

Visitors are advised that this exhibition contains some nudity.

IMMA wishes to thank those who have generously lent to the exhibition:

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In addition to the lenders, IMMA would like to thank the many public collections, companies and individuals who have assisted us so generously in researching and creating the exhibition and catalogue, particularly the Royal Hibernian Academy; Limerick City Gallery of Art; Office of Public Works; Pym's Gallery, London; National Library of Ireland; and the Arts Council.

We are extremely grateful to David Britton of James Adams & Sons and Adelle Hughes of Whyte's, for their time and assistance in the sourcing of loans. We would also like to thank our valuable IMMA Members and Patrons all of whom have made this exhibition possible.

A fully-illustrated catalogue accompanies the exhibition, with a text by Seán Kissane; a biography by Kevin A. Rutledge; and essays by James Hanley and Robert O'Byrne. Designed by Niall & Nigel at Pony Ltd. Available at the IMMA Shop on the first floor of the main galleries and online at [www.IMMAShop.com](http://www.IMMAShop.com).

Exhibition curated by Seán Kissane, Curator: Exhibitions  
Assisted by Georgie Thompson, Assistant Curator - Curatorial and Artist Liaison

**Exhibition Team**

Seán Kissane, Curator: Exhibitions  
Georgie Thompson, Assistant Curator - Curatorial and Artist Liaison  
Marguerite O'Molloy, Programme Production Manager  
Jennifer Phelan, Programme Production Coordinator  
Cillian Hayes, Technical Crew Supervisor  
David Trunk, Lead Technician

**ASSOCIATED EVENTS**

**Modern Irish Masters Series I Patrick Hennessy, De Profundis**  
**Sun 10 April, 3 - 4pm / Johnston Suite / FREE**

Seán Kissane (Curator: Exhibitions, IMMA) presents a keynote lecture offering a new perspective on the work of Irish artist Patrick Hennessy. This talk will give rich insights into Hennessy's images which address themes such as war, religion, gender and sexuality. This is a free event but places are limited. Book online at [www.imma.ie](http://www.imma.ie)

**Curators Lunchtime Talks**  
**Saturday 23 July, 1.15 - 2pm / Meeting Point, Main Reception / FREE**

Join Seán Kissane, Curator, Exhibitions, IMMA, for an insightful walk through of the exhibition. No booking required.

For a full programme of talks and events, for booking visit [www.imma.ie](http://www.imma.ie)  
For further information contact [talksandlectures@imma.ie](mailto:talksandlectures@imma.ie)

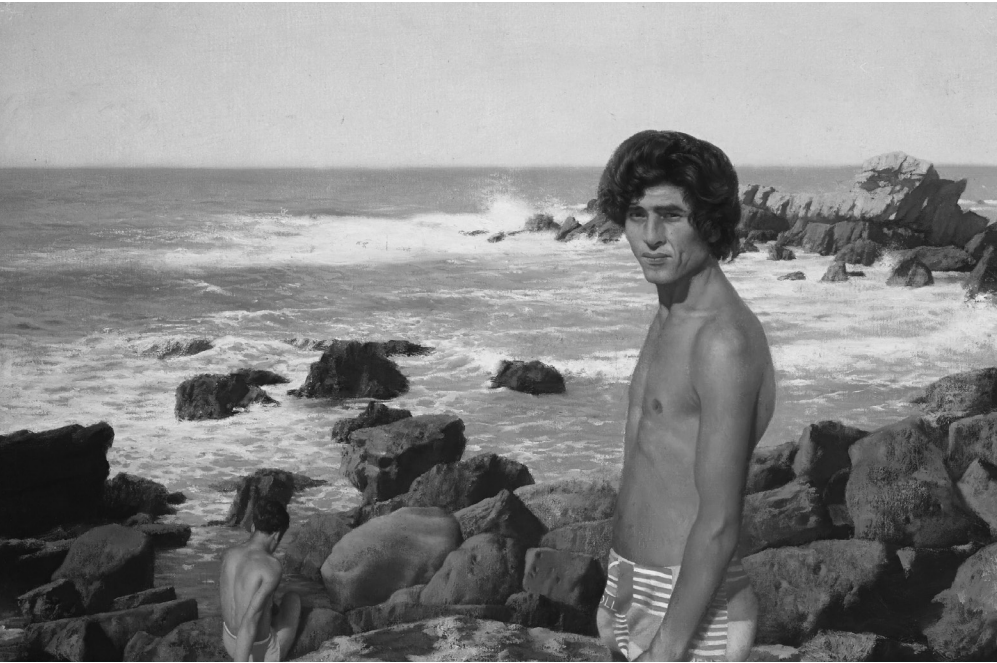
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IMMA - IRISH MUSEUM OF MODERN ART  
EAST WING GALLERIES  
24 MARCH - 24 JULY 2016

**Patrick Hennessy:  
De Profundis**



Front cover:

Patrick Hennessy / Kassim by  
the Sea, 1978 / Oil on canvas  
/ 62.2 x 87.6 cm / Private  
Collection / Image courtesy of  
Whytes / © The Artist's Estate



**An Roinn**  
**Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta**  
**Department of**  
**Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht**

Patrick Hennessy De Profundis, 'A strange and exotic presence in Irish art', 'standing alone', 'very un-Irish'... were some of the adjectives used to describe Patrick Hennessy RHA (1915-80), one of Ireland's most successful realist painters in the post-war period. Born in Cork, he was educated in Scotland and in 1937 won a scholarship to Paris where he worked for a time under the Cubist master Fernand Léger. He fused the Surrealist subjectivity he learned there with realism to create works unlike anything being made in Ireland at the time.

