


THE IRELAND FUNDS AND THE BANK OF AMERICA
MERRILL LYNCH ART CONSERVATION PROGRAMME HAVE
JOINED WITH THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND TO
CONSERVE THE MAGNIFICENT IRISH MASTERPIECE
PAINTING: THE MARRIAGE OF STRONGBOW AND AOIFE
(1854) BY DANIEL MACLISE (1806-70)



IT is considered one of the beloved pieces of iconic Irish art. Every Irish schoolchild knows of its importance. *The Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife* depicts the marriage of the daughter of Leinster King, Dermot MacMorrough, to Strongbow, the Norman conqueror of Ireland. It is a massive piece, full of symbolism, and is considered one of Maclise's best works. And today, this national Irish treasure is in need of care and conservation.

In partnership with The Ireland Funds and their focus on preserving the best of Irish culture and heritage, this care and conservation is now underway. The project is one of ten international projects enabled by the Bank of America Merrill Lynch Art Conservation Programme. The Bank of America Merrill Lynch Art Conservation Project was piloted in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa in 2010 and provided funding to restore a diverse range of works of art in 10 countries. The project has been expanded to Asia Pacific, Latin America, and the United States in 2011-2012 to facilitate the restoration of 20 art and artifacts that display important cultural and historical value around the world.

Below, the National Gallery of Ireland tells of the importance of this work and how support from The Ireland Funds and Bank of America Merrill Lynch Art Conservation Programme will benefit generations to come.



Daniel Maclise (1806-70)
The Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife, c.1854
Photo © National Gallery of Ireland

THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND is the country's premier cultural attraction devoted to the care, research, and display of its national collection of fine and modern art. Founded in 1854 by an Act of Parliament, and opened to the public in 1864, the Gallery houses over 14,500 works of art spanning the period circa 1300s to 1950s. As a national institution, the Gallery has an important collection of historic Irish paintings dating from the seventeenth century with works by Thomas Roberts, James Barry, Nathaniel Hone, Daniel Maclise, Roderic O'Connor, John Lavery, William Orpen, Mary Swanzy, Paul Henry, and Jack B. Yeats. The Gallery is also renowned for the range and quality of its European collection, which comprises important works by Fra Angelico, Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Poussin, Goya, Picasso, Bonnard, and Van Gogh. Funded by the State, the Gallery provides free access to the public seven days a week.

Since its inception, the Gallery has been the fortunate recipient of bequests and gifts. In 1950, the Gallery was listed as a beneficiary of the estate of Irish writer and playwright George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), who had a long relationship with the institution. The income from Shaw's royalties has greatly benefited the Gallery over the years, contributing to the acquisition of over 100 works of art, in addition to a generous contribution towards the construction of the Millennium Wing (2002). Other prominent benefactors of the Gallery include Alfred Chester Beatty (1875-1978), the Irish American mining mogul who gifted 93 paintings representative of the realist and orientalist traditions in nineteenth-century French art. Without doubt, the presentation in 1987 of seventeen masterpieces from the prestigious collection of Sir Alfred and Lady Beit constituted one of the most celebrated gifts of the twentieth century comprising rare works by Vermeer, Velázquez, Goya, Hals, and Metsu. Paintings by Picasso and Gris entered the collection in 1986 through the generosity of Máire MacNeill Sweeney, whose brother-in-law, James Johnson Sweeney, was former director of the Guggenheim Museum in New York. In 1993, Caravaggio's long lost masterpiece *The Taking of Christ* was unveiled to the public and placed on indefinite loan to the National Gallery, where it takes pride of place in the collection.

The last two decades have seen enormous development in the form of gifts to the collection and contributions towards building projects. The Gallery's library and archive collections, which house and research material from the Yeats Archive, Centre for the Study of Irish Art, and Fine Art Library have been enriched with items of historic value and enable members of the public, students, and historians to better understand the development of the visual arts in Ireland. In 2010, Sir Denis Mahon (1900-2011), one of the foremost collectors and scholars of the twentieth century, presented his entire personal library and archive to the Gallery. This gift is considered the most important scholarly resource to the Gallery in recent years.

