

Meet the Gallerist: Olivier Cornet



‘My advice: don’t be shy, engage with the gallerist, ask questions about the artist’

The owner of the Olivier Cornet Gallery on Great Denmark Street in Dublin 1 reflects on a life in art, and reveals the things he’s learned along the way

Interview: **Ros Drinkwater**

What kickstarted your interest in art?

Initially through stamp collecting in my early teens. Art has always featured very highly in the stamp issuing policies of the French Post. I discovered the work of Matisse, Degas, Cézanne, Delaunay, Chagall, Braque, Toulouse-Lautrec, Rouault, Nicolas de Stael and so many more. My maternal grandmother, who died before I was born, was an amateur painter. I grew up fascinated by the only painting we had by her at my parents, a still life featuring poppies. To this day, when visiting my parents in France, looking at that painting just makes me happy. I realised only recently that my all-time favourite colour combination – green and red – comes from my grandma’s painting.

Talk us through the course of your career.

A linguist by training, I came to Ireland initially in the late 1980s and worked as a translator in the localisation industry. In the early 1990s, I did my military service as a Cultural Animator at the French Cultural Centre of Lilongwe in Malawi, where part of my brief was to organise art exhibitions. When I returned to Ireland in the mid-1990s, I wanted to do something in the area of visual art and volunteered as a gallery assistant at the long-gone Metatron gallery in Enniskerry, Wicklow, where I learned a lot about Irish art. After that, in parallel to my career as a project manager in the localisation industry, I started organising art exhibitions with artists such as Yanny Petters, Jordi Fornies and John Fitzsimons until I opened my first gallery in the Wooden Building, in Temple Bar in 2012. I moved the gallery to Dublin 1 in 2014, when I started to hear about the Parnell Square Cultural Quarter project.

What was your low point/worst mistake?

The logistic challenges when I was organising art exhibitions at different Dublin venues before I opened my own gallery – not having a decent storage area or a place where people could see and buy work before or after exhibitions was a huge frustration. Getting too excited about an artist’s work and starting to represent them straight away. I made that mistake a few times when I was inexperienced.

The quality of the work is one thing, but at the end of the day, it is a relationship with commitments on both sides. I am now much more prudent, and the setting-up of our Associate Gallery Artist (AGA) group at the gallery has a lot to do with these earlier mistakes. I am now happy with the group of artists I represent.

Who do you most admire now?

I have had a constant fascination

for the work of the recently deceased Mick (Michael) Cullen. If money was no object, I would buy the best works from his various periods and open a museum in Dublin to celebrate his oeuvre. Humour in art is often underrated in my mind and there was an abundance of it in his, but much more of course. He produced pure magic.

What do you regard as the high point in your career?

A difficult question for me to answer, as any achievement by the artists I work with makes me progress as their gallerist and as their agent – and when I have a little to do with it, it just makes my day, constituting the new high point in my career. Recent acquisitions of work by Yanny Petters by the National Museum of Ireland and by the National Gallery of Ireland, as well as work by Claire Halpin by Imma, were definitely a high point.

The acquisition of Eoin Mac Lochlainn’s painting of his great-grand-uncle Patrick Pearse by the OPW for a permanent place in the Pearse museum, was also a proud moment. I really appreciate the reaction I’ve had to the themed shows I have presented annually at the VUE Art Fair (RHA Dublin) over the years. Last but not least, the visit (and later review) by Robert Risk of our WWI show with the artist LEYHO was a very special moment.

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What skills make a successful



Infanta After Velasquez by Mick Cullen



Garden Green by Norah McGuinness



Hand Fan For Habitats by Yanny Petters

gallery owner?

You need to excel at multi-tasking especially if you don’t have staff. As it takes quite some time to get established, you need patience and perseverance – and the means to sustain yourself. Keep the day job if you don’t have independent means. Never compromise on the quality of the art or the artists. In Ireland, a good knowledge of Irish art and its history is essential, and being customer-driven and friendly is also a big plus.

