

# coming home

ART & THE GREAT HUNGER

March – June 2018

Dublin Castle

July – October 2018

West Cork Arts Centre, Skibbereen

January – March 2019

An tSeaneaglais (Glassworks),  
Cultúrlann Uí Chanáin, Derry

## About the Exhibition

Ireland's Great Hunger Museum at Quinnipiac University in Hamden, Connecticut, has sent its acclaimed art collection to Ireland in 2018. The works will go to Dublin Castle, Skibbereen and Derry—diametric epicentres of the Great Famine (1845-52)—for the exhibition Coming Home: Art and the Great Hunger. The museum's collection, the only one of its kind in the world, constitutes an incomparable direct link to the past of almost 6.5 million Irish and 40 million Irish-American people. This guide is based on descriptions of the artwork kindly provided by Niamh O'Sullivan (Curator/Professor Emeritus).

### Black '47 (1997-98)



Black '47 is a painting by Micheal Farrell. In this painting, Farrell is putting the British government on trial for failing to help the Irish people during the famine. As Charles Trevelyan, who was in charge of famine relief, is making his case for non-intervention, bodies are seen sprouting up from the floor.

The shaft of light—as if a searchlight beaming from a prison window—lights up the courthouse, falling full force on the British establishment while, on the dark side, walk the Irish peasants.

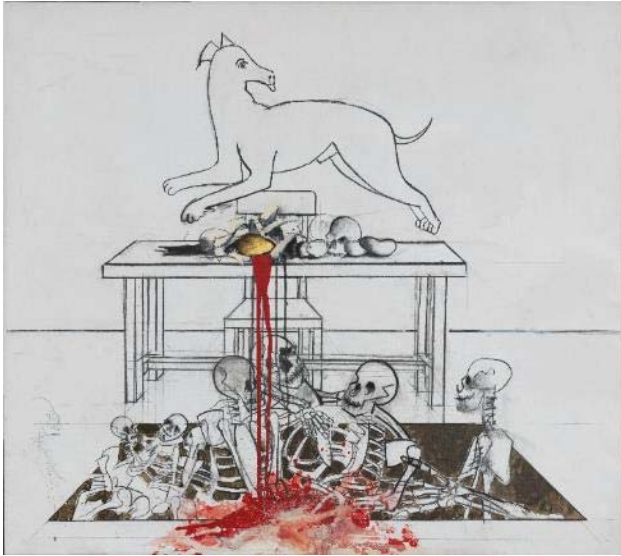
#### *Discussion*

1. What does '47 represent in the title?
2. Who was Charles Trevelyan? What was he responsible for in Ireland?
3. Why do you think the artist puts the British government on trial in this painting?
4. What items are on the table? Why did the artist draw them there?

#### *Further Study*

1. Look up the painting 'A Burial at Ornans' by Gustave Courbet. Do you notice any similarities between Burial at Ornans and Black '47?
2. There are Turkish people in the dark next to the Irish in this painting. What was the connection between Turkey and Ireland during the Famine?

## The Wounded Wonder (1997-98)



In *The Wounded Wonder* by Micheal Farrell, skulls and potatoes are side by side, as if exchangeable valuable goods, from which blood splashes into the open grave beneath – the blood of Famine victims, as well as Farrell’s own blood – an intimation of his mortality. Farrell died soon after this painting was finished.

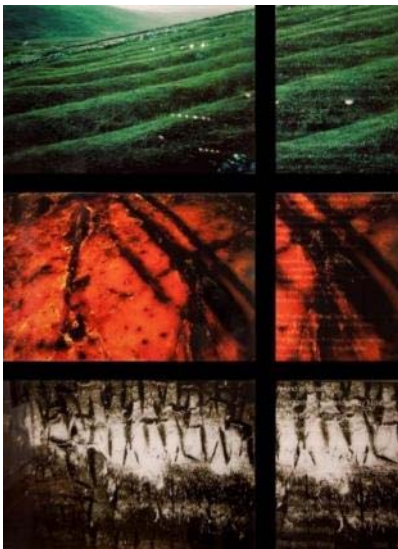
### **Discussion**

1. Why did Farrell use only two colours in this painting? What effect does it have?
2. What items did Farrell paint on the table?
3. Who do think are represented by the skeletons in the grave?

### **Further Study**

1. Can you see any similarities between this painting and *Black '47*?
2. What do you think the dog in this painting represents?

## A Kind of Quietism (1990)



Alanna O’Kelly’s 6-panel *A Kind of Quietism* comprises views of Achill Island and Belmullet, County Mayo; Black Head, County Clare; Connemara, and the Rock of Gibraltar.

The overlaid text on the right hand side is from contemporary historical sources, personal narratives, and accounts by witnesses, provide a harrowing insight into the Famine.

### **Discussion**

1. Why did the artist divide the pictures into six sections?
2. What do you think each section represent?
3. How do you think this artwork relates to the famine?

### **Further Study**

1. There is text overlaying the pictures on the right hand side. Can you find out what it says?
2. Find out where the three pictures were taken.

## On Our Knees (1996-97)



Hughie O'Donoghue's work lends itself to the amazing beauty of parts of North-West Mayo on the one hand, and the unequalled poverty during the Famine on the other. There are few artists who could do justice to the epic nature of scene and situation that was Mayo during the Great Hunger.

The title 'On Our Knees' alludes to the poverty that O'Donoghue's grandfather suffered growing up during the 1850's in the aftermath of the Famine.

### **Discussion**

1. What does the expression 'On Our Knees' mean?
2. In what position is the main figure in the painting?
3. Why is the main figure in that position?
4. What do you think is in the background of the painting?

### **Further Study**

1. Where is the artist Hughie O'Donoghue from and what connection does he have with Ireland?
2. Find out if Hughie O'Donoghue has done any other works relating to the Famine.

## Riomh-After (2017)



Riomh - After is a painting by Robert Ballagh. In Riomh - After, the left of the painting shows potatoes growing abundantly under a peaceful sky. After, on the right, shows the food of the peasantry, symbolically struck by lightning and shrivelling on the stalk. The use of both English and Irish in the title hints at cultural changes within Ireland.

