

TROVE

Dorothy Cross selects from
the National Collections
sponsored by BNP Paribas

ideas for **Transition Year students and teachers**
developed by artist Christine Mackey



Murdo Macleod, *Portrait of Roy Keane*,
Crawford Gallery of Art, Cork



Football, on loan, Athlone Castle Visitor Centre



Rodrigues Solitaire,
National Museum of Ireland - Natural History

03 December 2014 – 08 March 2015
Garden Galleries
Irish Museum of Modern Art
Royal Hospital Kilmainham, Dublin 8

About the Exhibition

TROVE

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Collections
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The exhibition TROVE contains a vast collection of objects, artifacts and artworks curated by renowned Irish artist Dorothy Cross sourced from the combined collections from

- Crawford Art Gallery, Cork
- The National Gallery of Ireland
- The National Museum of Ireland
- IMMA

The diversity of works included in this exhibition range from a selection of gold spheres to a turf cart, from soap bars to paintings.

The objects, artifacts and artworks span a range of historical, geological and political timeframes, places, processes and materials. Commenting on the selection process Dorothy Cross said:

“The idea of Trove is to make new relationships or arrangements of painting and object from collections that would rarely meet”.

WHAT WE WILL DO:

Through this exhibition, we will explore the dynamic and formal properties of a number of works - their **visual**, **tactile**, and **sensual** dimensions.

By responding to a series of prompts and activities we will consider the inherent **ritual**, **artistic**, **geographical**, **social** and **historical** contexts these objects, artifacts and artworks inhabit.

Through this playful investigation we will expand our knowledge on the relational, social and aesthetic value of these objects, artifacts and artworks, and how they contribute meanings to people and place as practiced through time and history.

PROMPT 1

CURATE - origin of the word

The term 'curator' originates from the Latin word 'cura' meaning 'care'. In a cultural heritage institution such as the National Museum of Ireland, a curator oversees a specific collection (such as an archive, a library, or a museum). In a museum of modern art such as IMMA, a curator devises, implements and directs plans for exhibitions.

The role of curator is similar to the role of a choreographer in dance or a director in film.

Gradually, the role of the curator has expanded and today as we can see from this exhibition, the artist Dorothy Cross has taken up the role of curator by selecting a series of works from different 'museum collections' with the aim of bringing works together in a temporary art exhibition that would not be normally exhibited together in one place.

PROMPT 2

The world of COLLECTIONS

As children, we fill our pockets with small 'found' treasures that we most probably chewed on first. We furnish our homes with all types of objects from both the functional to the personnel and from the most hi-tech to the handmade.

These objects can reveal our personal histories and taste. In a museum, curators select objects from a collection to create a story or to communicate information about a particular history or place. In creating a display, they make decisions about how to classify and arrange the objects.

Personal collections have the same potential for the exploration of ideas. The study of 'objects', be they the high arts of painting and sculpture, the decorative arts (furniture, ceramics, metalwork, etc.) or everyday objects of all kinds, may collectively be referred to as 'Material Culture'.

PROMPT 3

What is Material Culture?

Material culture is concerned with objects, their properties and the materials that they are made of, and the ways in which these material are central to an understanding of people, place, traditions, habits and activities. Those who study material culture are situated in a wide range of disciplines such as archaeology, anthropology, geography, history, design and sociology.

PROMPT 4

The Works

This exhibition is composed of a collection of works that could be loosely categorised in terms of:

OBJECTS – ARTIFACTS – ARTWORKS

The following definitions act as a loose guide in terms of thinking about objects, artifacts and artworks in general. They are not definitive, which means they are open for discussion based on your interpretation. You can challenge, alter and even invent new ideas around these particular terms.

WHAT IS AN OBJECT?

In its basic form, an object is a material that can be seen and touched. In its extreme form it can be hand-made such as the 'soap bars' or it can be created by (in theory) from the accumulation of dust over geological time through the application and contraction of heat (environmental conditions) such as the 'meteorities'.