What advice would you give to the novice collector?

The Dublin scene can be very cliquish, so try to frequent as many commercial galleries as possible. Too many go to the same galleries all the time. It’s important to be aware of the whole scene. Don’t be shy, engage with the gallerist, ask questions about the artist. Avoid buying online: art needs to be experienced in the flesh.

Stay away from giclée prints of paintings (often referred to as pigment ink prints). They are just luxurious photocopies, even signed. If you are looking for prints, unless you are buying a lens-based work or a work that was produced digitally, buy a hand-produced print, preferably in a low edition. Most established galleries represent artists who are also print-makers.

What is your favourite artwork in an Irish public collection?

Garden Green by the Irish artist Norah McGuinness, in the collection of the Hugh Lane Gallery. If it ever disappears, you’ll know where to find it. I get emotional every time I see it. It’s also a must-see and a good start if you are interested in exploring cubism in Ireland and the French connection. Cristin Leach talked beautifully about it in the Through the Canvas series on RTE Lyric FM.

With money no object, what would you buy?

If it was ever for sale, it would have to be Las Meninas by Diego Velazquez in the Prado. I could study it forever and solve the mystery of it, or maybe not. That said, I have my Mick Cullen version of it at home, a print I purchased from the Graphic Studio many years ago.

What, if anything, has the pandemic taught you?

That we have to adapt to new circumstances, and we all have, privately and in our professional life. As regards the gallery, with the help of one of my artists, Susanne Wawra, I have explored new ways of presenting our exhibitions online. Since May 2020, we have been able to present virtual editions of all our exhibitions, a feature which we will retain even in a post-Covid-19 era.



Salute/Farewell to Rosses Point by Jack B Yeats (€120,000-€160,000)

Henry and Yeats dominate landscape in sale of Irish art

The two artists lead Adam’s sale this week, while Spain features across the board and includes paintings by Keating and O’Neill



**Ros Drinkwater**  
Fine Arts

The two Titans of 20th-century Irish art lead Adam’s sale this week. Paul Henry’s magnificent obsession has struck a chord globally since he first arrived on Achill Island in 1910. His Connemara Cottages is beautifully catalogued by Helena Carlyle as “falling on to the viewer like a blanket, wrapping them in tranquillity”. Measuring 45 x 50cm, it is expected to realise €120,000-€160,000. With the same estimate,



Salute/Farewell to Rosses Point by Jack B Yeats (€120,000-€160,000)

Jack B Yeats’s oil, Salute/Farewell to Rosses Point, is one of several depictions of the area painted when Yeats was in his 70s. The man standing on the deck of a ship saying farewell to the landscape draws on Yeats’s childhood memories when he regularly travelled on pilot boats that guided merchant ships from here to Sligo. The sentiment expressed isn’t necessarily sad.

When he sold the painting to Dr LB Somerville in 1946, Yeats wrote that he had painted the work “with real enjoyment”. The memories were clearly happy ones.

A Yeats watercolour, The Handball Alley, is based on a scene he sketched when he visited Co Mayo with JM Synge in 1905. Unique to Ireland, the

ball alley dates from the 1770s, and by 1923 when the GAA listed handball as one of its four official games they could be found all over the country. Most have been demolished, but there’s a splendid example in Clogherhead, Co Louth. Once owned by former rugby international Karl Mullan, it measures 26.5 x 36.5 cm (€20,000-€30,000).

Spanish culture has long held an allure for Irish artists. Three are represented in the sale. Sean Keating’s focus is literature’s best loved anti-hero, Don Quixote, Cervantes’ delusional pensioner who decided to transform himself into a knight. His appeal is as strong today as when he first leapt from the page in 1605. Keating depicts him lost in thought, dreaming



The Mid-Day Meal by Christopher Campbell (€1,000-€1,500)



Figure With Yellow Hair by Colin Middleton

his impossible dreams, 63 x 84cm (€30,000-€50,000). Daniel O’Neill’s interest was sparked by his travels in Spain,

but his romantic portrait, Spanish Girl, was possibly inspired by the beautiful face and jet black hair of his first

wife, Eileen. Measuring 60 x 50cm (€20,000-€30,000).