Ballagh was born in Dublin in 1943, to a lower middle class family. Although living on a secluded leafy street in one of the capital's grandest suburbs, Ballsbridge, the Ballaghs had little money. Not many in 1940s Ireland did. Their home in Elgin Road was a rented flat, and Robert's father worked in the wholesale drapery trade.

### **Discussion**

1. Why is the title of this print in Irish and in English?
2. Why is the print split in two? What does this signify?
3. What do you think has happened to the potato plant on the right hand side of the print?

### **Further Study**

1. What happened to the Irish language after the Famine?
2. Were potatoes still part of the staple diet of Irish people after the Famine?

## The World is Full of Murder (1985)



In *The World is Full of Murder* by Brian Maguire, reds, blacks and browns are smeared, splattered and striped. The body parts are spread, shortened and fragmented.

It shows a bunch of bodies “mangled – murdered – by their own emotion” beside and on top of each other in a ditch. The absence of a horizon reduces depth, so that the figures seem close to the viewer.

### **Discussion**

1. Why did the artist give this painting the title of 'The World is Full of Murder'?
2. Who did the artist want to portray as being murdered?
3. Why do you think the artist used these colours in his painting?

### **Further Study**

1. Why would the artist link 'murder' and 'the Famine' together?
2. Find out about other works by the artist Brian Maguire.

## Rainbow's End (1970)



In *Rainbow's End* by William Crozier, a dead body rots. It could be anywhere, and yet nowhere more typical than West Cork, where gorse fires rage, where Crozier later lived and worked for some 30 years. The feverish reds, yellows and oranges, blacks, greens and blues echo in the apocalyptic fire. The powerful movement of the towering tree, and the counter arc of the rainbow, suggest a grave site.

### **Discussion**

1. Why does the artist use a lot of reds and oranges in this painting?
2. What do you think these colours represent?
3. Why do you think the artist named this piece 'Rainbow's End'?

### **Further Study**

1. The description mentions gorse fires of West Cork. What are gorse fires?
2. Find out more about William Crozier's life and works.

## The Deserted Village (2012)



The Deserted Village is a series of photo etchings by Geraldine O'Reilly. O'Reilly created a series of photo etchings, conceived in association with the poem Slievemore: The Abandoned Village by John F. Deane and an excerpt from Eavan Boland's essay, "Outside History".

The village of Slievemore dates to about 1750. Comprising up to 100 tiny stone dwellings in which families of 10 or 12 lived, it stretched for one mile, with potato ridges – lazy beds – rising up the mountain behind. It lost approximately a

third of its population during the Famine, the rest leaving in the 1850s.

### **Discussion**

1. Why do you think the inhabitants of this village deserted it in the 1850's?
2. Are there any abandoned towns/estates in Ireland today?

### **Further Study**

1. Where is Achill Island?
2. Is it inhabited today?

## Connemara Girls (1880)



From the 1860s, Thomas Alfred Jones produced a number of paintings featuring Irish young women, often referred to as colleens and 'Connemara Girls' is considered to be the best of this collection.

These colleens, with their black and red hair, are at once traditional and modern. The symbolic expression of Ireland as female has its origins in Celtic mythology. Representations of attractive, young women in pretty peasant attire, posed in beautiful landscapes, took on a symbolic and, at times, political tone and are a strong sign of the role of gender in the making of a national identity in nineteenth century Ireland.

### **Discussion**

1. What is different about how the girls are dressed compared to nowadays?
2. Why are they not wearing any shoes?
3. What do girls use to cover their heads?

### **Further Study**

1. Female names have been sometimes used to represent Ireland's identity. Can you find any female names used by poets or artists to represent Ireland?
2. Find out more about Connemara and the surrounding area.

## Mending Nets (1886)



Howard Helmick was from Zanesville, Ohio. Beginning in the early 1870s he established two studios in Ireland, in Galway and Kinsale, where he developed empathy for Irish country people.

This scene is set in a dark fisherman's cottage. Two young, barefooted girls chat with their grandfather, while their grandmother sits by the fire, the heart(h) of the family. The painting is full of traditional items of Irish material culture, such as the Sligo chair typical of Counties Galway and Sligo. Helmick displays his technical skill by rendering different textures: the nets, the flagon and tankard, and the combined candlestick and

rush light holder, with its distinctive barley twist shaft on the window ledge. While the painting suggests that there is much work to be done, the mood is upbeat and lively. And there is a sense of suspense, as the grandfather rests his pipe to emphasise a moment in his story.

### **Discussion**

1. What would the nets have been used for and why would they need to be mended?
2. What are the differences between a modern house and the cottage in the painting?
3. Are the people in the painting wealthy?

### **Further Study**

1. Find out more about the artist Howard Helmick. Where did he live and work before he came to Ireland?
2. Find out more about Co. Sligo nowadays and during the Famine.

## Lady of the West (c. 1912-1919)



Grace Henry was an accomplished landscape, portrait and flower painter. In 1910, she and her husband, Paul Henry, went to Achill Island, County Mayo, for a fortnight but stayed for almost 10 years.

Wearing a white smock, Henry painted at night around the old bridge at Dooagh on Achill, using orange lamps that simulated daylight, partly from shyness, it is said, and partly also to experiment with night light. Wearing an accentuated paisley shawl, the heavily outlined woman dominates the simplified row of diminutive cottages.

### **Discussion**

1. What has the Lady of the West got wrapped around her?
2. What is on the roofs of the cottages behind her?
3. Is the Lady of the West poor? How do you know?

### **Further Study**

1. Grace Henry was married to a famous painter. Find out who he was.
2. Find out about the other works of Grace Henry.

## Cottages, West of Ireland (1928-1930)



This painting, by Paul Henry, is possibly of the Maamturks, seen from the eastern end of Kylemore Lake, done from memory in the late 1920s. Typically, it shows a two-part division of the picture plane, with a cloudy sky characterized by a narrow tonal range—Henry had defective colour vision, compensated for by a strong sense of pattern and design.

