

Irish Museum of Modern Art
IMMA Collection:

Nick Miller and the Studio of Edward McGuire
Garden Galleries | 19th November 2015 - 3rd April 2016

Room Texts | Nick Miller



IMMA residency. May 2015. Nick Miller and the studio of Edward McGuire

Room 1



Room 1 (L-R): Portraits of Wanda Ryan-Smolin by Nick Miller (2015) and Edward McGuire (1963-66) Private collection.

The painting of Wanda Ryan as a child, nearly 50 Years ago, includes the doll that Wanda still has; the shells and leaves she collected, which McGuire kept to re-use in other works. Over the 2 years he took to complete the painting, he borrowed (and never returned) the Ryan's family carpet to work from. The story book on display is one of 12 Edward gave to Wanda, and which was read to her while she sat. During our own meeting, Wanda's fascinating memories of the era gave an intensity and energy to our own encounter that charged the painting.



Room 1 (L-R): Portraits of Anthony Cronin by Nick Miller (2015) and Edward McGuire (1977) Collection of Crawford, Art Gallery, Cork. Purchase 2008 Archive Material, Private collection & Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art. Donated by Sally McGuire 1997

Some of McGuire's best portraits were of poets and writers, their company feeding his connection to Art. His unusual portrait of Anthony Cronin is among the best. We are fortunate to be able to see and hear both artist and sitter talking in the original studio context in a 1977 RTE documentary made by Ted Dolan. It is available online during the exhibition on RTE Player. It was a privilege for me, 38 years later to visit and paint a true poet and man I greatly admire, whose vision helped shape so much that supports artists and the arts in Ireland.

[Folio: Edward McGuire | RTE Player](#)

Room 2



Room 2 (L-R): Portraits of Tresa Browne (1978-80) by Edward McGuire, Private Collection & by Nick Miller (2015). Portraits of Garech de Brún by Nick Miller (2015) and Edward McGuire (1968)

Garech De Brún (Browne) was one of Edward's first real patrons and is the subject of one of his finest paintings. It is a painting that took seven years to finish, dated 1968 and shown first in the RHA in 1970. There is no better example in the show than this, for his use of colour, unique and particular application of paint for both flesh and material. It was Garech who explained to me during our morning sitting for his portrait in Luggala, Edward's preliminary systems of drawing through glass on acetate and



Room 2 (L-R): The Colour Dictionary, Edward McGuire (1958-68). Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art. Donated by Sally McGuire 1997. Spring Leaves, by Nick Miller (2015)

Sara McGuire (known as Sally) adopted Tresa from India with her first husband Dominick Browne (a half brother to Garech). Sally met Edward while he was painting Garech Browne and eventually married him in 1974. He painted Tresa between the age of 11 and 14 in a wonderful Halloween costume made by Sally. Tresa's memories of childhood, the studio, family life and her own remarkable life story infused my own engagement with her, and the portrait that resulted during my residency at IMMA. Her own material archive and generous contributions also helped fill in some gaps.



Room 2: The Colour Dictionary, [Page 1-2] Edward McGuire (1958-68). Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art. Donated by Sally McGuire 1997

McGuire's remarkable colour dictionary (1958-68) his 10 year investigation into colour and particularly the use of cool - warm and complimentary colour contrasts, for use in his work.

In the studio McGuire's Jazz collection helped animate my connection to the material from his studio, and personally I engaged most deeply with the remarkable pianist, Bill Evans, whose track "Blue in Green" is used as the soundtrack to the film I made exploring The Colour Dictionary (See room 4)

Alcove between Room 2 & 3



Alcove between R2 &3: The Mayo Coughs (1907), Archive Material.
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art. Donated by Sally McGuire 1997.

I wanted to respond to his work and the studio objects in the collection as directly as possible, through painting. To step briefly into his world, and, in my own way, address some of his subjects that also interested me, both human and otherwise. In that context I approached a few of the people he had painted, inviting them to sit for me, not a reworking of the McGuire original, but for a present encounter, with their recollections of Edward as a starting point for our connection.

McGuire's paintings seem influenced by the intensely detailed observational painting of early Freud, by his friend Patrick Swift and maybe a dose of the Belgian surrealist René Magritte. However, I feel his best work transcends and holds its own as a remarkable and unique voice in painting. His exacting, slowly constructed portraits and still lives are neither academic, nor obviously expressive. At their best they have an intangible painted resolution and odd presence, with a cool stillness that defies categorisation.

My own tempo and temperament in painting could not be more different from McGuire's. I prefer my subjects alive, working intensely and relatively quickly, I attempt to hold the meeting of life-presence in paint. Whereas I often finish paintings in a few hours, McGuire could take many years. He famously declared his preference for taxidermy over live subjects. But, we are connected as painters of portraits and still-lives who try to resolve the problems of these subjects with intent, in paint.

