



Seán Keating, *Men of the South*, 1921-22. Collection Crawford Art Gallery, Cork. © Estate of Seán Keating, IVARO Dublin, 2022.

Press Release 18/07/2022

A centenary celebration of an iconic War of Independence artwork goes on display in Cork. Crawford Art Gallery is set to open its new exhibition, *As They Must Have Been*, which focuses on Seán Keating's iconic group portrait, *Men of the South*.

Gathering together key artworks, the exhibition tells the story of *Men of the South* and Keating's quest to capture contemporary history.

Completed in 1922 in the aftermath of the Irish War of Independence, the painting depicts six members of the **No.2 (North) Cork Brigade**. Members of the Brigade visited the artist's Dublin studio during the truce of 11 July 1921 to sit for their portrait. Keating would later remark: "They trooped in, dressed and armed very much as they must have been on many an ambush."

The exhibition also provides the public with a rare – and possibly unique – opportunity to encounter the painting with its companion, ***An IRA Column*** (1921), which is on kind loan from Áras an Uachtaráin and President Michael D. Higgins. It is thought that the paintings may not have been together since 1924.

As They Must Have Been places *Men of the South* in context and seeks to draw out stories of the individuals depicted, the wider theatre of war, and the circumstances surrounding the making of a masterpiece.

Exhibited at the Munster Fine Arts Club in 1922, *Men of the South* excited discussion in the Cork press and was ultimately purchased for Crawford Art Gallery's collection in 1924 through the **Gibson Bequest Fund**.

Accompanying these historic artworks are rare oral history recordings collected by **Irish Life & Lore**, which provide verbal accounts and fascinating insights from people connected with the painting.

Curator of the exhibition, Dr Michael Waldron, notes that: *"In addition to marking the centenary of Seán Keating's Men of the South, the exhibition also offers a broader exploration of Ireland a century ago. How did artists participate in conceiving of a new Ireland and who were some of the voices in the emergent Irish Free State?"*

This centenary exhibition invites our visitors to reflect upon the possibility of art to shape or reshape our histories, with an eye to posterity and bearing witness to lives and events "as they must have been."

Alongside those works by Seán Keating, ***As They Must Have Been*** also features works by George Atkinson, Hugh C. Charde, Margaret Clarke, Paul Henry, Catherine Holland, Mainie Jellett, John Lavery, Louis le Brocquy, Séamus Murphy, Breda O'Donoghue-Lucci, William Rothenstein, Thomas Ryan, Oliver Sheppard, Estella Solomons, and Jack B. Yeats.

The exhibition is accompanied by a programme of free public tours and a special Heritage Week event: **Men of the South at 100: An Oral History** with Maurice O'Keeffe and Michael Waldron 5:30pm, Thursday 18 August, Crawford Art Gallery.

Mary McCarthy Director says *"Crawford Art Gallery will continue to explore the narratives around commemoration through our Collection, buildings and art works by contemporary artists. Simultaneously we are also researching the history of the building and the activities that were happening within the building and its environs during that timeframe in a programme, 'Building as Witness' which is supported by the Department*

of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media under the Decade of Centenaries initiative.”

ENDS

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More about Seán Keating

Seán Keating (1889-1977) is remembered as one of the most recognisable Irish artists of his generation. Having trained under William Orpen at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art, the Limerick native turned his intellect and academic realist style to numerous contemporary subjects in the early years of the Irish Free State. A regular visitor to the Aran Islands, Keating was President (1950-62) of the Royal Hibernian Academy. His work is represented in numerous public collections, including Crawford Art Gallery, National Gallery of Ireland, Irish Museum of Modern Art, and Gallery Oldham.

More about *Men of the South*

Men of the South (1921-22) was painted by Seán Keating at his Dublin studio in the months between the end of the Irish War of Independence and start of the Irish Civil War. Hand-picked by their commanding officer, Seán Moylan, the men depicted were real members of the No.2 (North) Cork

Brigade: Jim Riordan, Denis O'Mullane, Jim Cashman, John Jones, Roger Kiely, and Dan Browne. Having invited these men to his studio, Keating would later remember: "They trooped in, dressed and armed very much as they must have been on many an ambush."

In minutes from the Gibson Bequest Committee, dated 1 December 1923, George Atkinson is noted as stating "that he considered it good work; almost great work and far beyond one other work of the artist's which is in Harcourt Street Gallery (*Men of the West*) and quite equal to another purchased from Canada (*On His Keeping*)."

The painting's companion, *An IRA Column* (1921), is the first version that the artist attempted and includes additional figures, most notably Seán Moylan. *Men of the South* excludes Moylan, however, as it would have made him readily identifiable during the uncertain years of the early 1920s.

More about Crawford Art Gallery

Crawford Art Gallery is an Irish national cultural institution, dedicated to contemporary and historic visual art, located in a significant heritage building in the heart of Cork city. Offering a vibrant and dynamic programme of temporary exhibitions, it also houses a collection of national importance which tells a compelling story of Cork and Ireland over the last three centuries.

Originally built in 1724 as the city's Customs House, the Gallery is home to the famous Canova Casts, gifted to Cork two centuries ago. Featured in the gallery's collection of over 3,000 objects are contemporary artists Aideen Barry, Gerard Byrne, Maud Cotter, Dorothy Cross, Tacita Dean, and Sean Scully as well as much-loved works by Irish artists James Barry, Harry Clarke, Mainie Jellett, Seán Keating, Daniel Maclise, Norah McGuinness, Edith Somerville, and Jack B. Yeats.

An oasis of calm and tranquillity, Crawford Art Gallery is open seven days a week, free to enter, and a must-see for locals and tourists alike. Welcoming over 265,000 visitors annually, the Gallery boasts an award-winning Café in stunning surroundings, serving fresh local produce for which Cork is famous.

Opening Hours

Monday – Saturday 10am – 5pm

Late opening Thursday until 8pm

Sunday and Bank Holidays 11am – 4pm

Entry Free

Upcoming Exhibitions

MEAT AND POTATOES

16 July – 6 November 2022

DRAWING ROOM

9 September – 4 December 2022

TOURS

Free Tours Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays 2pm

Free Tours on Thursday 6.30 pm . This project is in support of the Night-Time Economy and funded by The Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.



**An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir,
Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán**
Department of Tourism, Culture,
Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media