



The Ireland Funds Celebrate the RHA's
185 Years of Continuity and Culture.

THE ROYAL HIBERNIAN ACADEMY

ROYAL HIBERNIAN

IN THE LATE 1700S A GROUP OF IRISH ARTISTS
PETITIONED THE THEN VICEROY, EARL TALBOT, FOR AN
OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW THEIR WORKS ANNUALLY.
THE REQUEST WAS GRANTED AND
THE ROYAL HIBERNIAN ACADEMY WAS BORN.

TODAY THE ACADEMY HAS EVOLVED AND GROWN INTO
AN IMPORTANT CULTURAL BODY IN IRELAND THAT
SUPPORTS CONTEMPORARY ART AND ARTISTS
THROUGH EXHIBITION, EDUCATION, AND ADVOCACY.

CONNECT MAGAZINE VISITED THE ACADEMY ON ELY PLACE
IN DUBLIN TO MEET DIRECTOR PATRICK T. MURPHY ON THE
OCCASION OF THEIR 185TH ANNUAL EXHIBITION.

IAN ACADEMY

GALLAGHER GALLERY

Q. Patrick, how do you like to introduce the Royal Hibernian Academy to people who are new to your mission?

A. First and foremost, we are a group of living artists with a great tradition. The artists work in many different styles. They work figuratively, they work in abstraction, they work in sculpture, and they work in photography. What we do is twofold, we try to really promote and document current art made by current artists living and working in Ireland. We also try to contextualize Irish art with art from other places so we have guest artists and exhibitions. Currently, there are 30 Members, 15 Senior Members and 10 Associate Members, all of whom are professional artists. Membership is for life and a new member is not voted in unless another member passes.

Q. The Annual Exhibition of the Royal Hibernian Academy is an unusually democratic “open call” for artists. How does that work?

A. Each year the Academy does an open call to artists around Ireland for our Annual Exhibition which runs from May through August. So beginning in September, we open our doors to artists and ask them to send or bring in their work for consideration. That work is then judged by members of the Academy. This year celebrates the 185th Anniversary of the exhibition as we had nearly 3,000 works submitted and only 280 of those works were chosen to show in the exhibition, where you can see a mix of work by these new artists and current Members from the Academy. And aside from commissioned portraits, all of the work is for sale to the public. This is key because it goes directly to support the artists.

Q. The logistics of managing 3,000 submissions for an exhibition must be quite a challenge.

A. It happens over five days. Artists pull up in cars and vans, there's truckloads coming in from all over the island. All this work comes in the door and has to be signed in and carefully packed away before being seen and adjudicated. So yes, it's a real logistical challenge. But you know, I think that's fabulous because art is physical.

Q. How else does the Royal Hibernian Academy support and promote Irish artists?

A. We're truly here to support Irish artists in each stage of their career, much like the three stages of life. When they're crawling like babies, we help them stand up and give them some direction and support. An artist's middle years can be established but they can often be very difficult as well because so many awards are directed towards young artists. So those middle years need attention too. Then when they're senior, we can document them, give them major retrospectives. To offer them the opportunity to see all of their work together. So that's our commitment to the individual Irish artist.

Q. The Ireland Funds have been long-term supporters of The Royal Hibernian Academy. What has that relationship meant?

A. The Ireland Funds have been so vital to us by supporting and facilitating gifts. That support has allowed us to be ambitious. For the last 6 years in Ireland, there was plenty of ambition but very little fuel, very little money to fuel that ambition. In a number of key important points over those years, The Ireland Funds' support has helped us maintain ambition. It has allowed us to bring into the city and to our audience, artwork that they would not have seen without that funding.



Stephen Johnston, *and who are you?* 2015, Oil on canvas, 100 x 150cm, Image courtesy of the artist.

Q. Can you share an example?

A. The support has meant we can be very innovative and challenge our audience. It has been remarkable that we can get some of the most esteemed artists of the 20th century, such as Philip Guston, a really important American artist of the mid to late 20th century and Bruce Nauman, one of the most formidable artists working today in video and in performance art. We created an exhibition that combined their work with films of plays by Samuel Beckett in celebration of Beckett's centenary.

Q. Ireland's culture is celebrated around the world. What is distinctive about “Irish art”?

A. Is there an Irish-ness to Irish art? It's a question yet to be answered. I think that it's very difficult. But I do believe that if the gift of Ireland was literature in the 20th century, then the surge and the gift of Ireland to the world will be to the visual arts in the 21st century. There's a new breath of fresh air happening this year, almost a tentative romanticism in the content of what we're seeing submitted. **SOMETHING IS REALLY HAPPENING HERE AND IT'S EXCITING.**

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— Patrick T. Murphy, Director of The Royal Hibernian Academy



Martin Gale RHA, *Talking at Doonfeeny*, 2015, Oil on linen, 100 x 120cm, Image courtesy of the artist



Richard Gorman RHA, *k-sora*, 2015, Oil on linen, 170 x 170cm, Image courtesy of the artist



Tracey Emin, *Wanting you*, 2014, Neon (snow white heart, coral pink text, 95.1 x 112.6, Edition of 3 + 2AP, Image courtesy of the artist, Copyright Tracey Emin



Robin Buick ARHA, *Print I*, 2015, Print on canvas, 82 x 61cm, Edition of 5, Image courtesy of the artist