George Campbell was so in thrall, he became an accomplished flamenco guitarist. From 1951, he and his wife spent much of the year in Spain and the sale has his My Window, Zamora, 61 x 51cm (€8,000-€12,000).

The saddest catalogue note accompanies The Forgotten Man, a stooped figure with a canvas under his arm, one of three paintings by Christopher Campbell.

It quotes Bruce Arnold’s description of Campbell as “introverted, self-conscious, shy, dominated by his mother, overshadowed by his brother, unsuccessful in selling his work, increasingly bewildered in the direction he was going, but with a firm and

lasting belief in his basic skills and vision”.

That vision is revealed in the third canvas, The Mid-Day Meal, an effervescent depiction of a family in an elegant setting, 75 x 75cm (€1,000-€1,500).

Colin Middleton’s 1955 Figure with Yellow Hair is a delightful patchwork of a painting with, of course, a figure with yellow hair, oil on board, 16 x 13cm (€1,000-€1,500).

A must for Louis Le Brocqy aficionados is Amelia Stein’s joyous black and white photograph, Louis and Anne, from the Collection of Antoinette and Patrick J Murphy, 43 x 43cm (€1,000-€1,500).

Important Irish Art, September 29; Adams, 26 St Stephen’s Green, Dublin 2; see: adams.ie



Spanish Girl by Daniel O’Neill (€20,000-€30,000)

Bumper bonanza from the Big Houses

What would you expect to find in an Irish Big House, but not necessarily in the average family home? Quantities of silver – lobster picks, oyster forks, sandwich tongs, novelty condiments, silver-backed hairbrushes and silver-topped walking sticks, at least a couple of Waterford crystal chandeliers, Georgian and Regency furniture, assorted taxidermy, Sevres, Herend, and Chinese porcelain, a games compendium and, most certainly, a bizarre dinner gong.

Sheppards’ forthcoming three-day sale has them all. Among a number of Regency pieces are an Irish side table, a pair of brass inlaid games tables, each with an estimate of €3,000-€5,000, and a hand-produced print, preferably in a low edition. Most established galleries represent artists who are also print-makers.

The top clock is an Edwardian marquetry long-case clock which chimes and strikes with nine tubular bells (€6,000-€9,000). Other rare timepieces are an 1886 miniature, richly embossed silver



A Regency musical box in the

shape of a spinette



Capodimonte cup and saucer



19th-century Limerick gold fob watch pocket watch



Miniature embossed silver longcase clock

Events Calendar

Until October 2: Alter/Altar: solo exhibition by Aisling Conroy, Olivier Cornet Gallery, 3 Great Denmark Street, Dublin 1; see: oliviercornetgallery.com

Until October 3: A Wild Atlantic Way: Irish Life and Landscapes; Hunt Museum, Custom House, Limerick; see: huntmuseum.com

Until October 8: Juxtapositions: solo show by Paula Pohl; Kenny Gallery, Lioban Retail Park, Tuam, Galway; see: thekenygallery.ie

Until October 9: Window: recent paintings by Merlin James; Kerlin Gallery, Anne’s Lane, South Anne Street, Dublin 2; see: kerlingallery.com

Until October 10: art exhibition of 21 curraghs to mark new partnership between Aras Eanna Art Centre and NUI Galway; NUI Galway quadrangle; see: nuiagalway.ie

Until October 11: Like Stars and Years, Like Numerals: solo show by Lee Welch, Berlin Opticians Gallery; see: berlinopticiansdublin.com