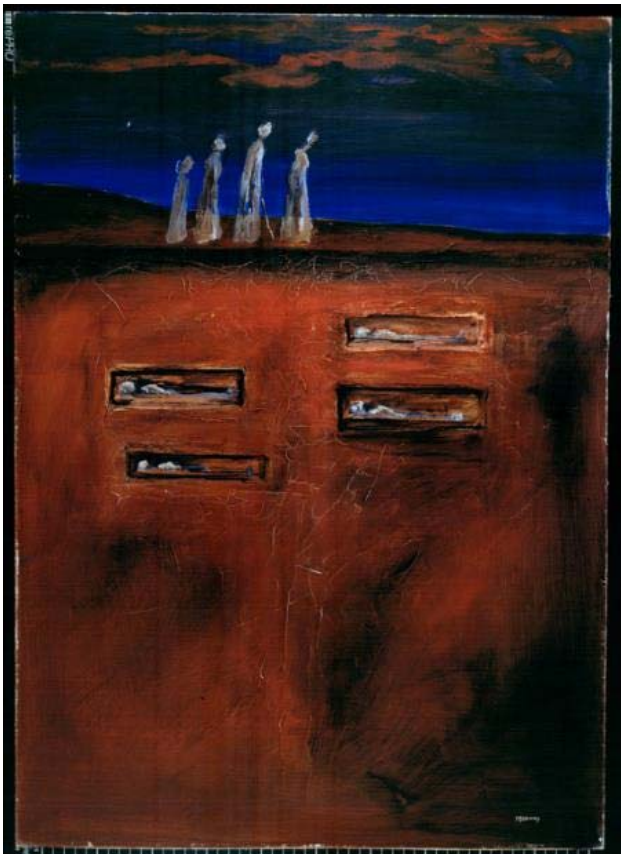
### **Discussion**

1. Why do you think the artist wanted to paint the landscape?
2. Does the artist use bright colours? Why/Why not?
3. What kind of people do you think live in the cottages in the painting?

### **Further Study**

1. Find out where the Maamturk Mountains are.
2. Are there any famous buildings or landmarks near Kylemore Lake?

## Departure (1995)



In *Departure* by Pádraic Reaney, a family has been evicted. There is nothing left for them in their own country. Walking single file through the night, they tread over the unmarked graves of their kin to face the treacherous crossing to America.

In this painting, the high horizon extends the visual narrative below, reminding us that traces of the atrocity remain to this day, congealed in the blood-red soil.

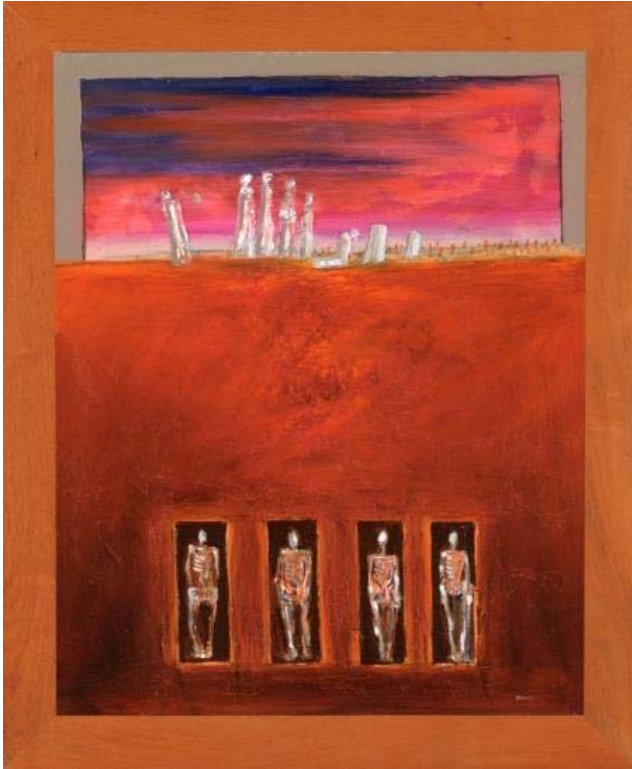
### **Discussion**

1. What do you think is represented by the red soil in the painting?
2. What do you think the family looks like?
3. What do you think the people in the grave died from?

### **Further Study**

1. Find out more about the artist Pádraic Reaney and his works.
2. Why was the famine particularly bad in Connemara?

## The Last Visit (n.d.)



In *The Last Visit* by Pádraic Reaney, people pay their last respects to their dead before they emigrate. The ghostly images of this painting reflect how people buried their memories of such a horrific time as well as burying their dead.

Given the severity of the Famine in Connemara, the scars on the landscape continue to be apparent to those who live there.

### **Discussion**

1. Why do you think the artist used two different types of red in this painting?
2. How many headstones can you see in the painting?

### **Further Study**

1. How many people died during the Famine?
2. What were the main causes of death during the Famine?

## Scene in Connemara (1828)



There is some evidence that in 1828, James Arthur O'Connor made a trip home. If so, 'Scene in Connemara' was one of the few landscapes he painted in Ireland. An 1828 view of Connemara – probably this – was exhibited in the centenary exhibition held at the Hugh Lane, Municipal Gallery, Dublin, in 1941.

O'Connor used classical grouping devices such as golden light, figures on lonely paths moving away into the distance, the use of rocks and trees to create depth. He was excellent at small scale paintings with reduced figures, set in large landscapes. And he used impasto (painting that

applies the pigment thickly so that brush or palette knife marks are visible) to increase the immediacy, as we see here in his trademark red-coated figure in the middle distance.

### **Discussion**

1. Why do you think the artist decided to paint this landscape?
2. Why do you think the artist painted a red coat in the middle of the painting?

### **Further Study**

1. This painting was on exhibition in the Hugh Lane Gallery in 1941. Find out more about the artist Hugh Lane and the Hugh Lane Gallery.
2. Find out more about the artist James Arthur O'Connor and his other works.



## Sunset (1847)



'Sunset' also known as 'Rock of Cashel' is a painting by (Henry) Mark Anthony. He was considered to be one of the most original British landscape artists of his generation. (Henry) Mark Anthony acquired a reputation for powerful and daring work. Anthony exhibited to considerable acclaim in the salons of London and the major provincial centres, as well as the 1857-8 American Exhibition of British Art in New York and Boston.

During the 1840s, Anthony visited Ireland with Frederick Goodall, Alfred Downing Fripp and

Francis Topham, returning himself in 1855 to paint the landscape and historic 'Rock of Cashel' ruins.

