



Artists' Studios  
in Henrietta  
Street 1976-2026

Selected Works

## Genius Loci

### Artists' Studios in Henrietta Street 1976–2026 – Selected Works

One of Dublin's grandest Georgian streets, over the past three centuries Henrietta Street has housed archbishops, Anglo-Irish ascendancy, domestic staff, coachmen, barristers, religious orders, soldiers' barracks, families in tenements, and, more recently, Georgian enthusiasts and artists working in studios. More a cul-de-sac than a thoroughfare, the street is dominated at one end by the gateway to the King's Inns. Of its original fifteen houses, thirteen survive. The works in this exhibition provide a glimpse into the artistic world of Henrietta Street over the past fifty years, a period when it became one of



Gwen O'Dowd, *Tonn III*, 2015  
Paul Nugent, *Transference*, 2017

the most important—if under-recognised—centres for contemporary artists in Dublin.

In 1967, V. S. Pritchett wrote in *Dublin, A Portrait*, “Lady Blessington’s ballroom, with its lovely Italian stucco, is now in the hands of the nuns . . . There is a fine staircase at No. 9. In the other houses, you enter those vast entrance halls that are familiar in old Italian houses in Genoa and Naples and under the stained and dirty colour wash you can see the ghost of a lost grandeur, while above the poor families are crowded into one room.” In 2026, after five decades of providing a haven for artists, this historic street is undergoing a transition, with several of the houses being restored and coming back into residential use, while No. 14 has been transformed from tenement into a museum. The ‘nuns’—the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul—who own Nos. 8, 9 and 10, up near the King’s Inns, have cared for them well, in contrast to the mixed fortunes of other buildings on the street.

To the casual passer-by, walking towards the King’s Inns, the houses numbered 5 and 6 on the right appear to be two separate residences. However, originally they were one large townhouse, built in 1739 by Nathaniel Clements for Henry O’Brien, 8th Earl of Thomond. This was one of eight houses built by Clements on lands that were originally part of St. Mary’s Abbey; the other houses were built by Luke Gardiner. O’Brien died in 1741, and so did not live long enough to occupy his new home, but had he done so, he would have entered a four storey five-bay house, stepping through a Classical doorway with pediment and rusticated columns into a large entrance hall with ornate plasterwork and staircase. A patriotic Hanoverian, O’Brien wanted a house that would reflect his status as a descendant of the last High King of Ireland. In the event, No. 5 was let to Brabazon Ponsonby, first Earl of Bessborough, and by the late 1770s it was occupied by John Ponsonby, Speaker of the House of Commons. Following the exodus of Irish peers and parliamentarians after the Act of Union, in 1826 the house was considered too big, and was divided in two. The entrance hall was cut and the great staircase removed. A fanlight and side window were added to the front door. On the left side, a new entrance doorway, with granite steps and railing, was added—this became No. 6. As the

twentieth century advanced, the two houses slowly devolved into tenements, and by the mid 1960s were facing almost certain demolition. Happily, they were saved by Uinseann and Margaret MacEoin. An architect and writer, MacEoin was also a leading member of the IRA. He and Margaret had a strong social vision and made the houses they bought on Henrietta Street available to artists to use as studios. Although there was no heating, the rents were low and the rooms were large, providing ideal conditions for painters, sculptors and printmakers. In keeping with his Republican sympathies, MacEoin placed a plaque on No. 5 commemorating James Bryson, an IRA sniper killed by the British army in Belfast.

In the mid 1970s, the first artists, among them Charles Cullen and Michael Cullen (although sharing a surname they were not related) moved in to studios in Nos. 6 and 5, and over the ensuing decades many artists have worked in these houses, among them Eithne Jordan, Gwen O’Dowd, Robert Armstrong, Gabby Dowling, Mick O’Dea, Fergus Martin, Paul Nugent, Daniel Mc Keon, Kathlyn O’Brien, Louise Peat and the photographer Perry Ogden. In an interview in 1993, Mairead Byrne asked Eithne Jordan if having a studio in Henrietta Street was important to her. The response was unequivocal: “My studio is of paramount importance to me — I can’t work unless I have a studio. I love my studio; it’s not big enough but it’s very peaceful — I can just cut myself off when I’m working. Also, there are artists there — it’s sort of a community. You don’t feel too isolated; painting is a very isolated activity. As I grow older, I realise that you do need to keep your sanity and you have to somehow reach out and have relationships with people and talk to people.” *Eithne Jordan* (Gandon Editions, Works series 1994)