Room 3



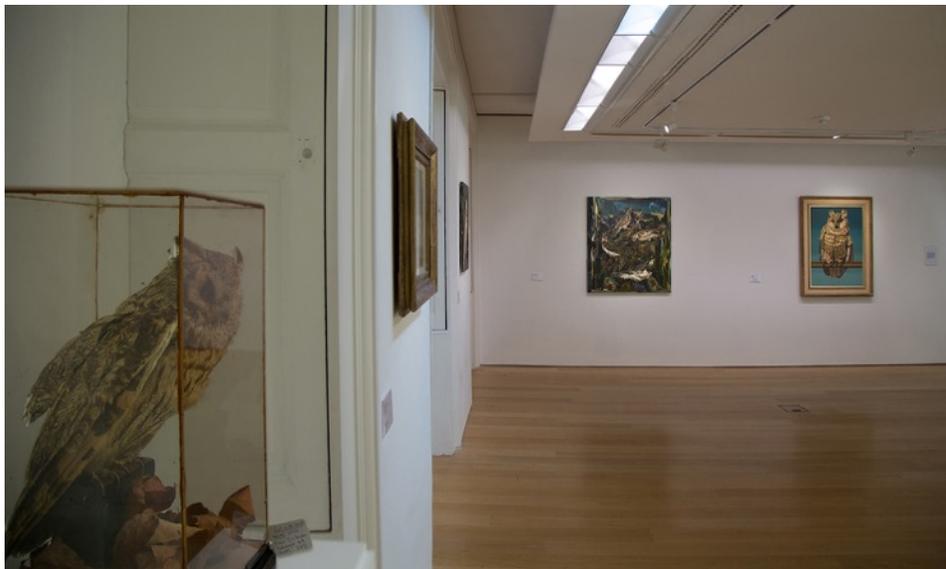
Room 3 (L-R): Portraits of Paul Durcan by Nick Miller (2015) and by Edward McGuire, Collection National Gallery of Ireland. Purchased 1992. Still Life : We Get Requests by Nick Miller (2105)

The poet Paul Durcan, sat for McGuire in the 1980's, and a couple of painted versions exist; this one is from the National Gallery of Ireland. Paul is an animated presence and sitter and it took me two attempts to hold anything at all, I was aided in the end by one of McGuire's 1907 Mayo Choughs. He and McGuire became friends, and Durcan celebrated the artist in the poem "*Portrait of the painter as a creature of painstaking curiosity*" which you can hear recited in the film showing downstairs in the entrance foyer. It was made by students of IDAT earlier as they opened the crates for the first time and documented the contents of the McGuire studio donation for their own presentation in 2014. Video on view in the Foyer.



Room 3 (L-R): We Get Requests by Nick Miller (2105), Kestrel & Visor, Nick Miller(2015). Portrait of Pearse Hutchinson by Edward McGuire (1970. Private Collection. Archive Material, Collection IMMA, Donated by Sally McGuire 1997

The large and striking portrait of the poet Pearse Hutchinson is the first painting I remember seeing, that kindled my interest in Edward McGuire. Back then in the mid 1980s, having moved from London, I think I was attracted because of a subliminal association of atmosphere with Lucien Freud's 1951 portrait of the photographer Harry Diamond. I only knew Pearse slightly, and, as he died in 2012, it, and the Patrick Collins on the stairway are the only portraits included in this exhibition for which I don't have a contemporary version of my own.



Room 3 (L-R): Owl,, Archive Material Collection IMMA. Still Life : McGuire's Birds by Nick Miller (2105). Owl by Edward McGuire (1973) Collection IMMA. Heritage Gift P.J.Carroll & Co 2005

Room 4



Room 4: Archive Material. Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art. Donated by Sally McGuire 1997.



Room 4: Archive Material. Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art. Donated by Sally McGuire 1997.. Film:: Colour Dictionary, by Nick Miller (2015)

Edward McGuire is remembered as having a studio and method of a man at work in a laboratory; full of devices and adaption's to facilitate his practice. Amongst many selected items here are: Some viewing and scaling contraptions for making and projecting drawings; The colour mixing cabinets, in which he stored glass slides of oil paint with water underneath, for use in relation to individual paintings and the remarkable "Colour Dictionary" (1958-68, Room 2); The arm palettes that were designed to receive the colour slides and attach to his arm while working; The articulated figure, that he brought back from Italy supported clothes from sitters, so that he could continue working on paintings in their absence; Special wighted adaptions to the easel allowing the painting to be moved on pulleys.



Room 4: Archive Material. Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art. Donated by Sally McGuire 1997.

Working at IMMA for a studio residency in May 2015 enabled me to work with a selection of material, objects and the taxidermy birds which had populated his studio and paintings. I was confronted with the sense that the lustre and meaning of objects is fugitive, in part dependant on the attention of the person to whom they mattered. In his absence, I had to find a way to re-animate and engage the objects. I did this partly through his collection of Jazz record covers that were part of the studio donation. Jazz became the breath of life that brought the objects to life for me: Bill Evans, Erroll Garner, Oscar Peterson, listening to them as I painted, they framed my connection to the era and literally to the birds and certain objects as subjects for paintings.