

## Inspiration

Inspiration can come from anywhere, but for many photographers and filmmakers it comes from other photographers and filmmakers – particularly when starting out. This is a small collection of images that have inspired me and which, in subtle ways, have contributed to the making of my own works - some of which are exhibited here. I grew up in London, moved to New York in 1984 and first came to Ireland in 1985. The 'inspiration' photographs shown here in some small way mirror that journey.

### **Young farmers, 1914 – August Sander**

*Silver gelatin print*



I've always been haunted by this photograph of three young farmers, taken on the eve of the First World War. Where were they going? What were they doing? What were they hoping for? And what became of them? My introduction to August Sander was through his book 'Citizens of the Twentieth Century', posthumously published in the early Eighties. It remains one of the most extraordinary photographic records of German life during the first half of the twentieth century. Farmers, students, doctors, lawyers, soldiers, mothers, teachers, artists, writers, clergy, itinerants, persecuted Jews and Nazis – he perfectly captured German society at a time of great upheaval. His method was simple but rigorous; his images austere. These photographs have had a profound affect on contemporary photography - both fine art (the German school from Bernd and Hilla Becher to Andreas Gursky), portraiture (Diane Arbus) and far beyond. Michael Haneke has cited Sander – and this picture in particular - as a key influence on his film 'The White Ribbon'.

### **Southam Street, 1956 – Roger Mayne**

*Silver gelatin print*



For five years, between 1956 and 1961, Mayne documented the street life of a small area in North Kensington – and one street in particular, Southam Street, which was described by the writer Colin MacInnes as "a rotting slum of a sharp, horrible vivacity... The citizens among whom a criminal element is traditional, live on the streets, in a way rare even in prosperous working-class areas". Inspired by Henri Cartier Bresson and W. Eugene Smith, Mayne took to the streets of west London, making 1,400

frames over 27 visits. His photographs capture the vitality and spontaneity of Fifties working-class west London: the comings and goings, the laughter and tears, the fun and games, playful street-fighting, Teddy boys and West Indian immigrants. But his main focus is on the children – his true heroes and heroines. These are pictures that quietly and spontaneously jump with the rhythm of life. Southam Street was torn down in the late Sixties but Mayne's photographs capture a vigour and vitality unique to this time and place.

### **The Krays, 1965 – David Bailey**

*Silver gelatin print*



As a teenager there was only one photographer I aspired to be: David Bailey. His lifestyle was impossibly glamorous and his portraits of popstars, models, aristocrats and gangsters came to define Sixties London. When I was eighteen I tracked him down and he agreed to do an interview for my one-off school magazine 'Lipstick'. He had a large house in Primrose Hill which doubled as his studio. After a long wait I was finally ushered into the studio where Bailey sat dressed in a shirt, open to the waist, looking as if he hadn't slept for a week. I sat down and nervously blurted out my first question "how did you get into photography?". "Oh, for fuck's sake if you can't ask a better question than that you can get out," was Bailey's reply. Fortunately he agreed to take further questions, though when it came time for me to take his picture he ordered his assistant to set up a light as he didn't seem to trust me and my Olympus camera. This picture of the East End gangsters – Reg, Charlie and Ron Kray – epitomises Bailey's Sixties style: stark, high contrast, tightly cropped black and white portraits made against a white background. A style that still resonates today.

### **Tiny in her Halloween costume, Seattle, 1983 – Mary Ellen Mark**

*Silver gelatin print*



I was living in New York during the mid-Eighties when I first saw the film 'Streetwise'. I was mesmerised by the life and lives of these homeless teenagers living on the streets of Seattle – taking drugs, working as prostitutes and partying hard. I discovered later that the film had been inspired by the photographs of Mary Ellen Mark – and directed by her husband Martin Bell. Mary Ellen had been commissioned by Life magazine to do a story on homeless children in

Seattle - which had just been voted the most livable city in the US. Tiny, a thirteen year old child prostitute was one of her main discoveries and would go on to become the lead character in 'Streetwise'. This picture was taken at Halloween - Tiny told Mary Ellen that she wanted to look "like a French whore". 'Streetwise' was a huge influence on my own film 'Pavee Lackeen' and one or two of the scenes - such as Winnie visiting her brother Leroy in prison - were 'borrowed' from it. Like Winnie, these kids had that rare quality of being totally at ease and oblivious of the camera.