### **Discussion**

1. Why did the artist paint this landscape at sunset? Why did he not paint it in the morning or at midday?
2. What are the similarities between the ruins on the background and the cottages in the foreground?

### **Further Study**

1. What significance does the Rock of Cashel have in Irish history?
2. Find out more about Cashel and the surrounding areas.

## The Eagle's Nest (c. 1840)



The artist Thomas James Mulvany was considered by some to be a man of cultivated taste, with a considerable knowledge of the history of art, and a brilliant conversationalist.

Killarney became a tourist destination in the eighteenth century. Between the upper and lower lakes – a spectacular beauty spot – the 1,700-foot high Eagle's Nest housed an eyrie of birds. Here Mulvany shows the Eagle's Nest and Long Range River with the MacGillycuddy's Reeks and Purple Mountain to the northwest.

The growth of a tourist industry, the beginnings of modernisation, a recognition of the potential of the place and the resourcefulness of the people, were suddenly ruptured with the Famine. Mulvany captures both its beauty and stillness just before.

### **Discussion**

1. What do you think the people in the painting are doing?
2. Why do you think this became a popular tourist spot in the 1840's?
3. Is it still a popular tourist destination today?

### **Further Study**

1. Find out more about Killarney and the surrounding areas.
2. Find out more about Thomas James Mulvany and his other works

## Irish Peasant Children (1846)



Daniel Macdonald created this artwork at the height of the Famine in 1846. The figures are not blended into the landscape but painted to the fore, suggesting an awareness of modern art and political events.

The children represent three faces of Ireland: beautiful, mischievous and potentially dangerous. The barefooted girl in the red skirt and plaid shawl has that Spanish look found in the west of Ireland. The boy behind the rock is quick and wily and probably a handful. The girl on the left has seen terrible things, and has a desperate air. There are no parents to look out for these children, and their different characteristics hint at a disintegrating family unit.

The swirling mist represents the national tragedy unfolding. The idyllic landscape is a reminder of classical stillness, but the gathering storm hints at social and political reprisals to come. This is the work of a daring artist hinting inflammatory material

into the salons of Britain. The fascinating beauty of the painting made it acceptable to audiences normally against such material.

### **Discussion**

1. Do you think it would have been easy to be a child during the famine?
2. What terrible things do you think the children have seen?
3. What statement do you think the artist was trying to make with this painting?

### **Further Study**

1. Find out why the artist would paint a figure that has a 'Spanish' look.

## Irish Faction Leader (1844)



In 1844, Daniel Macdonald produced, Irish Faction Leader, which was a preparatory sketch for The Fighter, a startling image possessing a confrontational force unusual in Irish art history. The background to this painting shows an artist informed about the dangerous state of religious, economic and political conditions in the Irish countryside in the immediate pre-Famine period.

Macdonald's Irish Faction Leader tells a complex tale typical of many bitter complaints: tithes taken from poor Catholics to pay elite Protestant clergy, conarce (letting small strips of poor land for growing potatoes on disadvantageous terms), high food prices, low wages and putting land on the market to obtain higher rents.

### **Discussion**

1. Who do you think are the people in the background?
2. Why do think the artist would do a sketch before executing a painting?

3. What do you think is in the leader's hand?

### **Further Study**

1. What happened after the Famine with regard to land ownership?
2. Were there any rebellions before, during or after the Famine?

## Returning from an Irish Funeral (1842)



Returning from an Irish Funeral by Daniel Macdonald shows a lot of humour as a group of care-free peasants, including gravediggers, hitch a ride home from a funeral in a covered hearse, which the outlying riders are attempting to overtake, as geese scatter and pigs forage.

The sketch features a ruined gothic church and a round tower and a deserted graveyard in the distance. Macdonald, in this sketch is portraying the humorous parts of everyday life.

### **Discussion**

1. Why do you think the artist sketched this piece instead of painting it?

2. Are funerals usually a source of humour for artists?

### **Further Study**

1. Find out more about round towers and why they were built. Are there any still standing today?

## Galway Woman and Child (1846)



In Galway Woman and Child, Fripp paints a peasant woman sitting on a rock holding her child. Although they appear healthy and well-fed, the sad looking mother, the moody landscape, and the withered stalk in the background suggest otherwise.

Alfred Downing Fripp (22 April 1822 – 13 March 1895) was a British artist who specialised in watercolours of rural subjects. He was grandson of the artist Nicholas Pocock, a brother of the painter George Arthur Fripp, and father of the surgeon Sir Alfred Downing Fripp. Fripp was born in Bristol and studied at the Royal Academy of Arts. He held his first exhibition in 1842, his initial works featuring Irish and Welsh peasants in landscape settings.

### **Discussion**

1. What are watercolours?
2. Why do you think the artist used watercolours to paint his subjects?
3. Why do you think Fripp chose to paint peasants in rural settings?

### **Further Study**

1. What other types of paints are there?
2. Find out more about Fripp's other works.

## The Rag Pickers (1900)



In this painting, by Henry Allan, two women practice their meagre trade in Ringsend, a windswept coastal area close to Dublin. The term rag-pickers is used to describe those who sort through general domestic waste to identify anything that is recyclable or saleable. This painting was first shown at the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1900.

In the painting, women are collecting for the paper mills at Rathfarnham, Kilmainham or Clondalkin. Ragpickers turned over what they collected to a Master, who would sell it.

### **Discussion**

1. Do you think the job of a ragpicker was a nice job to have?
2. What do you think the women in the painting are talking about?

### **Further Study**

1. Find out more about the area of Ringsend, Irishtown and Sandymount.
2. Find out more about the works of Henry Allan.

## Gorta (1946)



In Lilian Lucy Davidson's 'Gorta', few colours are used as a means to intensify the emotion. Blue has a long tradition in Christian art, and is also associated with mourning. Its dominance here heightens the sense of loss. This family has lost its child to starvation.

Davidson provides a glimpse of terrifying grief. Even though the grandfather is clutching her Rosary beads, the painting is without religious hope or heroic overtones. It may have been painted one hundred years after the Famine but, Davidson reminds us, hope did not grow out of loss.

