

## A visit to an exhibition at Crawford Gallery Cork

A Visit to Crawford Gallery (part III) [https://youtu.be/jRKq\\_lgB83g](https://youtu.be/jRKq_lgB83g)

### Lucid Abnormalities 1 July – March 2021

in the preface of her book *The Demon Lover* Elizabeth Bowen's described the strange feelings of living through disruptions of World War II. She wrote: I felt one with, and just like, everyone else . . . We all lived in a state of lucid abnormality"

Brought up between Bowen's Court, a "big house" near Kildorrery in north Cork, and England, Elizabeth Bowen has been described as a writer who "felt most at home in mid-Irish Sea".

The war however brought out a new aspect in her relationship with her native country and fuelled her creativity. It gave her a sense of common purpose, making the deep uncertainties of her own identity merely part of the common human condition.

Curated by Dr Michael Waldron, *Lucid Abnormalities* draws on the feelings of living through our own 'strange time of uncertainty'. Dr Waldron's concept statement for the exhibition is found on the wall immediately inside the entrance to the gallery. In this he shares his ideas for bringing well known and loved works and placing them together with lesser known works from the Crawford Gallery's permanent collection and asks us to look at them in a new light.



lucid abnormalities

Thrust into a strange time of uncertainty, it is easy to feel on edge, to be unsure of how to behave or react, to have the impulse to escape or to be elsewhere. Moments of calm are held dear. Alone with our thoughts, the familiar might become alien, empathy may be coupled with suspicion, even anxiety. We relate to each other differently.

Forging new relationships and offering alternative contexts, this exhibition draws together familiar works from the collection by Margaret Clarke, Seán Keating, John Lavery, Daniel Maclise, Norah McGuinness, Edith Somerville, Mary Swanzy, and Jack B. Yeats, with lesser known works that are sometimes startling or troubling in mood or tone.

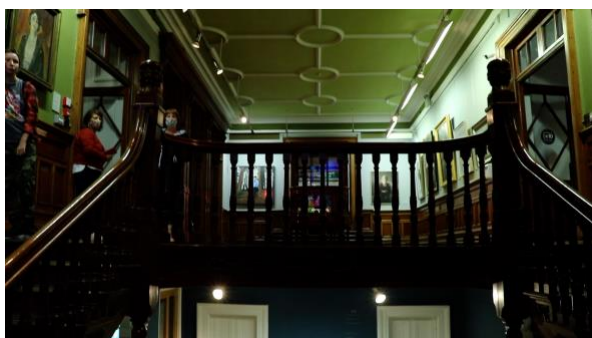
Even with more familiar works, rather than seeking a narrative or story in them we might instead consider other ways in which they speak to us. Somerville's *The Goose Girl* (1888), for instance, could be understood as a reluctance to face reality or a rude awakening, Lavery's *The Red Rose* (1923) as reflecting that which is longed for yet unattainable, and Keating's *Men of the South* (1921-22) as static, taut symbolism in hard times.

Joining these are paintings by Cecily Brennan, Sylvia Cooke-Collis, William Crozier, Elizabeth Magill, Hughie O'Donoghue, and Patrick Scott; an early work in mixed media by Dorothy Cross is set alongside an expression of becoming by Alice Maher; Suzanna Chan challenges stereotypes of gender and ethnicity; and other works form unexpected pairings that may disrupt attempts at traditional narrative understanding.

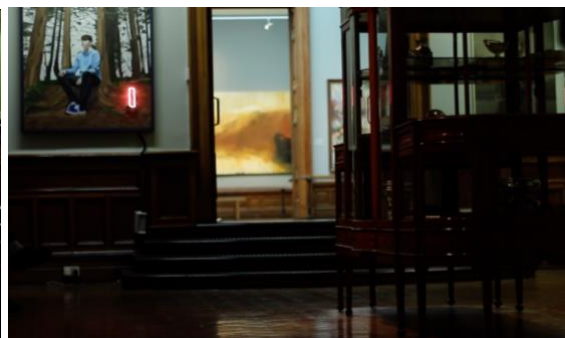
The lucid abnormalities between or within the works displayed in our historic Gibson Galleries (Floor 1) present an invitation to retune, explore, and experience parts of the collection through a variety of means – aesthetic, material, thematic, or historic. In thinking outside of the normal narrative displays, sometimes new ideas and associations emerge and can bring us forward.

