

## **MEN OF THE SOUTH Sean Keating (1889-1977)**

Sean Keating studied art in Limerick before winning a scholarship to study at the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin. He studied painting under the artist William Orpen and Orpen found him an excellent pupil. He painted in a similar realist fashion to Orpen and developed his skills in this area, even at a time when abstract painting was becoming popular in Ireland. A traditionalist, he believed in strong drawing skills and an academic approach to painting. Keating went to London as Orpen's assistant and sometimes model, but as a nationalist, he felt his mission was to help define what nationhood meant through his painting. A trip to the Aran Islands in 1914 greatly inspired him; here was the noble islander who represented the ideal strong independent type of man needed for the new nation. For Keating he became the image of national identity.



*Men of the South* shows a group of IRA men. They are waiting for a British military group to pass. An ambush is imminent but as we see from their staunch profiles these men are not concerned for their own safety, but for the principles they hold. Keating portrays these six men as a coherent group. Strong drawing underlies the figures and the neutral tones create an earthy wholesome attachment of the men to the landscape. Keating has made heroes of these men; this painting is not about the grime and pain of war, but about the idealism

and patriotism behind it.

### **DISCUSSION**

- The men in this painting seem to be waiting for something or someone, what do you think they are waiting for?
- Does the group look happy and relaxed?
- What do you see in the background of the painting? Does it look like a quiet or busy place?
- What do you think will happen when they see what they are waiting for?
- Only some of these men are wearing army outfits, do they look like soldiers or regular men? Why do you think this might be?
- It seems to be a warm day, are their clothes good for this weather? Why do you think they are wearing such clothes?
- Do you think there is a leader in this group? Who do you think this might be?
- Look carefully at his face, how do you think he is feeling? Do the other men look worried or confident?
- The artist, Sean Keating painted some of the men from photographs. Some of the men came and sat in his studio for him to paint. Would it be easier to paint someone from real life or from a photograph? How would it be different?

- Can you tell which men in the painting might have been painted from real life?
- In your opinion, did the artist make the men look like solid, real people? What makes them look real?
- How does the artist make the men fit in so well with the background?
- Do you think they could hide easily?



**In the gallery** can you find this painting? It is called *Economic Pressure* and is also by Sean Keating. What do you think is happening in this painting?

Look at the brush marks and the paint textures on both paintings (imagine you are a detective on a case). Can you tell the work is by the same painter? What are the clues?

## HANDS ON

Choose a photo of some of your family and make up a story about what is going on in the photo. Try to give them really unusual jobs and things to do. You could make your mum a rocket scientist and make your baby brother a rock star. (If your mum really is a rocket scientist make her something else!) Write your story out for the class, or draw a picture of your story adding costumes and props.

### **Camouflage**

Find a picture of an animal or insect with a strong pattern. Stick, trace, photocopy or draw your creature onto paper. (Or use this one.) Using paints, markers or pastels, disguise your creature by filling in the background with the same pattern markings.

Try to make your creature completely disappear.