WHAT IS AN ARTIFACT?

Artifacts are the material remains of past human life and activities. These include the very earliest stone tools to the man-made objects that are buried or thrown away in the present day: everything made by human beings—from simple tools to complex machines, from the earliest houses and temples and tombs to palaces, cathedrals and pyramids.

WHAT IS AN ARTWORK?

In a general sense, an artwork can take the form of a painting, sculpture, print, drawing, photograph or other visual media using a range of materials and activities where the artist's intention is to display the work in an exhibition for a public audience. An artwork can also be an idea or something that happens where the only material traces of the work are the instructions or the documentation about the work.



PROMPT 5

THIS EXHIBITION – Where to Begin

In viewing the works in this exhibition consider some of the following:

Where do you think some of these works came from?

Can you identify the materials of any of the works?

Are some of these works natural and/or man made?

Does the subject matter of any of the works suggest a specific story, person and/or history?

Can you identify any of the methods/processes/techniques involved in the creation of some of these works?

Are there specific common tools used to construct these works and/or they highly industrialised?

Are these materials and tools available now or were they unique to the time that these objects were made or found?

Are some of these objects specific to a location and/or were once living things?

Do any of the works on display suggest a function or prior use?

If so, can you tell what some of these works may have been used for?

PROMPT 5 (cont'd.)

There are many portraits in this exhibition. What are the qualities of a successful or interesting portrait?

What happens to an object when it is removed from its original context?

Do any of the works provide clues as to the cultural groups/societies which they may reference?

Do any of the works suggest an alternative story to what is presented?

Can you determine what the stories may be – perhaps it's a story regarding a political or sports figure – perhaps it is about the person who found the object or perhaps its about a particular period in a country's history or the animal and plant kingdom that may be extinct – the story may even refer to the formation of the earth?

Are there works that describe a particular custom, tradition or a period of politics?

Is there a particular narrative or theme that these works express as a collection?

How would you categorise these works – object, artifact, artwork?

What words would you use to describe these works?

Which of these works express a similar or different theme?

How do you feel when looking at these works?

Do you recognise any of the subjects?

Are any of these works relevant to a particular time and/or geographical region?

Do any of these works provide information about people, places or societies?

How do you think some of these works came into the hands of museum curators?

THE ARTIFACT



EXPLORATION

EXPLORE 1: THE ARTIFACT

Title: Football

On loan, Athlone Castle Visitor Centre

Location: First Floor | 4

For Discussion:

On entering this room you will quickly notice that there are a range of works on display. They include

- a *Portrait of Roy Keane*, 2002 by the artist Murdo MacLeod
- the skeleton remains of the extinct bird *Rodriguez solitaire*
- an early football
- a lithographic print of Roger Casement, 1915, by Colm O' Lochlainn
- a Training Rifle

About

The football was a souvenir of the 1924 Free state cup final match between Fordson Cork and Athlone Town, won by Athlone.

It seems the captain of Athlone town donated the football during the 1924 match and cup win to the Old Athlone Society.

The date recorded is 31/1/1967. This date may be when the information was compiled; it may have been earlier when the donation was made.

Description

This football is made from leather. It is constructed and stitched from cut leather sections. It is worn and the surfaces are uneven which suggests much use. We are not sure what the football is filled with but it is possibly some kind of tough animal hair.

History of the Sport

Gaelic football (Irish: *peil ghaelach*), commonly referred to as "football", "Gaelic" or "GAA ('gah')", is a form of football played mainly in Ireland. Teams of 15 players kick or hand pass a ball around a grass pitch towards opposing goals to either score a point over the bar or a goal. Gaelic football is one of four Gaelic sports run by the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA founded in 1884). The others include Hurling, Camogie and Handball. The game is believed to have descended from ancient Irish football dating back to 1537. The modern game however has its origins in the foundation of the GAA in 1884. The Tailteann Games, which was an ancient Celtic festival, took place annually during the feast of Lúnagsha (August 1st) and began in 1829 B.C. There are historical references to a form of Irish or Gaelic football being played in Ireland as far back as the 14th century. It appears that Gaelic football games were cross-country marathons involving hundreds of players and violent exchanges were acceptable. This cross country football was called 'caid' in County Kerry, taking its name from the ball of horsehide or oxhide, which had an inflated natural bladder inside it.