Some voices are loud, others more subtle, yet all have something to say.

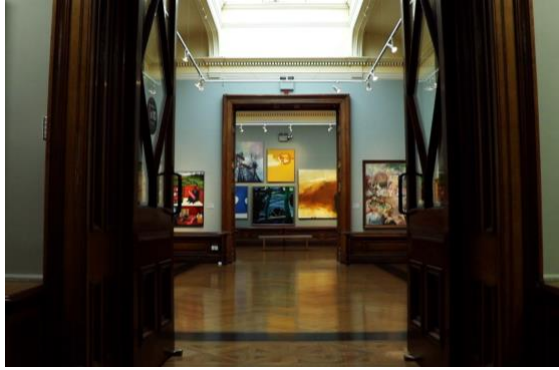
Curated by Dr Michael Waldron



The stairs to 1<sup>st</sup> floor



The cabinet made for the Gibson collection in 1920



The Gibson Galleries



Natural roof and track lighting

## The Gibson Galleries

'Lucid Abnormalities' is presented in the historic Gibson Galleries. The two adjoining rooms are named after Joseph Stafford Gibson, one of the most important benefactors to the gallery.

These rooms are part of part the new extension of 1864 and that included a magnificent mahogany staircase, appropriately embellished with carved wooden sheaves of barley, that leads to the panelled main landing and to three handsome, exhibition galleries.

The glass display cabinet, which Gibson had requested be made for the exhibition of his personal collection of coins, Spanish ceramics and silverware, can be seen on the landing and the works bought with the money he left are some of the Gallery's best known and loved.

<https://crawfordartgallery.ie/work-of-the-week-12-february-2020/>

### Lighting

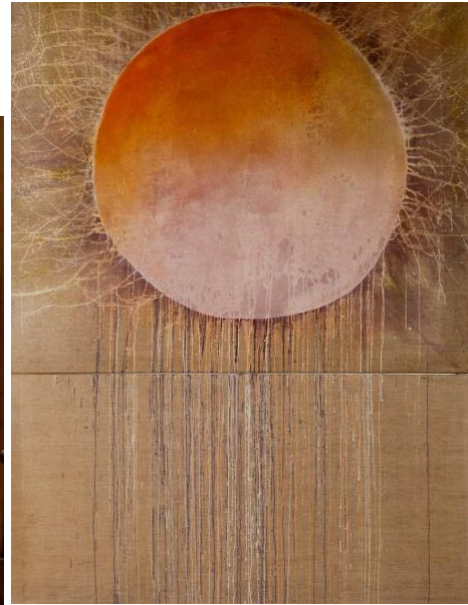
Large roof windows over the two main exhibition galleries were included as part of the design in 1864. These allowed in plenty of natural daylight but, in recent years these have been covered with a filament (light material) to control the brightness and better protect the works of art. Track lighting was also installed at a later date.

Track lighting is now the preferred choice for an art gallery because it so discreet but can create both warm and cool light, determined by colour temperature, it also has the added advantage of being able to aim spotlights where needed.

### Respond:

- Why do you think lighting is one of the most crucial components of an art gallery?
- How do you think it impacts on the appearance of the artwork?
- Which do you think is better, natural lighting or track lighting? Why do you think this?

## Selected works from the exhibition



*Diptych*, by Patrick Scott tempera on unprimed canvas, 197.5 x 152.3 cm.  
Bequeathed, by the Artist, in 2014.

#### *Diptych* by Patrick Scott (1921-2014)

This startling work likely dates to the mid-1960s, only a few years after the Kilbriain-born artist had dedicated himself to being a full-time artist.

Arresting the eye with its dazzling composition, the two canvases or *Diptych* not only reveals Scott's instinct for colour but can also be read as an expression of outrage. The bleached colouration, dripping solar halo, and unprimed canvas register the artist's protest to the testing of hydrogen bombs and other nuclear devices. In this context, the painting can be viewed in an eery and unsettling new Cold War light.