### **Discussion**

1. Are the people in this painting burying the child in a graveyard?
2. Do you think this painting is set at night or during the day?

### **Further Study**

1. Find out what a cillín was and how it may relate to this painting.

## The Consecration of the Roman Catholic Church of St. Mary's, Pope's Quay, Cork (c. 1841)



This painting by James Mahony shows the consecration of the Roman Catholic Church of St Mary's on 20th October 1839. Mahony was excellent at painting crowd scenes. In this painting, the architect of the church Kearns Deane, the archbishop of Armagh and primate of all Ireland, Dr Crolly and Daniel O'Connell can clearly be seen.

### **Discussion**

1. Why would the artist choose to paint this scene?
2. Do you think it would be hard to paint a crowd scene?

### **Further Study**

1. Investigate why it was important that a Catholic church was being

consecrated at this time.

2. Find out more about Daniel O'Connell and his role in Catholic Emancipation.

## The Connemara Spinner (c. 1840)



The interior of this cottage is rich in the material culture of a well-off “strong” Connemara farmer and his family in the immediate pre-Famine period. At the end of a busy day, the farmer lights his pipe with a turf ember, taken from the fire on the floor. His top hat sits on a ladder, leading up to a capacious half loft. Above his head hangs a horse shoe, for good luck. The women wear naturally dyed petticoats, typical of the west of Ireland.

### **Discussion**

1. What can you tell about this family from the items in the painting?
2. What was spinning used for?

### **Further Study**

1. Look into the Penal Laws and how they affected Catholics.
2. Find out if the Penal Laws in Ireland affected any other religious groups.

## Lest We Forget (c. 1880)



The setting is a traditional Irish cottage, where the hearth was the centre of the home. Painted in the late nineteenth century, this depicts a rural world, in the shadow of the Famine, but on the verge of change. The painting shows three generations. The elderly man warming his hands by the fire has had a hard life; he sits apart, engrossed in the past – his thoughts are dark as he tries to keep bad memories at bay.

The young woman and the musician, possibly her husband, are living very much in the present. The children and dog are enchanted by the fiddler, who attests to the vitality of Irish culture. The elderly man represents the

past; the young woman, with her hands on her hips, ready perhaps to dance, is modern in demeanour, and the children represent the future.

### **Discussion**

1. What do you think the artist does not want us to forget?
2. What details in the painting tell you that this is not a rich family?

### **Further Study**

1. Explore what life was like in the 1880's in Ireland.

## The Finishing Touch (1876)



This painting by James Brenan is set in a dark cabin. A young woman is about to leave home for America, probably never to be seen again. The local sign-writer, sitting on a four-legged crepie stool, is inscribing the girl's name, "O'Connor, New York," on her green traveling box. She is trying on her new hat from the open box on the settle, while her already grieving mother looks on.

The heavy heart of her father, heightened by his advancing age and ill health, is evident in his farewell hand on her traveling trunk. The grandfather sits morosely by the fire. A young boy carries turf into the kitchen, in a creel on his back. It won't be long before he too is off. Only the old and

infirm remain behind.

### **Discussion**

1. Why will the girl in the painting never return again?
2. Will the young boy in the painting emigrate when he's old enough?

### **Further Study**

1. Find out which countries Irish people emigrated to during and after the famine.
2. Find out more about the works of James Brenan.

## The Irish Piper (1874)



William Oliver was known for his paintings of attractive young women, like this coy red haired girl. The barrel on the right, the bottles of beer and jugs on the little hanging dresser suggest a shebeen (a pub without a licence) in the west of Ireland. Here, above the floor-level turf fire hang hooks and crooks for cooking, a Bastable pot for boiling potatoes and stews and, not unusually, a hens' nest.

The girl is well dressed, and the strewn potatoes suggest good times, but above the doorway to the curtained enclave on the left is an emigrant's chest – a reminder of the ongoing legacy of the Famine. The poor uilleann piper – felt hat, torn breeches, unravelling stockings and battered hobnailed boots – shows the artist's more robust painterly skills.

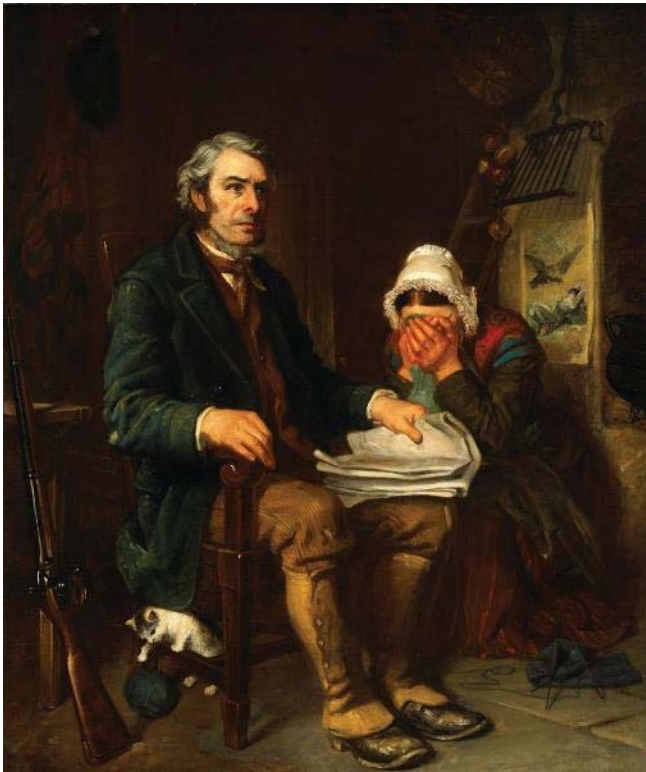
### **Discussion**

1. What do you think the artist is trying to show by painting a piper and a girl dancing?
2. Do you think music is an important part of Irish culture?

### **Further Study**

1. Find out more about William Oliver (Williams) and his other works.
2. Find out what type of instrument the piper is playing. Where does its name come from?