THE ARTWORK

Explore 2: THE ARTWORK

Title: Portrait of Roy Keane

Date: 2002

Artist: Murdo Macleod

Photograph

Dimensions: 90 x 76 cm

Location: First Floor | Room 4

Collection: The Crawford Gallery of Art, Cork

Description

Soccer player Roy Keane is the subject of this stark portrait. He is holding the skull of a raven in front of his face. Ravens are often associated with destruction or death.

The composition is stark, with Keane's head occupying half the area. Because the background is dark, the image appears closer to us.

The bird skull looks as though it holds Keane's eye in its beak and a strange symbiotic relationship exists between them.

The lighting is directed from above, allowing strong modelling of the facial features. A filtered light from underneath picks up the green of the subject's eyes and reflects on the underside of the raven.

The composition becomes a disconcerting triangle where we, the viewer, Keane and the eyeless bird survey each other.

Murdo Macleod (b. 1963 Scotland)

Murdo Macleod is a freelance photographer based in the UK.

Macleod was born and brought up on the Hebridean Isle of Lewis. He left the Island for the first time at the age of 16. At school, his interest in stories, pictures and poems was encouraged and this turned into an interest in photography. He studied art at Napier College in Edinburgh from 1980-1983. His work documents subjects in all areas of social and cultural life, in Scotland and England. His work has been published in *The Observer*, *The Guardian*, *The Scotsman*, and in magazines and online.

THE OBJECT



Explore 3: THE OBJECT

Title: Rodrigues solitaire

Collection: National Museum of Ireland – Natural History

Location: First Floor | Room 4

About

The Rodrigues solitaire (*Pezophaps solitaria*) is an extinct, flightless bird that was originally found on the island of Rodrigues, east of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean.

Genetically within the family of pigeons and birds it was most closely related to the also extinct dodo of Mauritius.

Males were much larger than females and measured up to 90 centimetres (35 inches) in length and 28 kilograms (62 pounds) in weight, contrasting with 70 centimetres (28 inches) and 17 kilograms (37 pounds) for females.

Its plumage was grey and brown; the female was paler than the male. It had a black band at the base of its slightly hooked beak and its neck and legs were long.

First mentioned during the 17th century, the Rodrigues solitaire was described in detail by Francois Leguat, the leader of a group of French Huguenot refugees who were marooned on Rodrigues in 1691–1693.

It was hunted by humans and animals and was extinct by the late 1700s.

TO DO 1: Visual and Textual Memory

Use this space to sketch and record details about three works in the exhibition that are vastly different and unique to each other and that hold your attention for an extended period of time in this exhibition.

How and why do they hold your attention?

Drawing a work helps to fix it to your memory.

Don't forget to note the name and date of the work and other interesting details associated with the works that you choose.

Reconsider the questions at the beginning of this document in terms of finding more information on the specific works that you choose.

TO DO 2: Curate your own exhibition

As we have seen from this exhibition the range of works on display are not confined to a particular time, process or type. Therefore we could think about TROVE as a **hybrid** exhibition model because it incorporates more than one type of work.

The curatorial approach that Dorothy Cross took opens up new ways of thinking and experiencing all kinds of creative models through the found, the made, the natural and the industrial.

There are other ways in thinking about the curating of an exhibition based on the following models.

1. Exhibition as artifact display
2. Exhibition as communicator of ideas
3. Exhibition as visitor activity
4. Exhibition as environment

1. Exhibition as artifact display

This approach emphasises the selection and arrangement of artifacts.