It is part of a series of 'device' paintings in which the artist registered his dismay by painting abstract 'explosions' to symbolise their terrifying beauty and to express his outrage that such weapons of mass destruction used with tragic consequences in 1945 in Japan were still being tested the mid 1960s.

Best known for his later 'gold paintings', Patrick Scott is noted for his dedication to pure abstraction. Having initially trained as an architect, the artist exhibited with the White Stag Group in 1944. He would go on to represent Ireland at the 30<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale (1960) and was elected a member of Aosdána in 1981. Scott was conferred with the title of Saoi ('wise one'), the highest honour for a living Irish artist, in 2007 by then President Mary McAleese. Patrick Scott died in February 2014 on the eve of the opening of a retrospective exhibition of his work at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin. He was 93.

<https://crawfordartgallery.ie/work-of-the-week-31-august-2020/>



*The Consultation*, by William Sheehan, 1917, oil on canvas, 69 x 80 cm. Donated.

*The Consultation* by William Sheehan (1894-1923)

Painted in 1917, *The Consultation* by William Sheehan holds a quiet, contemplative power for many visitors; its dynamic composition creating an intriguing, yet uncertain relationship between two seated figures.

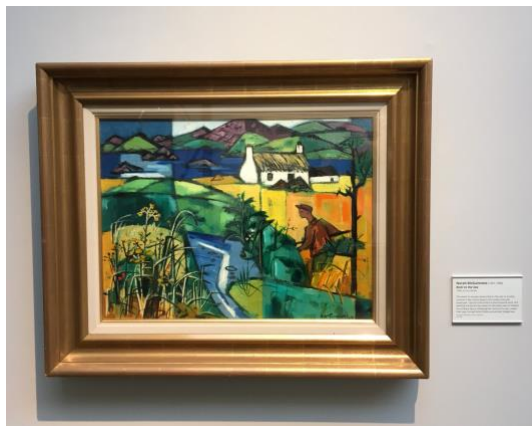
Depicting the interior of the artist's family home, his blending of two models - both his sister and the actress Caroline O'Connor - in the tense female figure suggests a less specific, more open meaning to the painting.

Among the numerous interpretations of this work, however, is that the withdrawn male figure imparts news of the death of O'Connor's two brothers, both of whom were killed in the First World War in 1917. The painting, therefore, may represent the impact of war on the home and on those anxiously awaiting the next letter. Sheehan's use of mirrors and still life serves to enhance the suspension of feeling in this moment, while the chair reflected in the background suggests emptiness or loss.

A native of Cork, artist William Sheehan studied at both the Crawford Municipal School of Art (now CIT Crawford College of Art & Design) and the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art (now National College of Art and Design).

In 1923, he became the first recipient of the Gibson Scholarship, which recognised the 'unusual talent and good habits' of an artist. At the time, expert advisor George Atkinson (1880-1941) noted that Sheehan was 'the most talented young man in Ireland, with the exception of [Seán] Keating.'

<https://crawfordartgallery.ie/work-of-the-week-11-november-2019/>



Norah McGuinness, *River to the Sea*, 1959, oil on canvas, 45 x 60 cm. Presented, 2006 (Great Southern Collection).

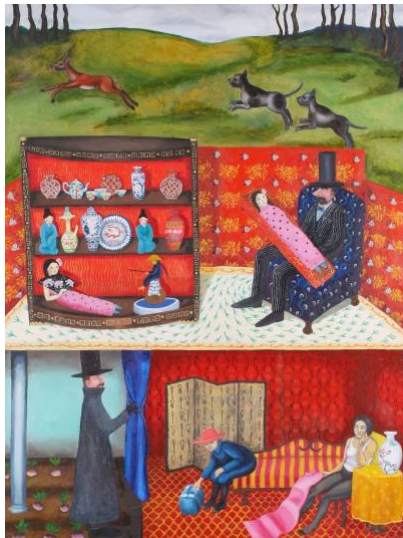
*River to the Sea* by Norah Mac Guinness (1901-1980)

Lyrical and luminous, *River to the Sea* (1959) is a boldly coloured landscape by Derry-born artist Norah McGuinness. A traditional thatched cottage, turf ricks, and rugged coastline set us firmly on the edge of the Atlantic, but the composition appears unusually fragmented. Almost like shards of a stained-glass window, the artist distils her subject into blocks of blues, greens, yellows, and purples, which are interspersed with finer details of foliage and flowers. A lone fisherman on the right animates the scene, while a strong arc sweeps through the canvas that at once suggests the course of the river, from foreground to background, and the changeable weather of the western seaboard. Is it a beating hot summer's day, or is change in the air?

