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Alanna O'Kelly, Biographical Entry

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ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF IRELAND

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FRONTISPIECE

Edward Ambrose, *Psyche discovering Cupid* (detail), 1840, marble, Crawford Art Gallery, Cork [see 33]

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Oliver Sheppard, *The Death of Cúchulainn* (detail), 1911-12, bronze, General Post Office, Dublin [see 356]

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Sculpture studio, Dublin Metropolitan School of Art (detail), c. 1912-14, Oliver Sheppard Collection, National Irish Visual Arts Library [see 403]

and refined' (FJ, 16 November 1863). The Marquess of Downshire, who became a patron and friend of O'Doherty, commissioned the Erin statue to be executed in marble, in half life-size, for his estate in Hillsborough, Co. Down. The statue remains untraced but it is known that details of the original design were altered in the marble version, with the mass of drapery reduced, creating a lighter appearance (AJ, 1862, 95). Strings were also added to the harp. The statue was displayed at the International Exhibition in London in 1862, where the catalogue listing included the line 'Erin, the tear and the smile in thine eyes' from *Moore's Irish Melodies*. The marble Erin was also among O'Doherty's exhibits at the British Institution in 1863. Two years earlier he had exhibited at the Institution a work entitled *One of the Surrey Volunteers*, depicting an unidentified member of the Volunteer Rifle Corps.

O'Doherty also exhibited three busts, all portraits of women, at the RA, and his only exhibit at the RHA was a Bust of a Lady sent from London in 1864. His portrait work met with acclaim. Busts of *Viscountess Guillamore* (marble, RA, 1863) and *Sir Robert Bateson* were admired for their dignified and life-like qualities (FJ, 16 November 1863).

Between 1857 and 1864 O'Doherty gave four different addresses in London for his RA exhibits: Upper Charlotte Street; Rathbone Place; Old Cavendish Street; and Upper Belgrave Place. After 1864 little is known of the last years of his life. O'Doherty's obituary in the *Art Journal* indicates that he was in Rome in the mid-1860s, pursuing his studies in sculpture and working on a statue of *The Martyr* for the Marquess of Downshire, and that he died in February 1868 in La Maison de Charité in Berlin (AJ, 1868, 73). PAULA MURPHY

SELECTED READING Strickland; Murphy, 2010.

O'KELLY, ALANNA (b. 1955). (See also AAI v). Presenting performance, photo-text montage, audio work, slide installation and video, Alanna O'Kelly's practice in the 1980s and 1990s was defiant of genre and discipline reduction. She worked in series to unfold the intricacies of her subjects, with interconnected artworks conflating historical concerns with contemporary identity politics. She appropriated traditional forms of expression and reflection to give voice in particular to a deep regard for location and gender-related interests.

These thematic strands of O'Kelly's practice were proclaimed by her participation in major international exhibitions of Irish artists – such as *Divisions*, *Crossroads*, *Turns of Mind: Some New Irish Art*, which toured in North America and *A Sense of Ireland* in 1980 and 1988 in London – and of women artists – such as *Forbidden Heroines*, 1986, in Arnhem, Holland, and *National Conference of the Women's Caucus for the Arts* in Boston in 1987. The universal appeal of her work was reflected in Lucy Lippard's comments: 'O'Kelly takes her Irishness for granted and seems at ease with local materials and obsessions, which paradoxically permits her a freedom to experiment and to treat the rest of the planet as home' (*Divisions*, 1985, 46).

Alanna O'Kelly was born and lives in County Wexford. She has travelled widely, spending time in Europe, Nigeria and North America. She represented Ireland at *Documenta 8*, Kassel, Germany, in 1987 and at the 23rd São Paulo Bienal, Brazil, in

1996. She is a member of Aosdána and her work is the collections of the CAG and IMMA. O'Kelly's graduation from NCAD in 1978 with an Honours Diploma in Fine Art was followed with a postgraduate scholarship in Helsinki in 1979 and a research assistantship at the Slade School of Art, 1985–87. She won the Guinness Peat Aviation Emerging Artist Award in 1986.

In 1980 she was the youngest of nine artists selected by Dorothy Walker for the exhibition *Without the Walls*, described by Medb Ruane as a counter-exhibition (*Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 91:363, Autumn 2002, 212) within the London Festival of Irish Art, *A Sense of Ireland*, at the ICA. She had her first solo show at Project Arts Centre, Dublin in 1981: *Barriers*, an installation of large wooden posts from County Wexford which were used to stem coastal erosion. This was in keeping with her early sculptural practice: using locally sourced materials to create new objects by adapting ritualistic manipulations of natural materials, such as flax, fern, wicker and sally rods. These were often site-specific works, generated through public performance, which would subsequently disintegrate as art objects to be reclaimed by natural environments. The inclusion of photographs and drawings in *Barriers* anticipated the multi-media and multi-sensory reflections on her subjects that later supplanted her primary process of gathering materials. O'Kelly's fidelity to art as a social process was sustained, if transformed, in later gallery works.

One bridging work between her early engagement with sculptural forms and her better-known installations was the participatory *Summer Solstice (Fire Drawing)* in Marlay Park, Dublin, in 1983. On St John's Night O'Kelly created a temporary site-specific work, which Peter Murray described as 'a gesture both ancient and modern, characteristic of the artist' (*Alanna O'Kelly*, 1996). A circle and cairn of stones were a stage setting for an assembly of people who completed the work in a performed fire ceremony. A comparable, though more intimate, act of empowerment and remembrance was realized in *Dancing with my Shadow*, 1987. O'Kelly released letters written to her recently deceased mother into the sea. Her video recording of the ebb and flow of the texts with a soundtrack of her singing the titular song her mother sang to her laid bare a wide-reaching elegy on the mourning of a loved one.