2. Exhibition as communicator of ideas

All exhibitions have a central theme or topic that defines them. When an exhibition functions strongly as a communicator of ideas (including thoughts, theories, information, discoveries, etc.) it seeks to convey additional messages that elaborate on that theme and provide new information or perspectives. In an idea-exhibition, the heart of the exhibition is the set of messages, stories or facts that the exhibition-makers wish to communicate.

3. Exhibition as visitor activity

It is also possible to see the exhibition in terms of the activities of visitors in the exhibition. Rather than putting objects at the centre (as in the **artifact-display**) or messages (as in the **idea-exhibition**) the activity-exhibition puts visitor behavior and interaction at the centre.

The starting point is what the visitor will do in the exhibition. The exhibition provides a medium (material or objects) that the visitor is encouraged to manipulate or use as he or she wishes. Typically the most activity-oriented exhibitions are found in children's museums and science centers. Activity-exhibitions are usually interactive because an interactive exhibition is specifically designed to respond to what the visitor does.

4. Exhibition as environment

Under this approach an exhibition is an environment that envelops the visitor. Although all museum exhibitions are constructed environments, the emphasis in the **environment-exhibition** is to create an immersive space where the experience of being in the space contributes to viewer's visit. Many **environment-exhibitions** reproduce the characteristics (colours, materials, sounds, smells, objects) of some other place to which the visitor is transported. This type of exhibition is frequently found in botanical gardens and zoos, since it facilitates the care of living specimens and provides an evocative context at the same time.

What to curate?

Consider the previous models

1. Exhibition as artifact display
2. Exhibition as communicator of ideas
3. Exhibition as visitor activity
4. Exhibition as environment

Choose one model

Consider the main steps for mounting your own exhibition:

- Themes/topics (political, historical, social, etc.)
- Objects/Artworks
- Artists/Crafters
- Title
- Media
- Layout
- Descriptions/Texts/Leaflets/Publicity/
Catalogue/Websites/Social Media
- Space (physical/virtual)
- Text panels/labels

FURTHER DISCUSSION

Use the following questions and activities as a way to initiate a broad-based dialogue about contemporary art and specific ideas related to where art is seen, how it is made and who makes it.

Why is art important?

Why is object making important?

Do you think there is a difference between a craft object, a found object, a natural object and an art object?

What roles do art and objects play in our society?

What value is placed upon artists and their art, and why?

What do you think are the differences between an art object and a craft object?

What makes something a work of art?

Is art defined by particular boundaries/tastes/politics?

If so, what are they and how have they changed over the course of history?

What is the role of the artist?

How has this role changed over time?

What distinguishes visual art from other forms of visual communication such as advertising, design or photojournalism?

Who decides what a work of art means— the artist, the critic, the viewer?

How do history and the passage of time affect the meaning of an artwork and/or an object?

What are the most important skills an artist can have?

What materials and tools do artists use to create art today?

Have the tools for making art changed over time?

Where do artists find inspiration?

How do artists work with history?

Can artists contribute to the historical record? Why or why not?

What is the difference between working alone and collaborating on an artwork with fabricators, audiences or others?

In addition to museums and galleries, where else can art be shown?

How does the location or context of a work of art effect its meaning?

What subjects, issues and themes are important to artists working today?

What role does beauty play in contemporary art?

Does a work of art need to be beautiful - why, or why not?

Who decides what is beautiful?

Is it possible to think with your hands?

What are the differences between making a work of art with a specific goal or product in mind, versus creating something that evolves as a result of the process?

How and where do artists get ideas?