In 1929, and at Mainie Jellett's suggestion, Norah McGuinness had studied with the Cubist painter André Lhote in Paris. Thirty years later, *River to the Sea* not only demonstrates the influence of the École de Paris (School of Paris) on her work, but the development of her own recognisable style, comprising of strong compositional choices and confident handling of colour.

Before this painting entered the collection, it resided in the Great Southern Hotel at Parknasilla, County Kerry. It was donated as part of the Great Southern Collection in 2006 when Crawford Art Gallery was designated a National Cultural Institution.

<https://crawfordartgallery.ie/work-of-the-week-28-july-2020/>



Suzanna Chan, *The Cabinet of Exotica*, 1993, oil on canvas, 123.5 x 93.5 cm. Purchased, 1993

### *The Cabinet of Exotica* by Suzanna Chan

The colourful and mysterious *The Cabinet of Exotica* has been in the Crawford collection since the early 1990s. At the time, Chan was the youngest artist to enter the collection and, today, the painting continues to capture visitors' attention!

Partially inspired by the practice of other artists, including Frida Kahlo, Sonia Boyce, and Lubaina Himid, this work is derived from Chan's own immigrant background and how this shaped her experiences. Through its complex imagery, and combination of doll's house and cabinet of curiosities, the artist meditates on the stereotypes ascribed to the Far East (and particularly to Asian women) by the West, as is reflected in the title. The stage-like imagery acknowledges and challenges stereotypical gender roles.

The painting also offers an unsettling mix of scenarios. While there is a repetition of the pink (perhaps restrictive) cheongsam dress in the upper storey, there is a sense of escape in the lower portion of the canvas. A sinister white male figure haunts both scenes, however; a threat which may be echoed by the hunting scene at the top. Adding to the mix, a screen at the centre of the lower part bears images of teeth and dental tools!

Following a period of working and exhibiting as an artist, with a practice principally focused on painting, Suzanna Chan went on to undertake a written PhD, completed in 2002.

Today she is Joint Course Director of BA Hons Fine Art in Belfast School of Art and also lectures in art history and theory.

<https://crawfordartgallery.ie/work-of-the-week-19-november-2018/>



Alice Maher, *Familiar III*, 1994, acrylic on canvas, flax sculpture, 244 x 152 cm (canvas). Purchased, 1995.

### *Familiar III* (1994) by Alice Maher

This work is composed of two distinct, yet related parts: an acrylic painting and a sculpture made of flax. The painted element shows a miniscule naked female by a campfire atop a white mountain, centred on a large dark minimal canvas.

This is number three in a series of tall, large paintings that are accompanied by its “familiar”, a sculptural object, anything from a couple of inches to a couple of yards in size. Like the others in the series *Familiar III* defies conventional definition. Are we looking at painting or sculpture, nature or art?

The artist places different languages and materials in overlapping and interwoven relationships to each other. In the sculptural element, for instance, flax exists between states: it is neither plant, nor the thread required to make the canvas support for the painting.

Flax, with features as a material, is like hair, but also has its own associations. The protagonist in the work is to a greater or lesser extent the artist herself.

Discussing the complex connection between image and object, in an interview with Cécile Bourne, Maher ponders whether the figure on the mountain “might have come out of that great black hole in the flax, might have lived there for years, a tiny mite waiting to escape onto a great big expanse”, or conversely perhaps the “sculpture could be the product of the woman's imagination...”

Nature and culture, the wild and the domestic are themes underlying all of Alice Maher's work. This is combined with a keen awareness of the debates in the art world about abstraction and figuration, about painting and sculpture.

