

Seamus Heaney's 70th birthday to be celebrated by special exhibition at IMMA



Above: Louis le Brocqy, *Image of Seamus Heaney*, 1993, Watercolour, pastel and collage on paper, 47 x 62 cm, Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art

An exhibition presenting an extensive display of books on which Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney collaborated with a wide cross section of leading artists opens to the public at the Irish Museum of Modern Art on Tuesday 14 April 2009. **Artists/Heaney/Books: An Exhibition** is being shown to coincide with the celebration of Seamus Heaney's 70th birthday on 13 April, and is presented in association with the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism and RTE. Throughout his career Heaney has developed friendships and collaborated on imagery with a variety of artists, including Barrie Cooke, Felim Egan, Barry Flanagan, T.P. Flanagan, Martin Gale, Cecil King, Sol LeWitt, Hughie O'Donoghue and many others.

The exhibition features a display of the poet's book collaborations, as well as selected artworks from IMMA's Collection by the artists in question, with select loans from the Ulster Museum and private collections. Especially for the occasion, Barrie Cooke has made a pair of editioned prints, *Guttural Muse*, 2009 and *In the Boathouse*, 2009 for the IMMA Editions series, with excerpts from published and unpublished poems written in the poet's own hand.

Most of the artists are friends of the poet, or if not friends then as he himself explains "familiar presences". Some, such as Basil Blackshaw and T. P. Flanagan, represented respectively by *Study for the first tractor in Randalstown*, 2001, and *Boglands (for Seamus Heaney)*, 1967, have been friends since his twenties in Belfast. Others, including Barrie Cooke, Sonja Landweer and Louis le Brocqy, came to know Heaney a little later, when he began to move in Dublin arts circles. Felim Egan's painting *Intertidal Note*, 1995 echoes the artist's book collaborations of the same period with Heaney, when they lived in close proximity near Sandymount Strand, Dublin, "under the influence of the big sky and the wide sand". Hughie O'Donoghue, whose paintings can be seen in an adjoining exhibition at IMMA, pursues his powerful vision in the images which he created in response to Heaney's translation of *The Testament of Cresseid*, which is among the poet's books included in this exhibition.

As Heaney describes in a short interview with the exhibition curator, Christina Kennedy, Head of Collections at IMMA: "I don't think ... an artist needs any specialised access to poems in order to make a significant response. It's enough if the words set him or her to work. I've always liked the old schoolroom definition of work as moving a certain force through a certain distance, so you could argue that all that's required is some stimulus to start that move, something that says to the artist, 'The force be with you.'" The interview is being published to coincide with the exhibition.

Seamus Heaney was born in 1939 near Castledawson, Co Derry. The eldest of nine children he won a scholarship to St Columb's College in Derry and later attended Queen's University Belfast where his first books of poems were written. He was a teacher in Belfast from the 1960s and has since held many positions including Professor of Poetry at Oxford and Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard University. A Saoi of Aosdána, he is one of the most admired and popular writers of our time. Best known for his poetry, his works also include plays, translations and essays. Among his many achievements is the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995.

The exhibition is curated by Christina Kennedy, Senior Curator: Head of Collections, assisted by Seamus McCormack, Assistant Curator: Collections, and Jessica Monnin, Intern: Collections. Thanks are due to Noureen Qureshi, Delmas Conservation Bindery, Marsh's Library.

Artists/Heaney/Books: An Exhibition continues until 14 June 2009. Admission is free.

Opening hours:

Tuesday - Saturday: 10.00am - 5.30pm, except Wednesday: 10.30am - 5.30pm

Sundays and Bank Holidays: 12noon - 5.30pm

Monday: Closed