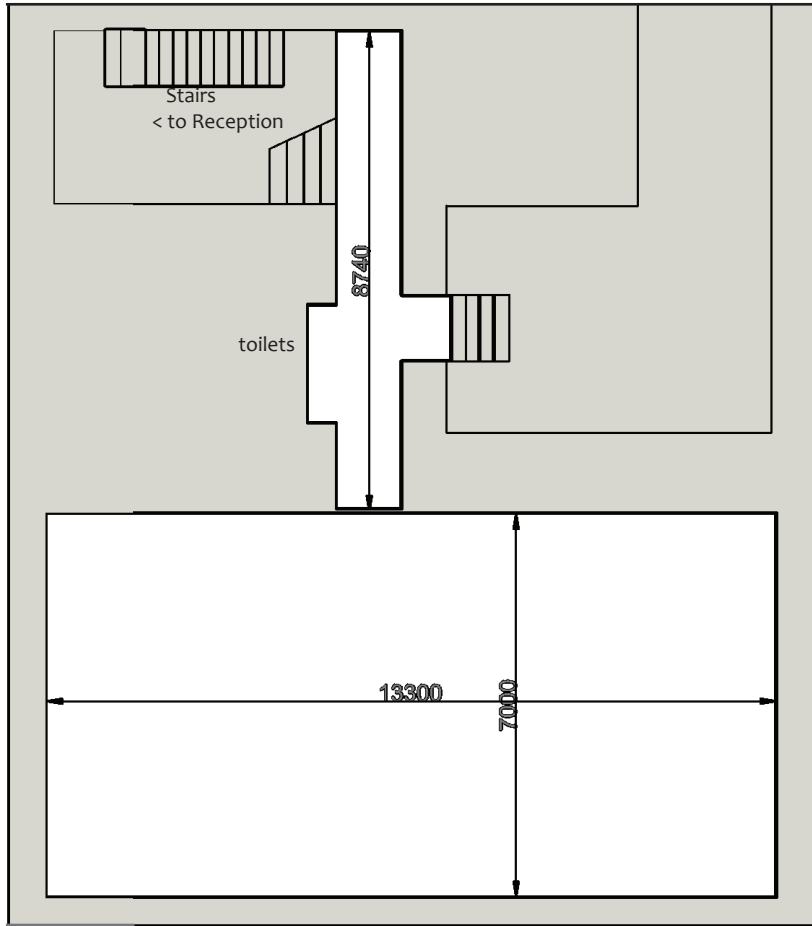
How and why do artists choose certain subject matter and places for inspiration?

What kinds of places inspire you?

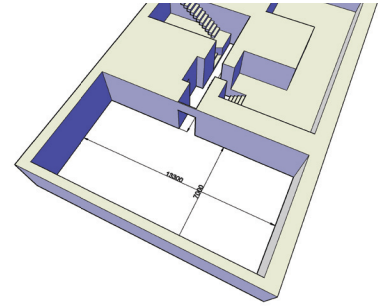
Why are they inspiring?