“That's one meaning contained in the title,” she observes, “but there are other layers as well. For example, a lot of the things in the paintings are familiar, and the objects and materials are sort of familiar — while still being difficult to pin down exactly. I like that ambiguity, where you can make some kind of connection but you're not quite sure.”

Maher was born in Tipperary in 1956 and, though she has lived in cities for most of her life, studying in Cork and Belfast, she still sees that rural dimension as significant to her work, particularly in her attitude to materials.

“It just seems like the most natural thing in the world for me to use the hips or the bees, because I have that familiarity with them.”

<https://crawfordartgallery.ie/work-of-the-week-28-september-2020/>



*The Annunciation* by Patrick Hennessey 1915-1980

Patrick Hennessey was born in Cork but in 1917 his father John Hennessey was killed in World War 1. His mother Bridget remarried in Cork when Patrick was five years old but her second husband was a Scot named John Duncan and shortly afterwards the whole family moved to Arbroath, Scotland.

He was raised a Roman Catholic but growing up in this mixed background, Hennessey learned to question received norms, and returning to Ireland in 1939, he found an unusual amount of influence in the country was held by the Catholic Church.

In this painting he examines the peculiar nature of Irish Catholicism, and addresses the complications of Irish religion by interweaving the pagan, classical and Catholic. He highlights the thin veneer that sometimes separates it from ancient practice. He also complicates the gender norms within the religion as practiced in Ireland, showing its goddess-centred nature.

These familiar painted stone or wood figures have been from their usual context of religious buildings and placed on the shore with the sea glistening brightly behind. Gabriel is the messenger of God, his Classical ancestor being Hermes or Mercury. In the Annunciation, the Archangel Gabriel came to the Virgin Mary to tell her of God's will that she should carry the Christ child.

Mary reacted in four ways from shock through to acceptance that are recognisable in Renaissance painting. But neither the Virgin Mary nor any of the symbolism of the Annunciation is present in this work. Instead of the Virgin there is another figure of indeterminate gender who could be a saint or monk, or it could be the figure of Christ.

The artist was known for his highly finished still lifes, landscapes and trompe l'oeil paintings. The hallmark of his style was his carefully observed realism and his highly finished surfaces.

<https://crawfordartgallery.ie/work-of-the-week-19-october-2020/>





The Falconer by Daniel Maclise 1853. Oil on canvas, 61cm x 47cm.

*The Falconer* by Daniel **Maclise** (1806-1870).

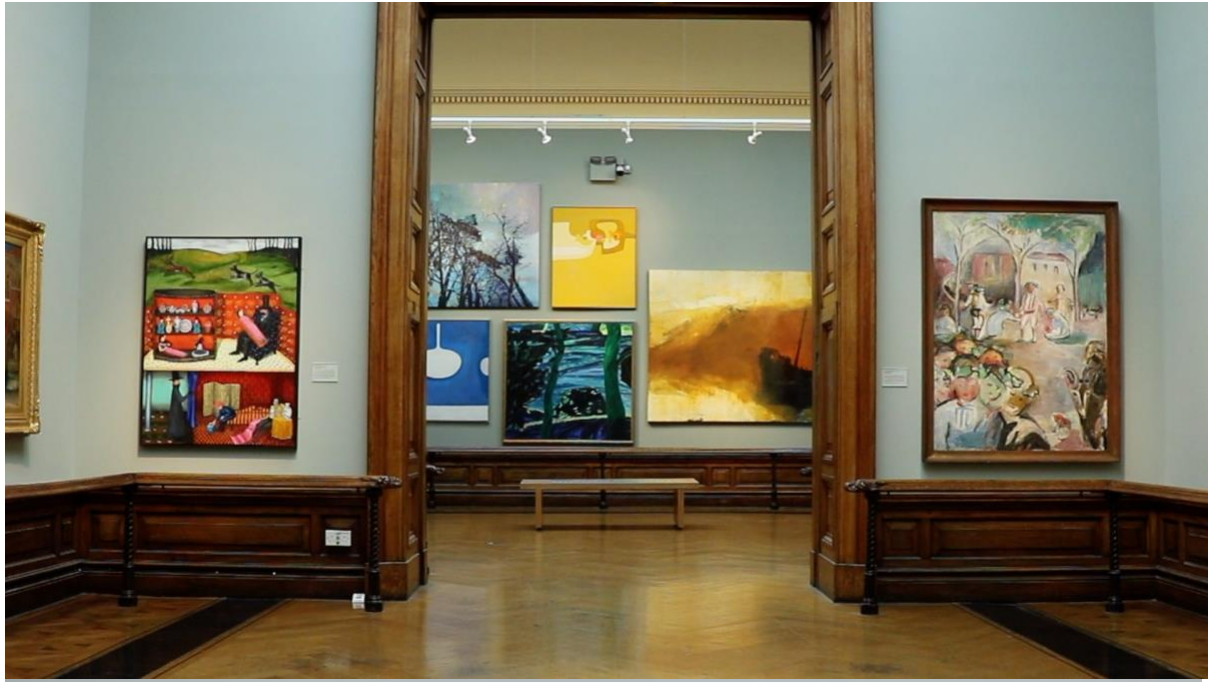
Born in, Cork, Daniel Maclise was the son of a discharged British soldier who had set up as a cobbler. From an early age, he showed unique artistic ability and, in 1819, he became one of the first students to enrol in the new Cork School of Art. At thirteen years of age he made the most of this opportunity to study from the antique which came about as a result of the arrival in Cork of a set of sculpture casts from the Vatican Museum.

