



Daniel MacDonald (1820-1853), *The Village Funeral – An Irish Family by a Graveside* (Detail)

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Crawford Art Gallery acquires important Cork painting at Auction

Crawford Art Gallery is delighted to announce that it has acquired a significant art work for its collection at auction in Dublin. There was significant interest in the work from private collectors and international institutions.

The painting in question by Cork artist Daniel MacDonald (1820-1853), *The Village Funeral – An Irish Family by a Graveside during the Great Famine* is oil on Canvas. It is an important acquisition for the Gallery and also an important work to return to the City. The painting completes a suite of works concerning key aspects of Irish life in the mid-19th century

The Minister for Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht, Josepha Madigan T.D, says

“I am delighted that my Department was able to provide funding to the Crawford Art Gallery to enable it to secure this important painting for its collection. The Government will be investing €22m in the Crawford Art Gallery over the coming decade as part of Project Ireland 2040 and the growth of the gallery’s collection through acquisitions such as this will be a great compliment to this capital investment.”

The painting last changed hands in Bonham's of London in 1966 and was purchased by Peter Boydell of Westbourne Terrace, London.

Rose Mc Hugh Chair of Crawford Art Gallery says “this acquisition demonstrates a real commitment from Crawford Art Gallery to building our collection and ensuring works of national and international significance can be exhibited together in Cork”

The Village Funeral by Daniel MacDonald (1821-1853) depicts a scene of rural Irish mourning during the Famine era. More naturalistic and painterly than his earlier works, this undated painting is likely from the period in which the self-taught Cork artist made his celebrated *Eviction Scene* (c.1850).

MacDonald is nearly unique in his representation of rural life and customs in Ireland during the turbulent 1840s and 50s. The Crawford Art Gallery Collection holds a series of original drawings by the artist, in addition to larger paintings, *Bowling Match at Castlemary, Cloyne* (1842), *General Sir Rowland Smyth K.C.B.* (1845), *A Country Dance, or The Wedding Dance* (1848), and *Eviction Scene* (c.1850).

Mary McCarthy, Gallery Director expressed her "appreciation to all those who encouraged and supported the Gallery to acquire this work. This painting will contribute immensely to our 19th century collection and will certainly be a much sought after work by the public and researchers into the future. We are delighted to have secured it for the national collection".

Daniel MacDonald (1820-1853)

The Village Funeral – An Irish Family by a Graveside during the Great Famine
Oil on canvas, 47.5 x 56cm (18¾ X 22")

Further details on forthcoming display will be announced.

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More about the Crawford art gallery

Located in the heart of Cork city, The Crawford Art Gallery, a national cultural Institution, is a must see for locals and tourists alike. Welcoming almost 200,000 visitors a year the Crawford Art Gallery is home to an expansive collection featuring works from the 18th Century to present. It is also home to the famous 'Canova Casts', which were gifted to the city of Cork nearly two centuries ago. Well-known and loved 20th century Irish artists such as Seán Keating, Harry Clarke, John Lavery, Jack B. Yeats, Norah McGuinness, Gerard Dillon, and Muriel Brandt feature in the gallery's historic collection, while the modern collection features work by contemporary artists such as Eilis O'Connell, Maud Cotter and Hughie O'Donoghue. The Gallery hosts numerous temporary exhibitions by local, national and international artists showcasing visual art, performance and installations.

The architecture of the building combining the modern new galleries with the historical, gives a breath-taking backdrop to a collection of great national importance.

Learn and Explore

For details on the Learn and explore programme for guided tours, access and education, please visit our website: www.crawfordartgallery.ie

More about the Artist

Daniel Mac Donald, born in Cork in 1820, made his debut as an artist at the age of 13, when he contributed sketches to a work of literary endeavour, *The Tribute* (1833). By the age of 20, he was on the exhibition circuit in Cork, with accomplished paintings such as 'The Eagle's Nest, Killarney', and he exhibited three paintings with the Cork Art Union in its first year, also in 1841.

Aged 22, he was on the managing committee of the Art Union, where he exhibited eight works in 1842, including 'Sídhe Gaoithe/ The Fairy Blast'. Between 1840 and 1844, prior to his move to London, Daniel produced a prodigious number of paintings and sketches, and received high praise from local newspapers, notably *The Cork Examiner*.

The move to London was a success for Daniel. By May, 1845, many members of the royal family and of the aristocracy had sat for him, including Prince George and Princess Mary of Cambridge, Lady Anglesea, Lord Sudeley, and Lady Douro.

Around this time, Queen Victoria acquired a drawing, 'Returning from a Funeral', by MacDonald, which she kept in a precious album (to this day in the Royal Collections). A companion sketch hangs in Ireland's Great Hunger Museum.

In view of his new milieu, it is all the more extraordinary that MacDonald exhibited 'An Irish Peasant Family Discovering the Blight of their Store' in the heart of the Empire, and at the height of the Famine.

The Crawford Gallery was the first to recognize MacDonald's importance as a painter of Irish life and has highlighted the artist significance to other institutions.

Daniel Macdonald was the subject of a major exhibition that re-established him as one of the most talented, audacious and experimental artists of his time.¹ *In the Lion's Den: Daniel Macdonald, Ireland and Empire*, the first retrospective of this artist, took place in Ireland's Great Hunger Museum in 2016, and showed Macdonald to be an audacious artist who evolved a spirited form of realism that countered British stereotypes of Irish people – an acute observer of everyday life and national character. Macdonald uniquely, in art, drew attention to the most cataclysmic event of the epoch, the Great Famine. The death of one million people, the emigration of another million, and the subsequent depletion of the population of Ireland by one half made the Famine the single worst demographic catastrophe of the nineteenth century.

Prior to the emergence of this painting, Macdonald held the distinction of having painted the only known representation of the Famine, *An Irish Peasant Family Discovering the Blight of their Store*, exhibited in London in 1847 (National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin, bequeathed by Cecil Woodham Smith, author of *Great Hunger: Ireland 1845-49*). *The Funeral* is thus an exceptionally important milestone, not only in Irish art history, but in international art history and visual culture. There is no other known painting of a Famine funeral. Moreover, aesthetically, it would seem to predate Gustave Courbet's shocking Realist painting, *Burial at Ornans* (1849-50). As only one of two paintings of the Famine, contemporary with the Famine, its importance in Irish art and social history cannot be overstated.

Far from the artisan stock they were assumed to be, the Macdonalds were Scottish bluebloods. Daniel's great grandfather Alexander Macdonald eloped with a young aristocrat, Lady Jane Johnstone, settling in Cork under the name McDaniel. His father James was thus an Annandale claimant; the Annandale peerage dispute spanned 193 years, until the House of Lords finally settled the matter in 1985. James' claim, complicated by historical issues of lunacy and illegitimacy, was disallowed. James, however, was confirmed

¹ See Niamh O'Sullivan, *In the Lion's Den: Daniel Macdonald, Ireland and Empire* (Quinnipiac University Press, 2016).

as the 8th Baron Macdonald of Castleton, Isle of Skye. Had Daniel outlived his father, he would have inherited this title.

To pursue their claim, the family left Cork for London in the mid-1840s. In 1847, Macdonald returned to Ireland and travelled around the south and south-west, where he encountered scenes of appalling distress. This painting almost certainly was painted in 1847 and shows Macdonald to have been well informed about the parlous state of rural Ireland in the 1840s, and shows himself to be remarkably sensitive to the plight of the people.