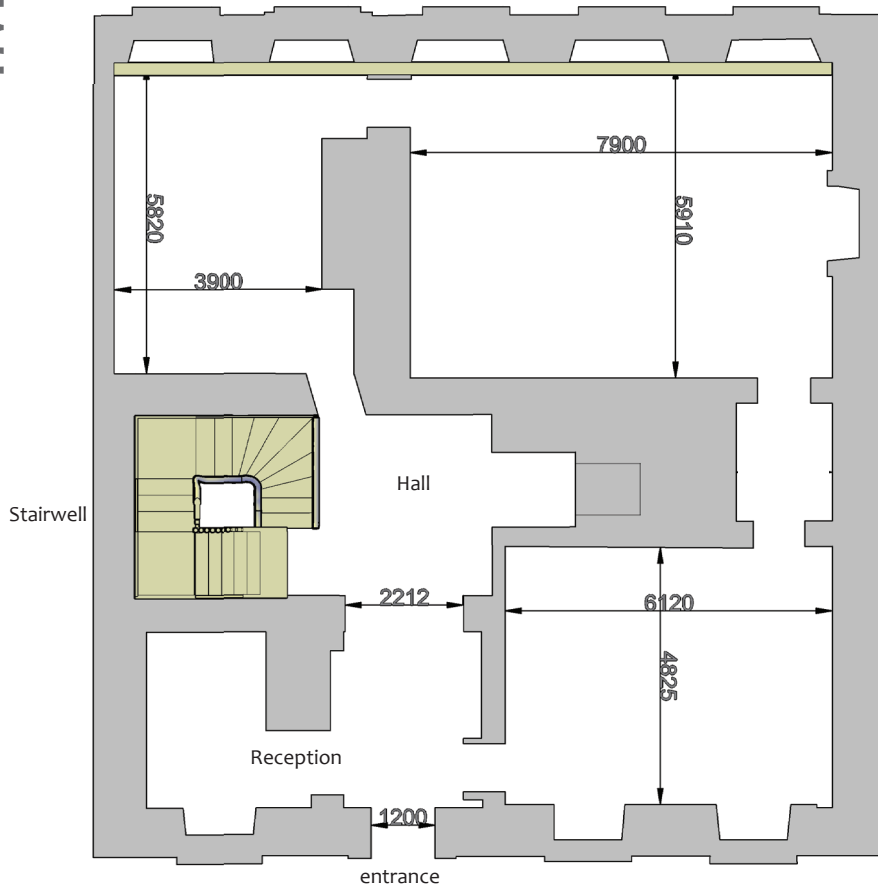
What are the various ways we learn about history?

Which films, written accounts, or other sources provide the most reliable and compelling information about history?