## Bad News in Troubled Times “An important arrest has been made, that of a young man named...” “The Freeman’s Journal” (1886)



In Margaret Allen's painting we see a middle-class farmer and his wife presented in all their respectability, contrary to stereotypes of an Irish race out of control and in need of authority. In shock, the mother has dropped her knitting as she sinks to floor; the father, newspaper clenched in his hand, stares rigidly ahead. Ominously, perhaps, within reach is his shotgun. They have just read of the arrest of their son in connection with the dynamiting campaign in London.

John Tenniel's *The Irish Vampire* is on display on the wall behind this painting.

### **Discussion**

1. Why do you think Irish people would be involved in a dynamiting campaign in London?
2. What do you think the man in the painting will do next?

### **Further Study**

1. Find out more about the Fenian/Clan na Gael

attacks on London in 1885.

2. What other Irish political movements were happening at this time?



## Derrynane (1927)



Jack B. Yeats visited Kerry in 1905 with his friend, playwright JM Synge, returned in 1913 to learn Irish, and visited again in 1925 when he drew a number of sketches of O'Connell's estate. But when Yeats stood in front of his easel to paint Derrynane – only a 10-minute walk by beach from Derrynane Abbey, the home of the Liberator Daniel O'Connell – he knew this was no ordinary place, but a landscape rich in history.

In the distance is Skellig Michael. Atop a steep rock, 230 meters above sea level, one of the most daring

monastic buildings was constructed. Throughout the medieval period, the site was renowned throughout Europe as a place of pilgrimage and mysticism.

### **Discussion**

1. What do you think connects Derrynane to the Famine?
2. Is Skellig Michael famous for reasons other than being a UNESCO World Heritage site?

### **Further Study**

1. Jack B. Yeats came from a very gifted family. Find out who his brothers and sisters were.
2. Find out more about the other works of Jack B. Yeats.
3. Look into the monastic settlement on Skellig Michael.

## A Young Man's Troubles (1900)



This work by Jack B. Yeats was described in the “All Ireland Review” as depicting “a shop interior in a Connaught town; a sad-faced young man stands brooding at one side of a broad board or counter; behind him pasted on the wall are a row of emigration notices; in front of him, at the far side of the counter, two elderly men stand drinking, and they watch with kindly distant disinterest the working of his thoughts.” The man, head in his hands, can only be contemplating departure from home, as he stands surrounded by emigration posters.

### **Discussion**

1. What troubles do you think this young man has?
2. Why do you think the young man in this piece is thinking of emigrating?

### **Further Study**

1. Find out about the various countries that Irish people emigrated to during and after the Famine.
2. Find out about any notable achievements of Irish emigrants.

## Connemara Woman with Red Skirt (1952)



In *Connemara Woman with Red Skirt*, Seán O'Sullivan portrays a rosy-cheeked woman from the west of Ireland, wearing traditional dress. Head covered, arms folded, she stands full square in front of a lovely landscape. Cottages are sparsely spread throughout the stony land. The low horizon allows for an expansive cloudy sky above the mountains, saturated in shimmering light.

Marked by its poverty, isolated culturally, and geographically inaccessible, the West came to be seen as the “real” Ireland, the repository of Gaelic culture, language and religion. The red skirts of the women, for example, can be understood “in the context of the cultural and biological role which was given to women in the West” where women functioned as models of wholesomeness, domesticity and authenticity.

### **Discussion**

1. Why do you think the artist chose to paint this woman?
2. What do you think the weather was like when the artist created this painting?

### **Further Study**

1. Seán O'Sullivan was a famous portrait painter. Find out whose portraits he painted.

## Outward Bound: The Quay of Dublin (1856)

## Homeward Bound: The Quay of New York (1856)



The prints *Outward Bound*, and *Homeward Bound* by Erskine Nicol, portray pre-emigration poverty standing on the Dublin quays, and post-emigration wealth on the docks of New York.

There is a suggestion that the ape-like emigrant would return home a successful and civilised man.

### **Discussion**

1. Why does the artist portray the figure in the first print like an ape?
2. Do you think that many emigrants returned to Ireland?

### **Further Study**

1. Find how much a journey to New York would cost in 1856.
2. How long would a journey by ship take to get to New York in 1856?

## A Knotty Point (1853)



In *A Knotty Point* by Erskine Nicol, we see a small community turn an eviction into a jolly picnic. Tables and chairs, and a table cloth have been installed outdoors. The three standing “gents” are barely human, and among the worst caricatures, even by Nicol standards.

The rest, although uncivilised, are accorded some redeeming features. As well as commenting on the supposed Irish ability to rise above hardship, Nicol acknowledges their ability to read. 53 percent were now recorded as literate, with all that that implies in terms of awareness and functioning. In Famine terms, the literate at least knew what relief was available, and even how to

emigrate; illiterate monoglots fared less well.

### **Discussion**

1. Why does the artist paint some of the figures with ape/monkey like features?
2. Do you think this is an accurate representation of Irish people at the time?

### **Further Study**

1. Find out how many people in Ireland could read during the Famine? Why was this important?
2. Find how people in Ireland were educated during the Penal Laws.

## The Farewell (n.d)



In *The Farewell* by William Magrath, we see a farmer standing at a gate, hat in hand bidding farewell to a lady on the back of a horse drawn cart. The chicken and chicklings as well as the thatch roof suggest a rural setting.

Having attended the Cork School of Art, William Magrath emigrated in 1855 as a seventeen-year-old stowaway. He worked as a sign painter in New York, became a night porter at a hotel, and enrolled in the National Academy's antique class in 1865. Soon, he had a studio and was specialising in sentimental scenes of Irish rural life, although he also painted classical subjects. He returned to Ireland regularly.

### **Discussion**

1. Who do you think the person in foreground is saying 'farewell' to?
2. Do you think the person leaving will return again?

### **Further Study**

1. Find out about how many people emigrated from Ireland between 1845 and 1852.

## Feeding Chickens (1848)



*Feeding Chickens* features the same humble dwelling as seen in the exuberant *Saturday Evening in Connemara*, and *Cabin on the Moor*, and the same girl features in *Chick! Chicks* (illustrated in *The Art Journal*, February 1880).

Dafforne, perceived “nothing vulgar nor unpleasant in the poverty it depicts - it rather suggests the simplicity of lowly rural life than suffering or want.” And so it is, the poverty is picturesque, the tumbled village kept to the background, the evicted out of sight...