A relatively impoverished art student, Maclise received support from a number of patrons, and in 1827, aged still just nineteen but already an established local artist, Maclise went to London. The following year he enrolled as a student at the Royal Academy schools, where in 1831 he gained the Gold Medal for History Painting.

Maclise's history paintings were often inspired by literary works, such as the plays of Shakespeare and the subject of *The Falconer* may well have been inspired by a 14th Florentine folk tale, *Frederigo's Falcon*. Maclise has paid a good deal of attention to the implied drama between the two figures and to the Renaissance period costume. The three-quarter length pose in an enclosed space but with an outdoor setting is reminiscent of Renaissance portraiture. The narrative and passion implicit in the scene is, however, typically Victorian. Maclise's poetic style of painting and strong use of colour is visually impressive. Both the repressed eroticism of the scene and the detailed style of painting suggest that he was influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite movement.

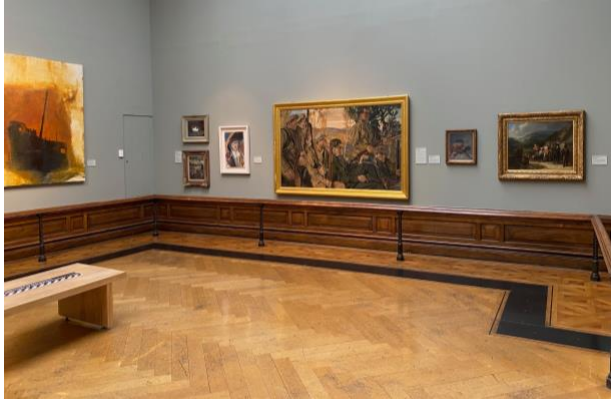
<https://crawfordartgallery.ie/work-of-the-week-8-october-2018/>

[Layout of the exhibition](#)



Below left to right: *Still life with Knife* by William Scott, *The River Boundary (Lough Hyne)* by William Crozier 1988, *Medusa* by Hughie O Donohue (2005-06).  
Above left to right *Blue Constrictor* by Elizabeth Magill, *Asgard* by RJ Croft.

The adjoining rooms of the 1<sup>st</sup> floor Gibson Galleries are connected to one another by an open doorway and the eye of the visitor is immediately drawn towards the wall of the inner room where five paintings in bright yellows and blues are carefully arranged.



These contemporary paintings face the historic and very familiar works on the opposite walls of the Men of the South by Sean Keating, The Red Rose by John Lavery, The Goosegirl by Edith Sommerville and Time Flies by William Gerard Barry.



**Respond:**

- Describe the layout of the five paintings on the inner wall.
- Why do you think the arrangement and colours were chosen for this position?
- Are they possibly some of the 'loudest voices' in the exhibition? Why do think that?
- Do you think the placement of the contemporary and familiar works together is a good idea?
- Do you think it makes us think differently about each? Why do you think this?



