

# Introducing

## THE IRELAND FUNDS GALLERY AT THE LITTLE MUSEUM OF DUBLIN

Thanks to a Flagship Grant given to The Little Museum of Dublin, The Ireland Funds have a space for cultural and educational programming that has been named in honour of our donors. The Ireland Funds Gallery is set to house a wide range of Museum exhibitions ranging from the personal archive of Christy Brown and an exhibition dedicated to Japanese-Irish writer Lafcadio Hearn to an illustrated history of 1916. An ambitious temporary exhibition programme is the first key step towards the museums ultimate ambition to build a full scale city museum of Dublin. Connect magazine recently caught up with Simon O'Connor, Curator and Co-Founder of The Little Museum.



### Q. Simon, how did this exhibition come about?

A. Last year, a very small clipping appeared in the newspaper that said Christy Brown's family archive was going up for sale in Bonham's auction house in London. I went online to the archive and was struck immediately by the contents. It was basically a lot of letters, a lot of correspondence between him and other people along with unpublished poetry, paintings, and personal affects. I saw a whole biography in it.

### Q. So the sale was quite an opportunity?

A. There are some authors that you wouldn't get a single signed letter for the amount of money that this entire collection was going for. Here was this incredible writer from Dublin, whose life story has traveled all around the world, whose books were internationally famous and who'd had Daniel Day Lewis play him in a movie (*My Left Foot*).

So we partnered on a bid with the National Library of Ireland. We were sitting at lunch waiting on the results of the bid. I think the

auction lasted 18 seconds and we were the successful bidder. It was such a great story for Dublin. And to have done it in the middle of a recession was a boost because often people feel, especially in the cultural landscape, that there is not much money and people can't really do anything. It is amazing what you can achieve when you ask and in turn, when people choose to show generosity and trust in your work. Ironically, because we're in a recession, there weren't many other bidders. So in a way, we got, the country got this archive for a steal.

### Q. What is it like to have the responsibility for an archive of such a great Irish figure?

A. The National Library took the archive and they did what they do best. They catalogued it, they started digitizing it, and they're making the entire collection available for students and anyone who wants to go in and request items from that collection. And we've taken some of that archive and created, I suppose, a biographical exhibition on Christy Brown's life, downstairs here in The Ireland Funds gallery.

### Q. Was there a challenge in curating this?

A. It was quite daunting but then it was also a pleasure, because you have so much to work with. Daniel Day Lewis did this incredible job of bringing Christy to life for people who, in reality, had probably never heard of him because he had died before the movie came out. So, this was an opportunity for us to, not only tell his full life story, but also to encourage an interest in his writing. And to draw people's attention to the fact that this great writer existed in the city.

### Q. What has been the reaction to the Exhibition?

A. People love it. We've had lots of people rushing in to say, "I'm just coming in to see the Christy exhibition, I just have to see it!" His story is such an important Dublin story. In his day some people thought, "He's not going to amount to anything. There's no intelligence there." But his mother Bridget knew, she could see it in his eyes. And then he goes on to produce one of the biggest masterpieces in Dublin history: the novel *Dawn of the Days*.

### Q. Simon, what do you personally find most exciting about The Little Museum of Dublin?

A. The long term potential! Four years ago, Dublin was the only European Capital without a museum dedicated to its own history. In 2011, our small museum of Dublin was created through public donation and the vision of our many patrons, including The Ireland Funds. The Little Museum has since become one of Ireland's most loved visitor attractions, receiving huge public support and over 100,000 annual visitors. We want to create the full scale city museum that Dublin deserves by expanding into the adjacent building and incorporating the stable mews buildings to the rear of the museum at 15 St Stephen's Green. We have grown dramatically from tiny beginnings in 2011, and our success to date would not have been possible without the support from The Ireland Funds. It is such an exciting moment in the life of the museum - with the right resources, creating a big museum of Dublin is possible. We want it to happen, the State wants it to happen, and the people of the city want it to happen.

*The Christy Brown Exhibition will travel to NYC in the fall of 2015.*

## Dear Christy

THE CHRISTY BROWN COLLECTION

Simon O'Connor, Co-Founder of The Little Museum of Dublin

