*Captivating Brightness[[1]](#footnote-1)*

IMMA in Connemara

There exists a visual and artistic ‘map’ of Connemara and the west that could coexist happily with the work of the great scholar Tim Robinson, a visual map of what Richard Kearney has called ‘the fifth province’ of the mind. This exhibition is a stepping-stone on that road of artistic cartography.

The artists represented here have all been exposed to and influenced by what Seamus Heaney has called the *Captivating Brightness* that is Connemara and the west of Ireland.

Some of the works are obviously west of Ireland inspired, such as the iconic Paul Henrys and the Gerard Dillons. Other works are not overtly ‘of’ the landscape or people but the artists have blossomed through their time spent in the west and indeed this *Captivating Brightness* has given sustenance to their work and creative energies.

Patrick Scott came to Renvyle in the 1940s, Mainie Jellett spent time on the Arran Islands, Louis le Brocquy had spent summers crab fishing in Ballyconneely. The pacifist painters Kenneth Hall and Basil Rakoczi found refuge from impending war in Europe in a cottage near Leenane. Gerard Dillon, James MacIntyre and Arthur Armstrong made Inishlacken their home. Dorothy Cross literally uses the Connemara landscape and seascape in her work; Barrie Cooke’s Great Irish Elk must have roamed the Twelve Bens in prehistoric times. Even Lucien Freud could not resist capturing the boats at rest near Cashel pier.

It is the ethos of this exhibition to celebrate this artistic love affair with the west by bringing together a group of artists that have exhibited at IMMA and allowing these works to return to the place where many of them first saw the light of day.

It is to IMMA’s credit that they have allowed these works to breathe in the Connemara air and travel west to Clifden. It demonstrates the inclusive nature of this institution and its openness to giving art back to the people. Some of the works in this exhibition will be familiar and accessible, others will be challenging and new but all hold a place in our national artistic heritage and for the first time are gathered together outside Dublin in a place that played a part in their creation.

Desmond Lally

*Arts Committee; Clifden Community Arts Festival*

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1. The title *Captivating Brightness* is taken from a poem *Ballynahinch Lake* by Seamus Heaney. First published by Ballynahinch Castle in 1999 and later included in *Electric Light* published by Faber and Faber in 2001. We are grateful to Seamus Heaney for allowing us to use his words. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)