### **Entrance Hall: Winter Embers from the series 'Bonnettstown: A House in Ireland' - Andrew Bush**

*C-type print*



One day in 1978 the American photographer Andrew Bush was hitch-hiking from Kilkenny to Dublin when he was offered a lift by an elderly gentleman dressed as a priest - who turned out to be a retired Royal Navy Commander, Geoffrey Marescaux de Saubruit. The Commander invited Bush to visit his home near Kilkenny if he was ever passing through again and some months later Bush took him up on the offer. It was a life changing experience. Bonnettstown, a gem of Georgian architecture, was home to four elderly aristocrats - one an escapee from the Russian revolutions, another a former film extra for Charlie Chaplin. Bush became a frequent visitor, but it was only when the house was being sold to a young family that he urgently set about documenting this twilight world. These photographs perfectly capture this world where, in Bush's words, "the exact Georgian geometric gardens had softened, so that they fit naturally, perfectly into the haphazardly walled in fields and brambled hedges of the wild overgrown Irish countryside". The faded grandeur of the entrance hall represents a way of life that hasn't changed for generations - where the only concession to modernity is the electric lamps. A way of life that was about to be swept away forever.

### **On the Loyalist Shankill Road, Belfast 1981 - Gilles Peress**

*Silver gelatin print*



Over the past forty years, the Magnum photographer, Gilles Peress, has created an astonishing body of work. Iran during the revolution, the Rwandan genocide, the massacre at Srebrenica, Lebanon, Palestine,

and the Troubles in Northern Ireland – his work has captured some of the most harrowing conflicts of our time. Working in black and white with a rangefinder Leica, Peress has taken Cartier Bresson's 'decisive moment' to a new level. For me his images of the Troubles represent the most powerful photographic record of this conflict. This photograph shows his mastery of deep focus photography and a penetrating gaze on human life, revealing much about the man himself. In more recent times, however, Peress has played down the significance of his technical skill and visual sensibility saying: " I don't care that much anymore about 'good photography'. I'm gathering evidence for history, so that we remember."

### **David Byrne, 1985 - Steve Pyke**

*Archival pigment print*



In the late Eighties I was trying to make a film of Mannix Flynn's book 'Nothing To Say', a semi-autobiographical account of his time growing up in Dublin and being sent to a reform school in Letterfrack, Connemara, run by the Christian Brothers. One day I opened the paper to see this picture by Steve Pyke of the singer and Talking Heads front man, David Byrne. I immediately thought he would make a wonderful Christian Brother in the film – the buttoned up white shirt and dark waistcoat obviously helped. I tore the picture out of the paper and carried it around with me for some time. Unfortunately we never got to make the film but I've always been struck by this image which is typical of Steve's trademark portrait style. Using a Rolleiflex with close-up lens attachments he has created a confrontational portrait style that always seems to take you that bit closer to the subject than the human eye.

### **Nell Ward, Cherry Orchard, Dublin, 1965 - Alen MacWeeney**

*Silver gelatin print*



I can't remember when I first came across Alen MacWeeney's Traveller photographs, but I feel like I've always known them. At sixteen MacWeeney had started out as a photographer with the Irish Times before decamping to Paris and then New York to work as an assistant to the celebrated American photographer Richard Avedon. A year later he returned to Ireland to make his own pictures. Looking for "a tinker woman to photograph for a photo essay on W. B. Yeats" he came across a Traveller encampment opposite the Cherry Orchard Fever

hospital – then on the outskirts of Dublin. After several visits he managed to gain their trust and started taking pictures. His intention was “to show the world (or at least Dublin) what it had dismissed and overlooked: a dignity, a raw beauty, a deep uncertainty, and perhaps a stripped-down Irishness in the rough-and-tumble existences laid bare before me”. These feelings are similar to those I had almost forty years later, when embarking on my film ‘Pavee Lackeen’.

**R12.S/E,W,E. from the series ‘British Watchtowers’  
- Donovan Wylie**

*C-type print*



Donovan Wylie spent over a year photographing Britain’s army watchtowers in Northern Ireland, used for surveillance during the Troubles. Working from a military helicopter to achieve a level perspective, he set about documenting these outposts mainly in the ‘bandit country’ of south Armagh. The result is a systematic survey, both austere and rigorous, that opens a window onto a view that has been hidden from us. These strange creatures, whether sitting alone on a barren hilltop or looming over a housing estate, became the defining symbol of The Troubles in one of Northern Ireland’s bloodiest provinces. This is a unique and fascinating body of work. From 2000 to 2007 the watchtowers were dismantled as part of the Peace Process, but these pictures have preserved an important part of our history and for that we should be indebted to Donovan Wylie.