### **Discussion**

1. Do you think that people still live in the cottages in the background of the painting?
2. Do you think these children have a lot of possessions?

### **Further Study**

1. Look into why people were evicted from their homes during the Famine.

## The Vigil (n.d.)



Francis William Topham's 'The Vigil' depicts a young mother and sister around the bed of a sick young girl in a rustic interior.

Topham was born in Leeds. From an apprenticeship printing letterheads, business cards and coffin plates, he moved to London where he first worked as a heraldic engraver. His earliest painting, *The Rustic's Meal*, was shown at the RA in 1832. He became a member of the Artists' Society for the Study of Historical, Poetical and Rustic Figures (Clipstone Street), founded by John Prescott Knight in 1838.

### **Discussion**

1. Who do you think the figures in the painting are keeping a vigil for?
2. What features of the painting tell you this is a poor family?

### **Further Study**

1. Find out about the other works of Francis William Topham.

## Cottage, Achill Island (n.d)



This painting by Alexander Williams evokes terrible memories of terrible times when poor, starving people were evicted from their homes during the Great Hunger.

This cottage may look run down and abandoned but the figure of a man – as if a ghost from the past – can be seen in the doorway.

### **Discussion**

1. Do you think this looks like a nice place to live?
2. What do you think life would be like on an island during the Famine?

### **Further Study**

1. Find out more about Achill Island and the surrounding area.

## Statistic I & II (2010)



Rowan Gillespie's (artist) statement:  
"Under one small municipal parking lot on Staten Island, some 650 human bodies have been discovered. Most are the remains of Irish immigrants who, having fled the devastation of Famine, survived the horrors of the "coffin ships," had, on arrival in the New World, died in quarantine from the diseases they carried with them. Amazingly it has been possible to identify the name, age, date, and cause of death of most of those who were so unceremoniously disposed of in this mass grave. Having spent some time at the site and

with those involved, I felt the need to offer some small dignity to those forgotten dead by cutting their names into bronze. It was my way of taking time to contemplate the horror behind these statistics. I would need to make 5,000 tables like these to record the known deaths resulting from the Famine in Ireland."

### Discussion

1. Why do you think the artist named these pieces Statistic I and Statistic II?
2. The ships Irish immigrants travelled to America on were nicknamed 'coffin ships'. How do you think they got this name?

### Further Study

1. Look into which countries the Irish immigrants emigrated to.
2. Find out how many people in the United States can trace their roots back to Ireland.

## Famine Ship (2000)



John Behan's National Famine Memorial (1997) of which this is a small version, is the largest bronze sculpture ever executed in Ireland. It is sited at Murrisk, Co. Mayo, at the foot of Croagh Patrick. Commissioned to encompass the loss of life and suffering in Ireland, while also reminding us that famines continue throughout the world, the ship is a powerful symbol, a testament to the millions who emigrated from Ireland during and after the Famine, especially those who did not survive the "coffin ships." The three masts rise above the ship like the crosses on Calvary. The rigging is entwined with the flattened bodies of those who died on board.

### Discussion

1. Why do think the artist chose to sculpt a ship to preserve the memory of those who suffered or died during the famine?
2. What do you think a voyage on a 'coffin ship' would be like?

### Further Study

1. Look into what conditions were like on a 'coffin ship'.

## Famine Funeral (n.d.)



In John Coll's 'Famine Funeral', we see hollowed figures, carrying the dead within. This is a powerful image of death by starvation.

From a career as a marine biologist, Coll turned to art. And from sculpting birds, plants and fish, he turned to the human figure. He has executed public monuments to Patrick Kavanagh and Brendan Behan on Dublin's canals, as well as to Countess Markievicz in Rathcormac, County Sligo. Private commissions, include portraits of Benedict Kiely, Francis Stuart, and the late Siobhán McKenna.

### Discussion

1. Why do you think it takes four figures to carry the corpse?
2. Why is the corpse not being buried in a coffin?

### Further Study

1. Find out about memorials around the world to people who died during the famine.

## Anguish (n.d.)



Glenna Goodacre's bronzes are noted for their expression and texture, and her ability to capture emotion in sculptural form.

Goodacre is regarded as one of America's most prolific monumental sculptors, Goodacre acknowledges that getting the emotional pitch right when it comes to subjects, such as the Irish Famine or the Vietnam War, is a challenge. She believes that the power of the image resides in its narrative accessibility more than its form.

### Discussion

1. What does the word anguish mean?
2. How do you think this sculpture captures the feeling of anguish?

### Further Study

1. Look at the other works of Glenna Goodacre. What topics has she tried to represent through her art?

## Famine (n.d.)



In selecting her submission for the Irish Famine Memorial, Glenna Goodacre's scale models were praised for their broad, loose treatment. In describing her creative process, she explains that while she draws sometimes, she mainly sketches in clay, small 23cm figures, for example, that have to be enlarged 15 times, and then multiplied by 40 figures. While the scale of her practice demonstrates her skill, her small pieces are not without power; the smaller story of the model is sometimes more intense than the expanded public monument version.

### Discussion

1. How do you think the figure in this sculpture feels?
2. Why do you think an artist would create a scale model before creating a sculpture?

### Further Study

1. Look into how many Famine monuments there are around the world.

## The Victim (1996, cast 1998)



The Victim by Rowan Gillespie represents each of the millions who died from starvation and disease, or emigrated. The scale of the figure contrasts with the scale of the horror. He has suffered pain, loss and humiliation, he sees nothing, hears nothing, utters nothing, yet, as Gillespie says, this piece "is about the miracle of human life in a galaxy of indifference".

The Victim is part of a series of works commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Great Hunger that culminated in Gillespie's Famine Memorial (1997, Custom House Quay, Dublin) in which seven people (and a dog) stagger toward the docks to board The Perseverance that sailed on St. Patrick's Day 1846, landing in New York two months later.