Perhaps inspired by these period settings, Paul Nugent is noted for using photographs of eighteenth-century paintings as a basis for his work, in which he lays smooth layers of acrylic paint over gessoed board. Gwen O’Dowd still has a studio in No. 5, in a large drawing room on the ground floor, beneath a Rococo ceiling that evokes the work of the LaFranchini brothers. The scale of the room suits her paintings, dramatic abstract works that evoke sea, sky and cliff. O’Dowd does not miss the ninety-eight steps she had to climb when her studio was on the top floor:

“Henrietta Street was a great place to work and live. Comfortable, affordable and with the knowledge of other artists working in the three houses Nos. 5, 6 and 7 it had a certain sense of security. Uinseann Mac Eoin and subsequently Nuadha Mac Eoin were of amazing support to all the numerous artists that passed through the three houses. It is sad now that era is coming to a close.”

Recently acquired by a new owner, No. 4 also has a long history in terms of the visual arts. Built in the early 1740’s, it was later the home of Lady Harriet Daly, whose collection of paintings included—it is



Daniel McKeon, *Virtual Encounter*, Henrietta series  
Louise Peat, *Washed up (iv)*



Alice Hanratty, *Three Renaissance Heads*, 1977  
Anna Rackard, *'Tommy the Clock'*, 2004

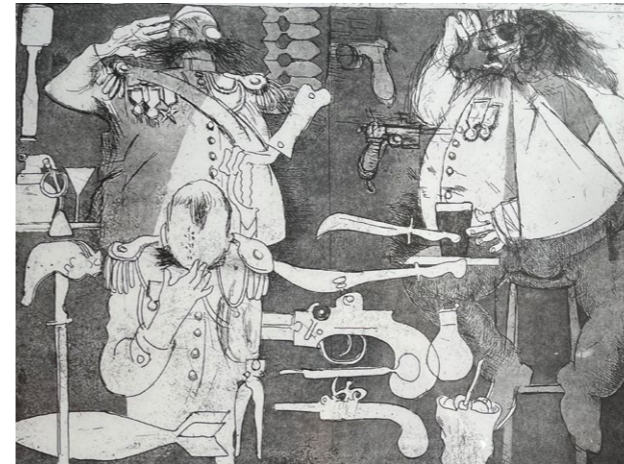
said—works by Rembrandt, Murillo, Teniers and Rubens. During her lifetime, Daly witnessed the street gradually transform, from a home for grandees, to chambers for barristers and solicitors, and finally tenements. After her death, No. 4 became the offices of Commissioners of Incumbered Estates, charged with selling off the holdings of landlords bankrupted as a result of the Great Famine and its aftermath. In 1974, the artist Alice Hanratty and her husband Sé Geraghty bought the house, and by so doing, also saved it from almost certain demolition. Over the following years they replaced the roof and preserved



Geraldine O'Neill, *Mick ag Obair*, 2012  
Eithne Jordan, *Corridor II*, 2025

the interiors. Coming from a strongly Republican and left-wing family, having researched the aristocrats who preceded him in the street, Geraghty happily branded them 'a parcel of rogues'. After his death, in 2008 Alice Hanratty donated his collection of seven thousand books to the city, and the Sé Geraghty library is now housed in Ballyfermot public library. A pioneering print-maker, many of Hanratty's prints, often inspired by Renaissance paintings, were made in her studio in No. 4. She also recorded the interiors in fine pastel drawings.

Throughout the late twentieth century, artists and other creative people came and went in Henrietta Street. In 2004, film production designer Anna Rackard photographed several artists in their studios, including Fergus Martin, Mick O'Dea, Michael



Charles Cullen, *Major Tweedy & the Citizen*, 2004  
Michael Cullen, *Painting with gunman, classical figure & painter, etc.*, 1990

Cullen and Charles Cullen. She also photographed 'Tommy the Clock', a genius who collected and repaired antique clocks.

Born and raised in Co. Wicklow, Charles Cullen in the 1970s travelled with Michael Mulcahy in Morocco; an experience reflected in his work, paintings infused with energy, colour and a quest to record the experience of living. His love of the writings of James Joyce found expression in spirited ink drawings and prints. Michael Cullen (1946-2020) also spent time in Spain and Morocco, travels that informed his brightly-coloured Neo-Expressionist canvases.



