

# An artist like no other

*Padraic Reaney is from An Ceathrú Rua, but don't come to his work expecting Connemara scenery.*

**By David Burke**



Driving towards Padraic Reaney's house near Moycullen is, for a moment, like climbing the stairway to heaven. You are heading for the big blue sky and the clouds, with only a fringe of grass and furze across the bottom of the picture to remind you that you are still Earthbound.

And then you crest the hill, plunge downwards through a glorious view of Lough Corrib, looking towards Tuam, to arrive at a house in a hollow – where all people rooted in a landscape build. There's no constant need

for spectacular views, you grow up with them. But there is need for shelter from wind and driving rain. Picture windows are no good if you can't stay dry.

The critic Desmond McAvoek has described Reaney as perhaps “the first Connemara painter, rather than a painter of that area”. In an interview the artist told McAvoek that he would never think of painting the landscape that surrounds him and in particular he could never imagine himself ever setting out to paint a particular view or even an effect of light.

By Connemara painter, McAvoek meant that Reaney is a native, born and reared in this countryside that has attracted so many artists, good, bad and indifferent through the years. McAvoek writes “It is suddenly borne in on one that art brought out of the West has all been produced by those who have come here in search of those particular qualities (of landscape and light); one hesitates to call them tourists, since many have settled and lived there for long periods, but their work has a whiff of souvenir; certainly is not indigenous.”



So when you go to see his exhibition in the Tuam Library Gallery at the end of this week and all next, do not go in search of pretty pictures of John Hinde landscapes. Instead you'll find a collection of paintings and sculpture, which are simultaneously both mysterious and accessible. No matter how abstract his work may seem at first glance, there is always something on which the eye can light, a figure, an element of landscape, a doorway or a window or a pillar.

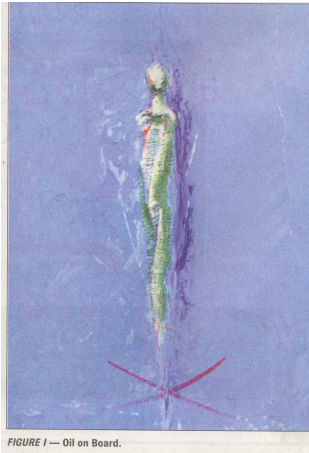


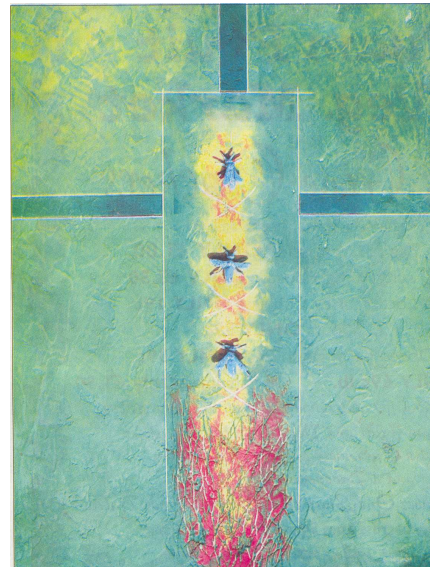
FIGURE 1 — Oil on Board.

From this point of reference the exploration can begin. Take the work on the left, entitled *Metamorphosis II*, it is part of a series in which the artist works with the amazing processes of nature, the metamorphoses we learned about in nature study at school and have now almost forgotten: how an egg becomes a caterpillar which becomes a chrysalis which eventually gives birth to a butterfly or a moth.

The insect figures are not painted: they are cast in bronze and the work becomes three-dimensional, a sculptural picture or a painted sculpture? It doesn't matter as long as you find it beautiful, and are prepared to study it and ponder the insights to which it leads. There are also

bronzes, one of which can be seen at right. The Reaneys of An Ceathrú Rua were boat builders, and of late Padraic has become intensely interested in man-made vessels of all kinds. *Boat People* was inspired by photographs of the Marsh Arabs of Mesopotamia in their reed boats. These are the people whose lands were drained and the way of life almost destroyed by Saddam Hussein, but whose habitat is now being restored, one of the few good consequences of the Iraq war.

It's a long way from reed boats that Padraic Reaney was reared. After school in Carraroe he attended the art school in the then RTC in Galway, and since he graduated he has been a fulltime artist. He has won several prizes, including the Padraic Mac Con Midhe Prize at the Oireachtas and an artist's bursary award from Galway County Council in 2003. His work is in many collections, including those of President McAleese and former President Hillary, the Irish Embassy in London, the National Museum of Malta, the Modern Irish Art Collection at Athlone I.T., and the Urawa Wood-Cut Prints Association in Japan, as well as in private homes and businesses.



No tourist in his own land, he has taken the minutiae of Irish flora and fauna and built from them something strange and new, as well as taking inspiration from our ancient history and archaeology. His work cannot be mistaken for any other: truly a unique vision, with those intersecting arcs a virtual signature.

- Padraic Reaney's exhibition in the Tuam Library Gallery will be opened by Henry O. Bourke S.C. on Friday December 9<sup>th</sup> and runs until Saturday 17<sup>th</sup>.