Until October 15: 35th Sculpture in Context Exhibition; National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, Dublin; see: botanicgardens.ie

Until October 17: Queer Mind, Body and Soul; exhibition exploring LGBTQIA+ youth experiences; Millennium Wing, National Gallery of Ireland; see: nationalgallery.ie

Until October 23: Silence: exhibition of work by 27 Irish and European artists; Graphic Studio Gallery, Cape Street, Dublin 2; see: graphicstudio.dublin.com

Until October 31: From the Secret Block to Rosc: exhibition of works by Joseph Beuys; Hugh Lane Gallery, Charlemont House, Parnell Square, Dublin 1; see: hughlane.ie

Until January 9: Rembrandt in Print: 50 of the Dutch master’s finest works from the Ashmolean Collection; Crawford Gallery, Emmet Place, Cork; see: crawfordartgallery.ie

PUBLIC VIEWING TODAY SUNDAY 2 - 5PM, MON & TUES 10AM - 5PM

IMPORTANT IRISH ART

AUCTION WEDNESDAY 29<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER AT 6PM



Walter Frederick Osborne RHA ROI (1859-1903) The Pump of St Nicholas, Antwerp €70,000 - 100,000



Paul Henry RHA (1877-1958) Connemara Cottages €120,000 - 160,000

View Catalogue Online at [www.adams.ie](http://www.adams.ie)

**ADAM’S**  
26 ST. STEPHEN’S GREEN, DUBLIN 2, IRELAND



Tapestry of the sacking of Basing House, Hampshire, in 1645; right: an Irish Georgian statutory marble chimneypiece



All roads lead to the Bishop’s Palace at latest Victor Mee sale

Victor Mee’s third Annual Palace Sale takes place in Kilmore’s Bishop’s

Palace, a Georgian Revival mansion 5.6km south of Cavan town. Irish bishops lived in high style, and the Palace – untouched since the last one left in 2000 – is the perfect venue for an interiors sale.

Heritage pieces that once graced a stately home begin with two chimneypieces, the first a highly ornate Irish Georgian statutory marble chimneypiece with inlaid flutes of Siena marble, decorated with urns and centre piece of flowers, foliage and swags. It comes complete with a reeded brass gate, and is expected to realise €8,000-€12,000. The second, Irish William IV, also marble and with a reeded brass fire grate,



A brass Ho Ho bird burner

include two longcase clocks by Dublin makers, one by Sam Busby circa 1760, the second by Chris Clarke, each with an estimate of €2,500-€4,500. The most unusual Regency piece is a leather upholstered mahogany window seat raised on spiral turned legs and brass castors (€600-€1,000).

From China, there’s a rare pair of 17/18th-century Yolk back armchairs, a design that first appeared in the 11th century (€6,000-€9,000). Wall hangings include a number of tapestries, notably a 19th-century example depicting the pillage and destruction of Basing House, Hampshire in 1645 at the height of the English Civil War, 156 x 185 x 12cm (€1,200-€1,800).

One for the country dweller is an enormous brass burner

log basket, 60 x 98 x 63cm (€1,000-€1,500). Affordable items include 25 lots each comprising ten second-period Belleek dinner plates inscribed with a Church of Ireland black stamp; each lot has an estimate of €100-€150.

Two quirky Asian pieces are a terrazzo pot in the form of a double-headed sheep (€80-€160) and a brass incense burner in the shape of a Ho Ho bird. In Japanese mythology, the Ho Ho was a reincarnation of the phoenix, said to bring luck and ensuring longevity, fidelity and wisdom. It’s a snip at €40-€80.

Victor Mee, Third Annual Palace Sale Online, September 28-30; for details, see: victormeeauctions.ie

Twitter: @RosDrinkwater



# LEGACY

OF THE BIG HOUSE

Includes the Collection of the late Patrick Martin, Coolatlin Lodge, Co. Wicklow

**AUCTION: 28 – 30 SEPTEMBER**

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