### Discussion

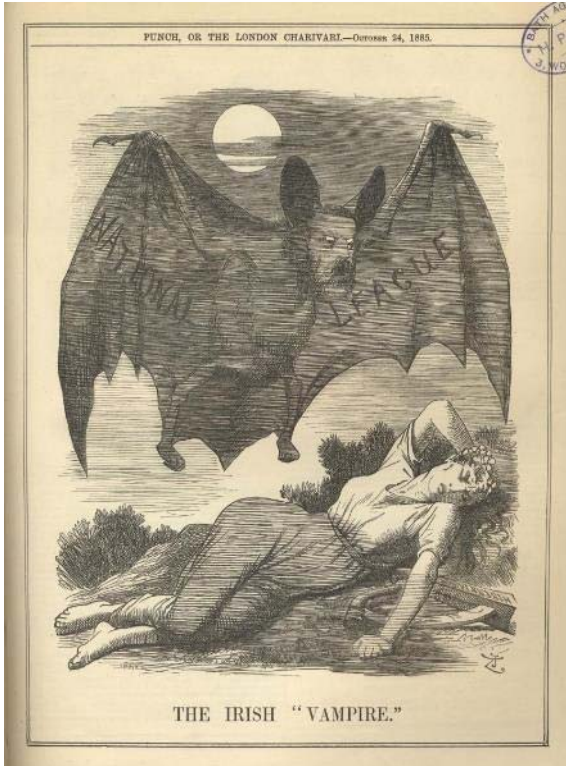
1. In what way is the figure a victim?
2. Why do you think this figure can't hear or see or talk?

### Further Study

1. Look into the reasons why the British government did not help famine victims as much as they could have.
2. Find out who donated money to the Irish people during the famine.



## Punch, 'The Irish Vampire' (1885)



In 1882, the National League was established in Dublin provoking a series of trenchant cartoons. The Punch image, by British cartoonist, Sir John Tenniel, shows Charles Stewart Parnell, personifying the National League, transformed into a vampire bat, about to prey on beautiful Erin, personifying Ireland. In the face of the evil from within, as Tenniel perceived the National League, attempts to liberate Ireland from her English protector, are portrayed as monstrous.

### Discussion

1. What do you think the National League was?
2. A similar image appears in the background of another painting in this exhibition. Can you name that painting?

### Further Study

1. Who was Charles Stewart Parnell? What impact did he have on Irish history?
2. Are there any places around Ireland named after Parnell?

## Thank You to the Choctaw (2005)



Kieran Tuohy uses oak and yew to tell stories of the mythic and distant past, as well as the Famine. The Choctaw tribe-with its own long history, rich culture and troubled past-took the sufferings of an unknown people, the Irish, onto themselves. In 1847 the tribe raised and sent more than \$170-a huge amount given their own needs-for the relief of famine in Ireland.

Only 16 years before, President Andrew Jackson (whose parents were from Antrim) seized the fertile lands of the Choctaw in Mississippi, and forced them to undertake the 500-mile trek to Oklahoma. Of the 21,000 who embarked on the Trail of Tears, more than half died from exposure, hunger and disease. The Choctaw thus identified with the Irish as victims of cultural suppression, dispossession and exile.

### Discussion

1. Do you think the Native American Choctaw tribe had a lot of money?
2. Do you think there are any similarities between the Choctaw and the Irish?

### Further Study

1. Find out more about the Choctaw tribe and the Trail of Tears.
2. Find out how much \$170 would be worth today.

## The Leave Taking (2000)



Margaret Chamberlain explores psychological and spiritual issues, such as loss and compassion, in her art. This 16-figure bronze was commissioned by Quinnipiac University to interpret the Famine experience from the view point of the refugees. The shrunken and starved passengers board the ship, their meagre possessions around them. This leave-taking is not one of choice, and many will not survive the crossing. The figure at the top stands as witness, giving up the past and encouraging hope for the future.

Chamberlain says: "I felt a strong link to the Jewish Holocaust and used photographs of those victims to study the effect of starvation and despair on the

human body. And I went within myself to integrate this experience into each figure's persona. I have been a baby, a girl, a sister, a wife and a mother.

How would each of these have endured such suffering, privation, humiliation and loss? I created a narrative based on these imagined experiences...."

### Discussion

1. What features of the artwork tell you that the figures are boarding a ship?
2. Do you think the figures in the artwork are happy to be leaving Ireland?

### Further Study

1. The artist felt a strong link between the Jewish Holocaust and the Irish Famine. Find out more about the Holocaust and why the artist would think that there is a link between it and the Famine.

## Basking Shark Currach (2013)



In Basking Shark Currach, by Dorothy Cross, a one-man currach is stretched with the skin of a basking shark (rather than the usual cowhide). In addition to its skin, fins and meat, the basking shark was once fished for the oil produced from its liver (Dublin was lit by shark oil in the eighteenth century).

Currachs – hand-made wooden boats, over which animal skins were stretched – were used by fishermen in the west of Ireland for centuries. Both currachs and sharks, appear again and again in Cross's work, not just as artistic ideas, but as allusive devices. The shark is thus a

representation for terror, fear and disgust, being exposed to harm, but also for survival, long life and power.

### Discussion

1. Why do you think the artist wanted to merge a currach and a basking shark in this artwork?
2. Do you think it would be dangerous to go fishing in a currach?

### Further Study

1. Ireland is surrounded by water. Look into the reasons why more people did not fish during the Famine.
2. Currachs feature prominently throughout Irish history. Can you find any examples?

## Famine Mother and Children (n.d)

This work by John Behan is based on the 1849 illustration, Bridget O'Donnel and her Children, featured in the Illustrated London News.



Bridget narrates: "I was at this time lying in fever... men came to tumble my house; they wanted me to give possession. I said that I would not; I had fever, and was within two months of my down-lying (confinement); they commenced knocking down the house... I had the priest and the doctor attend me shortly after. Father Meehan anointed me. I was carried into a cabin and lay there for eight days, when I had the creature (the child) born dead... and one boy thirteen years old died with wants and with hunger while we were lying sick. Dan Sheedey and Blake took the corn into Kilrush and sold it. I don't know what they got for it. I had not a bit for my children to eat when they took it from me."

### Discussion

1. What do you think Bridget O'Donnel means when she says, 'men came to tumble my house'?
2. Do you think Bridget's children survived the Famine?

### Further Study

1. Find out about how Irish people were represented in the London Illustrated News.
2. Why was the news illustrated instead of photographed at this time?