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**crawford art gallery cork**  
áiléar crawford chorcaigh

## **Press Release 17/07/18**

### **Naked Truth: The Nude in Irish Art 13 July – 29 October, 2018**

Crawford Art Gallery is delighted to present a major exhibition *Naked Truth: The Nude in Irish Art*. From mediaeval Sheela-na-gigs to the contemporary art of Dorothy Cross, the exhibition surveys the neglected subject of the rich tradition of the portrayal of the nude in Irish visual art. With over 80 works this spectacular exhibition presents the nude and the naked body as depicted by Irish artists. Focusing on the interconnecting discourses of political allegory, gender, sexuality, censorship and display, the exhibition features over forty artists including Francis Bacon, James Barry, Pauline Bewick, Amanda Coogan, Mainie Jellett, Dragana Jurisic, Alice Maher, William Orpen, Kathy Prendergast, Robert Ballagh, Sarah Purser, Nigel Rolfe and William Willes.

Curated by William Laffan and Dawn Williams the exhibition asserts the existence of a rich history of the depiction and necessity of utilising the nude and the unclothed body in the work and practice of Irish artists. The exhibition will feature over 80 works from public, collections including TATE, National Gallery of Ireland, Irish Museum of Modern Art and the Ulster Museum alongside artworks from artist's and private collections.

In recent times, the discussion of the Irish nude as subject matter has been said by some commentators, as not to exist, or at the very least to be an invention of the late 1970s. As recently as 2010, the artist Mick O'Dea could write: 'Even fundamentalist cultures have produced more nudes than we have'.<sup>1</sup> Catherine Marshall would write in 2016 that 'despite a few paintings, such as Barrie Cooke's *Sheela-na-gigs*, there was no established genre of the nude in this country until Micheal Farrell's *Madonna Irlanda* in 1977'.<sup>2</sup>

There has, in fact, been a long tradition of Irish artists painting the nude, with distinguished contributions to the genre by, among many others, James Barry, Hugh Douglas Hamilton, Margaret Clarke, Roderic O'Connor and Mainie Jellett. Indeed, there were enough Irish artists engaging actively with the subject matter to lend a helping hand to the artistic tradition of our neighbouring island. The catalogue of the exhibition *Exposed: The Victorian Nude* (Tate, 2001) put forward as evidence for the emergence of a distinctly *English* nude works by Irish artists including, ironically, Daniel Maclise *Origins of the Harp* and, in particular, the art of William Orpen and William Mulready, noting of the latter that 'the Irishman came to be regarded as the modern master of the English nude'.<sup>3</sup>

Acknowledging the large number of artists who have engaged fruitfully with the nude is not to deny that, at times, the Irish have had a problematic relationship with the corporeal and that, inevitably, this has impacted on artistic production. When the provision of an art school in Cork was being discussed in 1818, one of the suggested benefits was that young artists would not have to travel to London to study where they would be faced with 'drawing from living models, before the morals are matured'.<sup>4</sup> The denial of a tradition of the Irish nude is usually, if implicitly, linked to the prominence of the Catholic church forgetting that some of the greatest nudes in Western art such as Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus* and Goya's *Nude Maya* were produced by Spanish artists with the Inquisition rather than Archbishop McQuaid (1895-1973) to contend with.

This is not, however, to say that the display of the nude in twentieth century Ireland was not contentious – the subject has, for example, traditionally formed a small (though not entirely negligible) proportion of the RHA Annual Exhibition exhibits. The first exhibition of the Irish Nude, a modest, rather tentative show of just fourteen works, was held as part of Rosc '71 and included works by Patrick Collins, Colin Middleton and George Campbell and one woman artist, Camille Souter. In an accompanying text tellingly entitled *The Puritan Nude*, Brian O'Doherty posited a defensive relationship between Irish artists and the subject arguing that artists including Louis Le Brocq and Patrick Collins 'poeticise indistinctness' meaning that 'the subject is 'touched, summoned, and then avoided by partially losing it in an environmental veil'.

Of course, there were artists painting the nude at exactly this period who certainly did not adopt indirect as O'Doherty terms 'strategies of avoidance'. Irish artists have used the nude and unclothed body to explore a large number of themes, from the personal to political, from sexuality to display. The upturn of the perceived 'natural' order of men being artists and women being models, mistresses and wives, is illustrated in some of the most exciting changes in the presentation of the female nude having been introduced by women and the exhibition features work by formidable artists including Dorothy Cross, Amanda Coogan, Sarah Purser and Megan Eustace.

With the commercial ideal body of the 21<sup>st</sup> century at odds with the works being produced by artists created to confront today's attitudes and anxieties, the naked and the nude is still a relevant and divisive subject matter in contemporary society.

Ends

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<sup>1</sup> Mick O'Dea *Irish Arts Review*, Spring 2010

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Marshall, in Fintan O'Toole [ed.], *Modern Ireland in 100 Artworks* [Dublin 2016] p. 186.

<sup>3</sup> Alison Smith (ed.), in *Exposed, The Victorian Nude*, Exhibition Catalogue, Tate Britain (London, 2001) p. 54

<sup>4</sup> *Considerations on the Utility of the Casts Presented by H.R.H. The Prince Regent* (Cork, 1819).

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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 *Naked Truth*, guided tours, access and education, please visit our website: [www.crawfordartgallery.ie](http://www.crawfordartgallery.ie)

### **TOURS**

Friday 13 July

1pm curatorial tour – **free but ticketed EVENTBRITE DETAILS**

Thursday 20 September

1pm Curator's tour – **free but ticketed EVENTBRITE DETAILS**

Saturday 14 July

2pm Saturday summer tours to include casts and Naked Truth

other dates: 21 and 28 July; 4,11,18,25 August and 1 September

**School tours** from September

### **TALKS**

**Thursday 20 September 6pm**

William Laffan 18th century art/james barry

'The Irish are leading on painting the nude in Britain'

**Thursday 4 October**

Talk see website for details closer the time

**Thursday 11 October**

Talk see website for details closer the time

**Thursday 18 or 25 October**

Talk see website for details closer the time

### Drawing the Nude

Draw directly from life in the Sculpture Gallery.

Artist Helle Helsner will lead these sessions

Suitable for all levels; beginners, improvers or practicing artists.

Drawing materials and easels supplied.

Thursday 27 Sept - 6.15pm - 7.45pm

Thursday 4 Oct - 6.15pm - 7.45pm

Thursday 11 Oct - 6.15pm - 7.45pm

Thursday 18 Oct - 6.15pm - 7.45pm

Ticketed event and booking essential / places limited to 12

5euro per session or 15euro for the 4 weeks For booking: [EVENTBRITE DETAILS](#)