One of a generation of Irish artists who spent formative years working and exhibiting outside of Ireland, notably in Britain, O'Kelly became sensitive towards emigrant populations past and present. Her feminist activism emerged to significant effect in her early work also and political power exercised through collective experience was central to her initial sound works. Her first public use of keening (a form of lament, *caoine*) in performance arose out of time spent at the Women's Peace Camp in Greenham Common, Berkshire, England. *Chant Down Greenham Common*, 1986, was for O'Kelly 'a very powerful performance form: balancing that which is vulnerable with that which is strong' (Deepwell, p. 139). Dorothy Walker wrote: 'This is one of the most powerful and most moving live performances of any I have seen in twentieth-century performance art, heart-rending to witness as the live voice rises passionately to hold its human own against the machine, almost failing, but [...] finally, agonizingly, reaching the summit' (*IAR Year Book*, 6, 1989, p. 212). Complementing the time-based performative

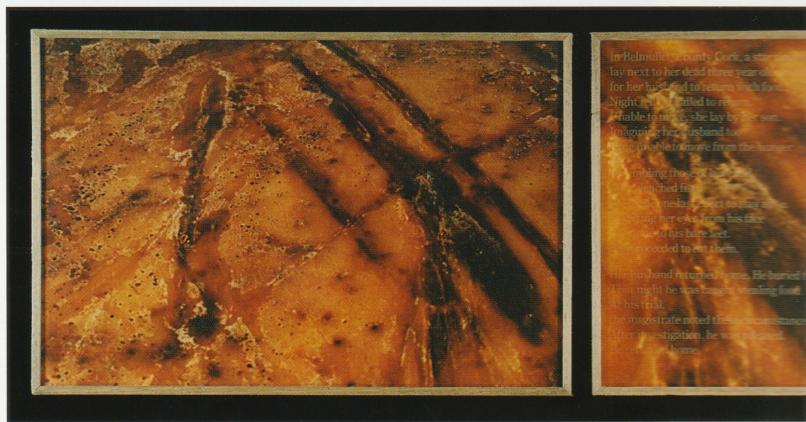
As her protest performances transfigured into representations of sublimated and contested history, O'Kelly combined her focus on the formation of identity with her interest in the rural landscapes of Ireland formed in her childhood years in the south-east of the county. These interests converged in the early 1990s when she formulated a major series of works, on the subject of the demographically devastating mid-nineteenth century Famine. *The Country Blooms: A Garden and a Grave*, 1992 [240], encompassed many media forms and created a correspondence between the Irish cultural legacy of the Famine and conditions of mass hunger elsewhere in the 1990s and tactfully incorporated O'Kelly's personal experiences as an emigrant and a new mother. First exhibited as a distinct body of work at IMMA in 1992, in 1994 she received the first Glen Dimplex Award for the series. Her previous use of tapes and video to document and record performances became central as forms of work in *The Country*.... Videos comprised image sequences of land, burial sites, forms of shelter and the fecundity of the maternal body, augmented by a sombre soundtrack.

Alongside these time-based elements were photo-text montages of poems and textual reflections of Famine experiences, folk memory, images of Irish fields and emaciated hands. Jeff Kelley identified the lack of closure and repeated narrative interruptions across the exhibition as '... dissolution both as a metaphor and as an artistic technique' (*Artforum International*, May 1993, 94). Referencing and questioning preconceptions of place, collective memory and individual voice, O'Kelly's liberating inter-disciplinary approach to artmaking through the 1980s and 90s pioneered art practice as a touchstone for assessment of historical authenticity and contemporary identity politics. Her use of series was an affective means of destabilizing overly simple understandings of commemoration and representation. The resonance of O'Kelly's artistic output has been distinguished by her adeptness at employing an array of media and her expansive engagement with cultural ascriptions of Irishness and femaleness in layered studies which echo through subsequent works of Irish contemporary art. NIAMH ANN KELLY

SELECTED READING Lucy R. Lippard, *Divisions, Crossroads, Turns of Mind: Some New Irish Art*, Madison, Wisconsin: Ireland America Arts Exchange, Inc., 1985; Arte Irlandesa/The Cultural Relations Committee of Ireland, *Alanna O'Kelly - 23rd São Paulo Bienal*, Dublin, 1996; Katy Deepwell (ed.), *Dialogues: Women Artists from Ireland*, London, New York, 2005.

O'KELLY, STEPHEN J. (1848–98). On 12 February 1888 the *Boston Daily Globe* noted that Stephen O'Kelly was making rapid progress towards the 'front rank of his profession'. O'Kelly had arrived in the United States in 1871 (*Nation*, 3 June 1882, quoting *Donohoe's Magazine*, a Boston monthly devoted to Catholic and Irish-American interests).

Born in Dublin on 5 September 1848 into an actively nationalist and artistic family, Stephen Joseph O'Kelly was the second youngest of five children, with one sister, Julia, and three brothers: James, a journalist and politician; Charles, a sculptor, who



went to work in Australia; and the painter Aloysius O'Kelly (qv AAI ii). Their mother, Bridget, was a sister of sculptor John Lawlor (qv), who stood as one of two sponsors at Stephen O'Kelly's baptism in St Andrew's Church, Westland Row. O'Kelly and his brothers all trained in sculpture with their uncle. Stephen is said to have served his apprenticeship with Lawlor when the latter was working on the *Albert Memorial* for Hyde Park (*Nation*, 1882) [185]. As a child O'Kelly had been kept at home by his mother and was tutored by rebel leader John Devoy (Devoy, p. 334).

On her husband's death, Bridget Kelly moved to London with her sons in 1861. However, their Fenian politics regularly

240. Alanna
*Country Blood
and a Grave*,
photomontage
Crawford Art