Many benefactors to the National Gallery of Ireland have been introduced through The Worldwide Ireland Funds. The Millennium Wing is the most recent addition to the Gallery's complex of buildings, which was designed by Benson & Forsyth and opened to the public in 2002. This award-winning architectural facility in Dublin city was funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Shaw Fund, and numerous Ireland Fund supporters such as Lew Glucksman and Loretta Brennan Glucksman, Sir Anthony and Lady O'Reilly, Brian and Eileen Burns, Fred and Kay Krehbiel.

More recently, a donor-advised gift by the Bank of America Foundation has enabled the conservation of one of the most important historic Irish pictures in the Gallery's collection, *The Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife* (1854) by Cork-born artist Daniel Maclise (1806-1870). The project on this enormous canvas (317 x 515 cm) commenced in October 2010 with the aim of preserving this significant work for future generations. Given its history, execution, and exceptional scale, the project, which is being carried out by the Gallery's Conservation Department, led by Simone Mancini, presents many exciting challenges. To ensure

that the conservation process on the painting can be communicated to a wider public, the Gallery has devoted a special section to the project on its website ('Saving a National Treasure'), with video footage on progress to date together with commentaries from sponsors and conservation scientists. The National Gallery of Ireland, like many of its sister institutions, is responding to the changes in today's society and environment that present new challenges for the museum sector. A growing awareness of cultural tourism encourages heritage sites like the National Gallery of Ireland to develop its programmes and services in line with twenty-first century

practices, both onsite and online. Today, the institution has enabled greater access to its collection and ancillary programmes through developments in its web technology. Visitors can access over 2,500 works from the Gallery's collection through its website (www.nationalgallery.ie), as well as follow progress on exciting conservation projects such as Maclise's *The Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife*. In 2011, the National Gallery of Ireland embarked on an extensive refurbishment programme of its historic complex of buildings on Merrion Square, namely the Dargan and Milltown wings which date to 1864 and 1903 respectively. The project involves the repair and replacement of the roofs to provide advanced daylight control for the exhibition spaces below. The entire fabric and services of the building will also be upgraded to modern standards, which will greatly improve the Gallery's ability to protect, preserve, and display the collection. It will provide for new accommodation for the collection and a range of key operations, including conservation, education, library, archives, and photography. While the refurbishment and development programme will be the main focus of activity for the Gallery up until 2015, visitors will continue to have access to the best of the collection on display. There will also be opportunities to bring its collection to a wider audience nationally and internationally.

Visitors can access

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THE GALLERY'S COLLECTION
THROUGH ITS WEBSITE:
www.nationalgallery.ie



Sean Rainbird, Director of the National Gallery of Ireland

"Projects like this are very serious undertakings. In the past, this sort of activity happened behind the scenes of a museum. But today we are bringing it forward to the public, we're making films about it, we're talking about it, we're sharing it. One of the most important aspects of this conservation treatment is the support of The Ireland Funds and Bank of America. Without that support, I don't think we would have been able to approach it in quite the same way and it would have taken much longer. We're making great progress."



Muirne Lydon, Paintings Conservator at the National Gallery of Ireland

"Worldwide interest is building in conserving Irish heritage. Bank of America as part of its worldwide art conservation project, in partnership with The Ireland Funds, is funding part of our mission at the National Gallery of Ireland; conserving our national collection. This funding is not only helping to preserve the cultural value of this significant art work, it is also helping the Gallery to engage with our audiences in new ways by making the project accessible through an online resource on our website where visitors have the opportunity to learn more about the history and on-going conservation of the painting."



Two conservators work on The Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife (c.1854)

This project is one of the most significant in decades. When completed, the Gallery will deliver a revitalised institution that will not only provide a safe and secure home for the collection, but also a wonderful cultural facility that enriches the lives of all who visit.