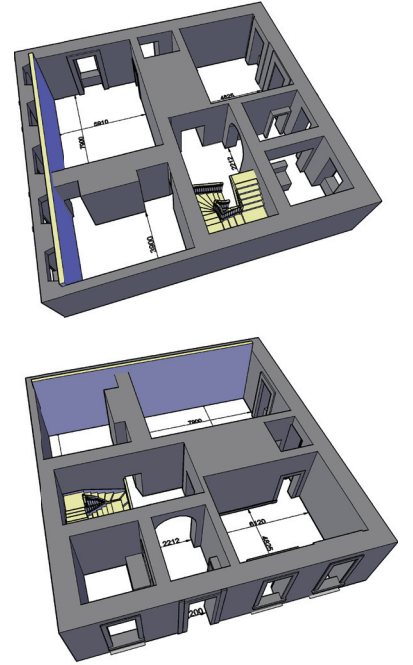


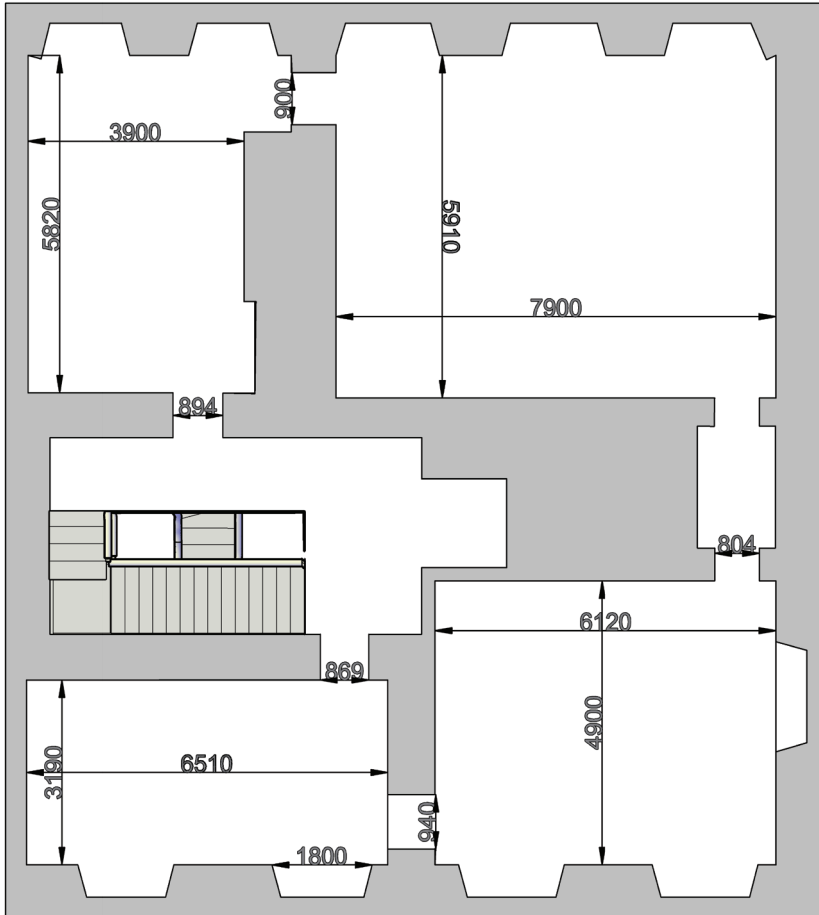
Basement Gallery



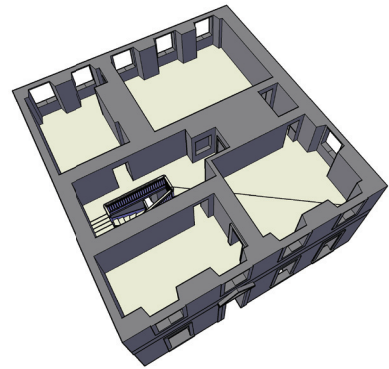


Ground Floor Gallery





First Floor Gallery



Mapping the exhibition

Use the attached floor plan to map out the exhibition indicating the following:

Exhibition Space

What kind of exhibition space is it – new, old, renovated, etc.?
How many rooms and floors does the exhibition comprise?

Display

How are the art works displayed?
What is the layout of the exhibition?
Describe the spaces of the exhibition?
Is there a theme/s to the exhibition?
How is/are the theme/s presented throughout the exhibition?

Access

How do visitors find their way through the exhibition?
Is it possible to get close to the artworks?
Are there any obstacles to getting around the spaces?
Consider the following in terms of access: space, lighting, information.

Seating

Is there seating for visitors to sit and rest and/or contemplate the works?
What kind of seating is available?
Where is it situated?

Lighting

What kind of lighting is used in the exhibition – daylight, artificial, bright, low, spotlight, theatrical?
What are the effects of the lighting?

Information, Reading and Resource Material

What kinds of information, reading and resource material about the exhibition are available in the gallery spaces, at the reception desk, on the website, over the phone, etc.?
Are there labels and/or wall texts, gallery guides, guided tours, etc.?

Security

What are the security issues for this exhibition?
What security mechanisms are in place?

National Cultural Institutions**Crawford Gallery of Art**

Emmet Place
Cork
Ireland
Tel: 353 (0)21 480 5042
Email: info@crawfordartgallery.ie
Website: www.crawfordartgallery.ie

National Gallery of Ireland

Merrion Square West
Dublin 2
Tel: +353 1 661 5133
Email: info@ngi.ie
Website: www.nationalgallery.ie

Irish Museum of Modern Art

Royal Hospital Kilmainham
Military Road
Dublin 8
Tel: 353 1 612 9900
Email: info@imma.ie
Website: www.imma.ie

National Museum**Archeology**

Kildare Street
Dublin 2
Tel: 353 1 677 7444
Email: marketing@museum.ie
Website: www.museum.ie

Decorative Arts & History

Colins Barracks
Benburb Street
Dublin 7
Tel: 353 1 677 7444
Email: marketing@museum.ie
Website: www.museum.ie

Country Life

Turlough Park
Castlebar
Co. Mayo
Tel: 353 94 903 1755
Email: tpark@museum.ie
Website: www.museum.ie

Natural History

Merrion Street
Dublin 2
Tel: 353 1 677 7444
Email: marketing@museum.ie
Website: www.museum.ie

Notes