent Artists' Group and was also active in the Sculptors' Society of Ireland. In 1960 he was awarded the Macaulay Fellowship, which allowed him to travel to Florence to study the work of the great Renaissance masters, particularly Michelangelo whose work continued to influence his practice throughout his career.

McKenna's work was also informed by Irish history and mythology, juxtaposing figures such as Wolfe Tone and Pádraig Pearse with *Ferdia* and *Oisín*. He made further works in response to contemporary events, including the Northern Troubles. Also a noted playwright and poet, his play *The Scatterin'* about emigration was one of the highpoints of the 1960 Dublin Theatre Festival and was later staged in London's West End. In 1969 he founded the Rising Ground theatre company for which he was writer, director and designer. He was elected a member of Aosdána in 1983.

James McKenna exhibited widely and his work was included in many international sculpture exhibitions in the 1980s and '90s. A retrospective of his work was held at the Riverbank Arts Centre, Newbridge, Co Kildare, in 2002, where the principal gallery was named in his honour. A major retrospective of McKenna's work was presented at IMMA in 2007-08. In addition to those presented by the Egan family, the Museum also has three further works by the artist in its Collection: two sculptures *Nude Girl Standing*, 1965, and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the G.P.O.*, 1990, and a work on paper, *The Royal Hospital Where William's Soldiers Recuperated After Aughrim* in 1692, 1969.

Commenting on the importance of the donations to IMMA's Collection, IMMA Director Enrique Juncosa said: "The donation of these two monumental works by James McKenna significantly enhances the holdings of the artist's work by IMMA. *Aisling*, Scaring is not only a major work of McKenna from the 1960s, where he mastered the use of wood, but one of the most significant works of his whole career. *Ferdia at the Ford* is a later work made in stone which can be permanently displayed outdoors. They are both excellent examples of the artist's interests and achievements".

Museum opening hours:

Tuesday – Saturday: 10.00am - 5.30pm

except Wednesday: 10.30am - 5.30pm

Sundays and Bank Holidays: 12noon - 5.30pm

Closed: Mondays and 24 – 27 December

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