**Thatched cottage, Connemara, Co Galway, Ireland – John Hinde**

*Postcard*



John Hinde was a pioneer. If he was working today he would be feted as the king of digital post-production. Growing up in England, he had always had an interest in colour photography, but for a while was diverted by his love of the circus. While on a circus photo assignment he joined Chipperfield’s where he met his future wife, the trapeze artist Jutta. He decided to start his own circus in Ireland, but the venture was a disastrous flop. It was at this moment that he returned to photography, having identified a gap in the market: Ireland needed colour postcards. Working from a small house in Bulloch Harbour, he realised that at the colour separation stage he could make colour changes and even import skies from other photographs. The result was the hyper real images that came to define his style. “My wife and I thought Ireland was extremely

beautiful. These were the early days of Irish tourism and we were genuinely anxious to present to the world an image of Ireland as an exceptionally beautiful country so that more people could enjoy it." Today the best re-touchers, working with state-of-the-art digital technology, can command fees of up to \$20,000 an image. Hinde was able to achieve many of these same effects with the most basic equipment and a vivid imagination.

### **Perry's pictures:**

#### **Connemara portraits from the series 'There's Plenty Cloud on the Mountains Abroad', 1992/93 - Perry Ogden**

*Four silver gelatin prints*

In the early nineties I was living in Paris directing television commercials. Beyond working with some great cinematographers, I wasn't enjoying it much. I'd lost my focus, and had even given up photography. The turning point came on the eve of making a McDonalds commercial. I had a crisis of conscience, and decided to abandon it all to spend time drawing and painting. My new life took me more and more to Connemara: I was drawn to its remoteness, the bog and the Atlantic, and became fascinated by my neighbours and others working on the land, cutting the turf. The man sitting in the room with a crate as a shelf is Pat Welch. He was the wise man of the village and became a good friend. He had never been to Dublin ("sure, I'd be killed"), but he had seen everything a man can see in the environs of his home place. His house was a mile or so walk over the bog from the road. The roof was beginning to cave in – hence the beautiful soft light from above. Soon after this picture was taken he moved to a prefab by the side of the road. Making these pictures reignited my love for photography.



**Andy Connors, from the series 'Pony Kids', 1996 – Perry Ogden**  
*Silver gelatin print*



This photograph is from a series I made at Smithfield horse fair in Dublin during the period 1995-97 and published as the book 'Pony Kids' in 1999. I had become interested in the Nike clad kids who were riding horses around the housing estates that ring the city – places like Ballymun and Finglas, Clondalkin and Coolock - and set out to document this sub-culture at the horse fair where these kids would congregate on the first Sunday of the month. I would arrive early, set up a white background and then choose kids from the crowd to photograph. I would soon be surrounded, "Mister, you didn't get me on this one", and by midday would have to pack up. Around this time new legislation was passed which made it almost impossible for the kids to keep their horses - now you had to have a licence for a horse, and prove that you had a stable and an acre of land. These pictures were all taken on a Polaroid camera with Polaroid 665 film – a black and white film that gave you a positive print and a negative which, after a lengthy process of clearing in sodium sulphite, washing and drying you could use later to make prints. Due to the advent of digital photography Polaroid went bust and this film is no longer available.

**Untitled from the series '7 Reece Mews: Francis Bacon's Studio', 1999 – Perry Ogden**

*Three C-type prints mounted on aluminium*

In 1999, the Francis Bacon Estate gifted his London Studio to the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin. The Gallery's director, Barbara Dawson, asked me to document the studio prior to its removal to Dublin. Though I had seen images of Bacon's studio – which was renowned for its chaos - nothing could have prepared me for the real thing. But what was equally extraordinary was the living quarters. Here was the home of a famous artist whose paintings had sold for millions and yet he had chosen to live in two rooms: a sitting room-cum-bedroom and a kitchen-cum-bathroom. You could almost lie in the bath and turn on the cooker. The living quarters were much more ordered than the studio. I was amused by his hanging of reproductions of his own work on the kitchen wall.



## **Untitled, Belmullet, 1999 – Perry Ogden**

*C-type print*



I was working on a fashion shoot for JANE magazine and had been told about two eccentric brothers – known as ‘The Birdmen’ – who lived in a cottage on Belmullet. My idea was to make a story about a girl coming back from England in her fancy clothes to visit her grand uncles in the West of Ireland. I drove to Belmullet to visit the brothers and to see if their house and surroundings would work as a suitable location.

