

## **Murdo Macleod (Born 1963)**

## **Teacher's Notes**

Murdo Macleod is an award winning, freelance photographer based in the UK. His work has been published in The Observer newspaper, The Guardian, The Scotsman, in magazines and online. Macleod was born and brought up on the Hebridean Isle of Lewis; he left the Island for the first time at the age of 16. At school, his interest in stories, pictures and poems was encouraged and this turned into an interest in photography. In secondary school the art department helped him to prepare a portfolio for Napier College in Edinburgh, where he studied from 1980-83. His work documents subjects in all areas of social and cultural life, in Scotland and England.

A series of photographs taken on the farms of families affected by the Foot and Mouth outbreak in 2001 shows the horror and devastation brought about by the culling process. His dedication to the story takes us from images of new born lambs, disease-free but about to be killed, to anxious farmers awaiting Government decisions and to the mountains of smouldering corpses silhouetted against the evening sky. Whether Macleod is photographing authors at the Edinburgh Book Festival or capturing scenes of traditional fish smoking, he manages to create images that are a powerful visual commentary on a time and place.

Roy Keane, one of the best-known personalities in Ireland and certainly in his hometown of Cork, is the subject of this portrait. He has had an eventful and sometimes controversial career as a footballer and manager. Keane's outspoken and passionate nature has brought controversy. He walked off the Irish team at the World Cup in Saipan following an argument with Ireland manager Mick McCarthy. Whether you love or hate Keane probably depends on whether you support Manchester United or Chelsea, but his talent as a footballer is undisputed.

This photograph takes its place in the collection with a number of works which portray important Irish cultural figures from Lady Lavery to Fiona Shaw. It may be interesting for students to compare painted portraits with photographic pieces especially in light of today's cult of celebrity, as well as examining why it is that people have their portraits made. When studying a photographic image it is helpful to consider how the artist has used composition and lighting, as well as, how the image may have been manipulated through darkroom processes.

*Roy Keane With Head of Raven* is a portrait of the footballer in serious mood, and certainly suggests the infamous 'dark side' of Roy Keane's personality. Keane is holding the skull of a raven in front of his face. Ravens are often associated with destruction or death. The composition is stark; Keane's head fills almost half the area, the background is dark, which pushes the image closer to us. Keane places the small but sinister skull in front of his eye. In fact, Keane is not looking at it, but through it, directly at us. The bird skull looks as though it holds Keane's eye in its beak and a strange symbiotic relationship exists between them. The lighting is directed from above, allowing strong modelling of the features. A filtered light from underneath picks up the green of the subject's eyes and reflects on the underside of the raven. The composition becomes a disconcerting triangle where we the viewer, Keane, and the eyeless bird survey each other!