*Medusa* by Hughie O Donoghue

Medusa is a large canvas by contemporary artist Hughie O'Donoghue. Its luminous abstract qualities and deep orange-to-yellow ochre tones are characteristic of his work, which seeks to achieve "an equivalent for something felt; something that embodies rather than illustrates meanings."

The title of this work refers to a monumental painting, *The Raft of the Medusa* (1818-19) by Théodore Géricault, which is in the collection of Musée du Louvre. This earlier work was a response to a specific event: the infamous wrecking of the French naval frigate *Méduse* off the coast of Mauritania, Africa in July 1816. In *Medusa*, however, O'Donoghue uses it as a universal symbol for maritime disasters and the tragedy of ordinary people caught up in historical events.

Glistening though the rich colour is dark, ghostly silhouette of a wrecked vessel, the MV *Plassy*, which ran aground at Inis Oírr on 8 March 1960. This photo printed image is absorbed into the layering process and probably inspired the rusty tones while in the centre a shadowy image of a Géricault-style face can barely be perceived— is this perhaps an echo of a life?

"The image of the sea appears as a metaphor," the artist notes about the relationship between his work and the ongoing crisis of global sustainability, "ever moving and changing its form, relentless and illusive but also timeless and constant."

Hughie O Donoghue was born to Irish parents and raised in Manchester. He studied art in Goldsmiths College in London but spent a good deal of his youth in the west of Ireland. He lives today in Erris Co Mayo.

<https://crawfordartgallery.ie/work-of-the-week-14-september-2020/>

### **Research:**

Examine Hughie O Donoghue's themes of human identity, memory, and experience and see how he draws on history, mythology, and personal records to create works that resonate with emotional intensity.

<https://www.hughieodonoghue.com>

<https://www.oliversearsgallery.com/hughie-o-donoghue>

An Interview with artist Hughie O'Donoghue | Galway International Arts Festival Gallery  
Hear the artist explain his ideas and why he uses photographs printed on light Japanese paper as part of his artistic process.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFRGAFSmmcw>

### Research

The River Boundary (Lough Hyne) by William Crozier 1988,

<https://crawfordartgallery.ie/work-of-the-week-6-july-2020/>

Richard J. Croft, *Asgard*, 1968, acrylic on canvas, 122 x 101.6 cm. Purchased, Irish Exhibition of Living Art, 1969 (Gibson Bequest Fund).

<https://crawfordartgallery.ie/work-of-the-week-24-june-2019/>

### Respond:

Now that you have visited the exhibition and examined the paintings, read over Dr Michael Waldron's statement again.

- Do you think *Lucid Abnormalities*, was an interesting choice for the title – why do you think this?
- Why do you think a themed exhibition might be an effective way to show contemporary and historic works from the permanent collection together?
- Did you find that even with more familiar works, you were able to 'consider other ways in which they speak to us'? Describe some of your reactions.
- Briefly describe why two contemporary works that you consider could be 'startling or troubling in mood or tone'.
- In your opinion which works formed 'unexpected pairings that may disrupt attempts at traditional narrative understanding'?
- Which works particularly interested you and why?

**Respond** to one of the following leaving certificate questions

### Section III Appreciation

#### 2017 Ordinary Level

Answer (a) and (b).

(a) Name an art gallery, museum or interpretive centre that you have visited and describe and discuss in detail how two artefacts were displayed.

(b) Suggest three ways that art galleries, museums and interpretive centres can make exhibitions more interesting to students and young people. Give reasons for your suggestions.

Illustrate your answer.

#### 2016 Higher Level

An appreciation of art and art history is enhanced by first-hand experiences in art galleries, museums and interpretative centres.

Discuss this statement with reference to a named exhibition in an art gallery, museum or interpretative centre you have visited. Describe and discuss **two** named artefacts from the exhibition. Explain how your experience and learning was improved by how these artefacts were displayed.

**and**

Briefly outline your own ideas on how art galleries, museums and interpretative centres can better interact with the public and improve the overall visitor experience.

*Illustrate your answer.*