This picture was taken in the main room of the cottage, pretty much as I found it. One of the brothers made naïve paintings of boats – you can see one at the top of the picture. A few weeks later the crew came over from the States and we all went to Belmullet to do the shoot - including the brothers in some of the pictures. It was one of those shoots that turned out even better than you had imagined it could – thanks to the inspiration of ‘The Birdmen’. A year or so later I went back to visit them to find that one of the brothers had died. My great regret was not buying one of the paintings.

## **Louis le Brocquy, studio wall, Carros, South of France, 2000 – Perry Ogden**

*C-type print*



In the summer of 2000 I invited myself to the studio of Louis le Brocquy and Anne Madden in Carros, South of France. I had met them in Dublin some years before and we’d become friends. I had always been drawn to their work and particularly taken with Louis’ heads – both the paintings and charcoal drawings. I persuaded them to do a photo shoot for Uomo Vogue magazine and spent three days with them in the studio they shared high up in the hills above Nice. Long lunches and even longer dinners, but in between intense periods of work. This is a detail of the wall at Louis’ end of the studio. Bacon, Beckett, Yeats and Joyce – all key influences on Louis along with Goya, Velaquez, Manet and Cezanne. He has painted these heads many times in an attempt to dig deep into the human condition. As Louis has said, “my aim was not portraiture in the sense of producing an outward likeness. It was rather to reach towards some kind of image of the inner meaning of these great instances of human consciousness.” Every time I look at this photograph I feel like I see something new.

## **Winnie, James, Paddy & Scotch, Irishtown, Dublin, 2003 – Perry Ogdan**

*Four C-type prints*

These were the first photographs I took of Winnie and three of her brothers – Paddy (aka Postman), James and Scotch - while I was researching for my film 'Pavee Lackeen'. My co-writer, Mark Venner, and I had spent a lot of time in the Children's Court as part of our research. One day Paddy appeared in front of the judge. Paddy put on a big performance for the judge telling him how the police had mistreated him - he even pulled down his tracksuit trousers to show the judge the bruises. I was impressed and a few days later dropped down to visit him in Irishtown, where he was living with his family by the side of the road. At that stage I thought Paddy would be perfect for the film – until his little sister turned up. Within five minutes of meeting the ten-year-old Winnie, I knew we had our star.



## **Untitled from the series '7 Reece Mews: Francis Bacon's Studio', 1999**

*C-type print mounted on aluminium*



From the early Sixties till his death in 1992 Francis Bacon primarily lived and worked in a small mews building in South Kensington. After he died, the studio was given by the Francis Bacon Estate to the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin, and I was asked to document the studio prior to its removal to Dublin. I remember visiting for the first time and climbing a steep set of narrow stairs with nothing but a piece of rope to hang onto. At the top of the stairs on the right was a doorway which led into the studio room. The floor was scattered with what appeared to be debris, but closer examination revealed photographs, books, magazine cuttings, slashed canvases, paintbrushes, rags - thirty years of Bacon's working life and what Bacon himself referred to as "deeply ordered chaos". This photograph is a detail of the floor showing some of Bacon's key inspirations: an orthopaedic boot, pages from a medical disease book,

a contact sheet of photographs of two men - semi-naked - wrestling, and reproductions of paintings by Velasquez.

**Untitled from the series 'Burntollet', 2009 – Perry Ogden**

*C-type print*



On January 1<sup>st</sup> 2009 I set out from Belfast City Hall to follow in the footsteps of the Civil Rights marchers of January 1969, who had marched from Belfast to Derry campaigning for social justice. It was the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary and I wanted to explore the journey they had taken, the space they had inhabited. To revisit the past in the present. To scrutinise the landscape. To look for signs. What remains? What has changed? Have we come any further? Armed with a contemporary account of the march and several Ordnance Survey maps, I set out with my camera to photograph the route. The marchers had been hounded at every turn and blocked by police and Unionist protestors from entering towns that lay along their route. Many now believe that the march was a major spark in igniting the Troubles. This picture was taken on a back road north of Randalstown. The marchers had been stopped from entering the town and travelled along this road in the cars of supporters, trying to find a way back to the main route.

**INSPIRATION: an exhibition curated by Perry Ogden for PhotoIreland Festival 2010.**

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