

Canavan, Bernard

VIEW 'Dispossessed: Images of the Forgotten Irish' Collection (2018) NOW >> Bernard Canavan grew up in County Longford in the 1950s, and had a sickly childhood, during which he only attended school sporadically. But having been taught to read by his mother, he got the habit of reading and drawing which has never left him. During the great post-WWII Irish exodus from Ireland, he emigrated to England with his father when he was coming on sixteen, where he did the usual unskilled emigrant jobs until he began to draw for many of the radical London Underground publications of the 1960s. In his late twenties he obtained a university scholarship where he spent five years reading philosophy, politics and economics and wrote a thesis on Irish rural family structure. Since then has taught courses mainly to Irish adults at evening classes across London and had regular exhibitions of his work in galleries in Britain and Ireland. He describes himself as a figurative expressionist in the tradition of Max Beckmann, Francis Bacon, Paulo Rego, and his work centres on the theme of 'the forgotten Irish in Britain'. He received a presidential award from Michael D Higgins for drawing attention to their experiences. But in general his work critiques the two other previous dominant movements in art: the Greco-Christian tradition in which art is a window into the world of the beyond, the world of Gods, miracles that lasted up till the high Renaissance of the 15th century. In the art that replaced it, aesthetics withdrew altogether from the world of the clerics and centred round human desires, art as a mirror of our own lives. The Baroque and Rococo, the Realist and the Impressionist, all focused around our deepest drives - sexuality, wealth, glory and other human events. The window to the beyond had closed, so that religious images are hardly produced at all in the modern world, but what was missing was a rational critique of the institutions and social structures that the previous world created, the giant buildings raised to heaven, the places of sinful incarceration, orphanages, houses of correction, schools and religious institutions; the curriculums of domination, anti-women, machoism, anti respect for the weak, anti the body. The Expressionist artist most associated with the rejection of that past was Francis Bacon who significantly had an Irish childhood. His screaming Popes, his monsters at the base of the crucifixion, his images of adult sexuality were his break with previous aesthetics. Canavan's work also centres round modernity, but also rationality and remembrance and rejects both the window and the mirror aesthetics as either corrupting or irrational. He rejects also the fashionable international aesthetics of post-modernity, conceptualism and other 'isms' that promotes art as some kind of private experience that only speaks to itself. His work is about restoring our experience and rationality so that we can judge our world more accurately and he believes no culture needs such corrective standards more than Ireland with our worship of violence and a phoney conception of love that only exists in the Beyond. Whether his views are valid, viewers of his images must be the best judge for that is the whole argument of his art.

VIEW 'Dispossessed: Images of the Forgotten Irish' Collection (2018) NOW >> PREVIOUS EXHIBITIONS 1965 Lowes Dickenson Art Scholarship show, Camden Town, London 1967 Exhibition Everyman Cinema Gallery, Hampstead, London 2003 'The Backward Glance' Hammersmith Irish Centre, London. 2004 'Nurses and Navvies' Hammersmith Irish Centre, London. 2006 'Over the Water' Willesden Library Centre London 2007 'Views from a Receding Childhood' Longford Library Gallery 2007 'Ireland and the Irish', the Excel Centre, Tipperary Town 2007 'Ireland and the Irish' Cork City Library. 2007 'The Streets of London. the Hammersmith Irish Centre Gallery, London 2008 'Encountering the Future' Dublin City Library and Archives). 2008 Exhibition of paintings Greater London Authority City Hall, London 2008 The Faithful Departed Hammersmith Irish Centre, London 2009 'Changing Times' Dublin City Library and Archive. 2009 'The Quiet Men' A touring exhibition of paintings by five Irish artists at the Pitshanger Gallery Ealing, London and Liceo de Noya, Santiago de Compostela, Spain (2009) and Villanova University Art Gallery Philadelphia, Pennsylvania USA (2010) 2010 Exhibition the Seven Gallery, Harrogate Road, Chapel Allerton, Leeds 2010 Exhibition at the 13th annual Lough Ree Environmental Summer School and Arts Festival Lanesboro Festival, Co Roscommon. 2010 Group show at the Purple Onion Gallery, Tarmonbarry, Co Longford 2011 Exhibition at the new Irish Club, Tudor Street, London 2011 Exhibition, Áras an Chontae Portlaoise. 2011 'Pictures of Vanishing Ireland' 2012 'Exile World' The Kenny Gallery, Galway 2013 'The Gathering' Longford and Edgeworthstown libraries. 2014 'The Backward Glance' 12 Star Gallery, Europe House, Westminster, London. 2014 'Scenes from a Disembodied Past' The Kenny Gallery Galway. 2016 Remembering Ireland Irish Center, Camden Town London. 2017 Awarded Irish Presidential Award for distinguished service for paintings on 'The Forgotten Irish' by President Michael D Higgins. 2018 'Post-WWII Irish in Britain' House of Commons Upper Waiting Room.