A prolific artist, he created portraits, landscapes, equine studies and still-lives that found a steady market in Ireland, UK and the USA. But he made other works showing human figures isolated in the landscape, male nudes and portraits of handsome men that puzzled critics who branded him 'something of an outsider'. He often adopted sexuality as subject matter, something that had been pioneered by the Surrealists and considered avant-garde at the time.

This is the first survey of this complex artist's work since 1981 and forms part of the IMMA Modern Irish Masters Series, a strand of programming that looks at the post-war period to shed light on artists who have been critically neglected; but also to reflect on what their work might mean to an audience today.

Room 1

In the 1940s Hennessy supported himself through commissioned portraits and the sale of still-lives.

The portraits are mainly of women and girls as commissions of 'official' portraits of men went to older and better established artists at the time. There is a marked difference between Hennessy's portraits of women and men; there is often a coldness to his representation of women as if he were unable to breathe life into them. This is unlike his portraits of the men in this room in which we sense a strong sense of attraction between artist and model.

Some of the other portraits are of members of his circle that included important artists and writers, creating links to London and a more open and tolerant society. These people gave Hennessy access to creative discussions and were also an audience for his more subversive works.

Room 2

Hennessy made many works that dealt with the subject of the Second World War. His life-long partner Henry Robertson Craig saw active service in the British Army from 1939-46 and his absence was a source of worry for the artist. He created works that were either a direct record of the conflict and destruction caused by it, or other more symbolic images that describe loneliness and a sense of foreboding.

These paintings have an atmosphere of stillness, and the hooded figures can seem threatening or like scenes from a dream remembered. These images led Hennessy to be associated with the Surrealist movement although he himself never described his work in that way.

Alcove

Any discussion of Hennessy's work must acknowledge the importance of the artist Henry Robertson Craig in his life. They met while at art school and although separated by the Second World War they were reunited in 1946 and remained together for the rest of their lives. They shared adjoining studios, critiqued each other's work, travelled the world together and shared the intimacies of their lives. As a legacy they set up the Hennessy-Craig Scholarship at the Royal Hibernian Academy which continues to support young Irish painters today.

*The Mandarin Robe* which was until recently attributed to Hennessy, was actually painted by Robertson Craig. It shows a young man in a kimono of gorgeous oriental fabrics in front of a Chinoiserie background. The work evokes the decadence and aestheticism of Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). This man later went to London to become an actor but he failed to do so. He became a prostitute instead and wrote letters back to Robertson Craig describing his life there.

Room 3

In the late 1950s due to ill health, Hennessy began to spend the winter in Tangier, Morocco until finally in the late 60s he made a more permanent move there. North Africa affected Hennessy's work in substantial ways. Immediately the sunshine caused his palette to change, becoming lighter and clearer. He travelled along the

coast to Essaouira, Fez and the Roman ruins at Volubilis and Lixus. At times he created works that are a direct record of the land and cityscapes, but the most striking works are those which insert the human narrative into these places. Other artists like Aloysius O'Kelly and Sir John Lavery had spent time in North Africa and the images they created were Orientalist, depicting the people and places they saw as 'other' and foreign. Hennessy departed from this convention. He did not orientalise the people he met but his models always wear contemporary dress and usually they are named, demonstrating his wish to portray an individual and not a type.

Room 4

Hennessy addressed the complications of Irish religion in highly personal ways interweaving the pagan, classical and Catholic. He examines the peculiar nature of Irish Catholicism, highlighting the thin veneer that sometimes separates it from ancient practice. He places Christian statues in pagan landscapes, often playing with the associations made between them to question ideas around gender and society. They are also shown in ruins, suggesting the end of an age or empire.

These statues removed from their traditional context and placed in the landscape can appear forlorn and ridiculous. With their faded paint they seem like relics from some past age, irrelevant in a modern world. By placing them within the glory of

nature, Hennessy points to the real and present power in our lives from whence joy and inspiration can be found.

Room 5

In these works, Hennessy takes the German sublime tradition of the Rückenfigur [a figure seen from behind] and places it within the landscapes of the west of Ireland typified by Paul Henry – which for Hennessy was a landscape synonymous with backwardness and intolerance.

The philosophy of the sublime integrated an awareness of God and his creation, with human emotions and sensuality. J.J. Rousseau argued that ethics emerged from the emotions – not reason or morals. His famous quote 'Man is born free, but is everywhere in chains', expresses the idea that man is inherently good and compassionate, but corrupted by society. Hennessy's use of this philosophy suggests that all men are good, all are created in God's image, and the private life of a citizen does not preclude them from participation in society.

We can read these images as men grappling with the problems of their sexual identity and the anxiety and loneliness they are experiencing. Looking over his shoulder we see the world from his perspective and empathise with his experience. We also see Hennessy's humour here, in the self-portrait we see him paint himself reflected in the mirror of a wardrobe – a pun on the expression 'to be in the closet'.

Room 6

One of the most innovative aspects of Hennessy's work is his frank description of gay men's lives. Made at a time when homosexual acts were illegal, these paintings depict sites of that sexuality which had been driven underground by an oppressive society. These works describe the places where gay men could meet safely: from public beaches and parks, bars, or the Turkish baths that were known to be tolerant of sexual activity. These works are coded – the narratives contained within them are not always immediately apparent, but they would have been easily recognised by those in his circle that included writers like Elizabeth Bowen or the artist Francis Bacon. *Self-Portrait with Figures* is an example of a deeply-coded work by Hennessy. The subject-matter is prostitution as we see young men standing in the well-known cruising area of the Tuileries Gardens in Paris. The figures appear to be loitering and the man on the right is poorly dressed suggesting economic hardship. As if by contrast, Hennessy shows himself nattily dressed with his trademark dark glasses. His red tie was a signifier for homosexuality recognised in art since the 1930s.