Mick O'Dea, *Alice Hanratty leaving No. 4*, 2025  
Mick O'Dea, *View of Dominick Street flat from Henrietta St studio*, 2020



Diana Copperwhite, *Evasion*, 2023  
Sinéad Ní Mhaonaigh, *Snaidhm XII*, 2026

More subdued in tone, Eithne Jordan's paintings, often depicting Classical museum interiors with sculptures, capture much of the spirit of Henrietta Street and its ghosts, while in her large canvas *Mick ag Obair* (2012) Geraldine O'Neill depicts Mick O'Dea, wearing a paint-spattered apron and working on a portrait on the easel in his studio in No. 6.

As if emphasising the close communal bond that existed between the artists of Henrietta Street, many of the subjects of Mick O'Dea's portraits are of other artists in and around Henrietta Street, including Fergus Martin, Geraldine O'Neill and Martin Folan.

In the 1980s, O'Dea and Alice Hanratty (1939-2025) served on the committee of the Independent Artists. His painting of Hanratty on the steps of her house at No. 4 is a homage not only to a great artist but also to the Georgian grandeur of the street. Equally, his portrait of Michel Cullen who had a studio in No. 6 for over forty years is a tribute by one artist to another. From his studio window, O'Dea painted views of the city, including the Corporation flats on Dominick Street, built in the 1950s to rehouse families in purpose-built blocks of flats. His paintings capture moments in a rapidly-changing urban landscape, as new buildings rise all around Henrietta Street.

Fergus Martin works in different media, creating unexpected and compelling images. In his large photograph *Chair* (2014), photographed in the basement of No. 7, he captures perfectly the atmosphere of the house; the photograph is now in the National Gallery of Ireland. Martin wrote of it: "I find the physical presence of *Chair*, the scale of it, very moving, as if it's trying to speak. I was looking at it during the week in the gallery. I was delighted when we found the basement of No. 7 to photograph *Chair*. Having searched high and low for a place to photograph it, we finally found it next door, with the broken glass on the floor." Built around 1738 by Nathaniel Clements for his own family, No. 7 was also acquired and saved by the MacEoins. It is now in private ownership and has been largely restored. As with many houses on Henrietta Street the original pedimented doorway was replaced in the nineteenth century by one with a fanlight. By the early twentieth century the house had become a tenement, and the families who had lived here in crowded rooms were gradually re-housed in new suburban estates. It is now in private ownership and has been largely restored. Artists who have worked in this house over the years include Geraldine O'Neill, Paul McKinley, Peter Burns and Diana Copperwhite, a painter whose lyrical canvases, while resolutely abstract and full of colour, hint at interiors and figures.

Built by Luke Gardiner around 1730, three years later No. 12 became the home of William Stewart, third Viscount Mountjoy and first Earl of Blessington. It was later lived in by the second Earl of Shannon, son of Henry Boyle, who amalgamated it with No. 11, an arrangement which lasted until 1807.



Perry Ogden, *Simon Reilly in No.14, 1994*

The doorway with its large fanlight dates from the late eighteenth century. No. 12 has long been the home of Ian Lumley, former director of An Taisce. Artists who have worked in this house include Sinéad Ní Mhaonaigh, Eamon O'Doherty and Corban Walker. Recently elected President of the RHA President, Ní Mhaonaigh, recalls her time there: "I reminisce about my first studio in Henrietta Street in Dublin where I spent eight productive years. Bumping into established artists like Mick O'Dea, Eithne Jordan, Geraldine O'Neill, Fergus Martin and Alice Hanratty on a regular basis helped ground me in my professional practice – they were very encouraging and supportive." [*Sunday Business Post* April 1, 2023].

The Irish Georgian Society has supported, encouraged, advised and helped wherever possible to save houses in Henrietta Street; No. 13 was bought by the Casey family in 1974, with assistance from the Society. Next door, No. 14 has been restored and transformed by Dublin City Council into a museum that documents the families, rich and poor, who lived within its walls: both house and street have been documented in detail by architectural historian

Melanie Hayes. Fewer artists had studios in No. 14, among them was the painter Simon Reilly, who now lives in Los Angeles.

The connection between the street and the visual arts dates back to its earliest years. No. 10 was the home of the Gardiner family, Earls of Blessington and Viscounts Mountjoy. Luke Gardiner, who laid out Henrietta Street, had an extensive art collection, while his grandson, also named Luke, travelled in Italy and was a patron of Gavin Hamilton and Sir Joshua Reynolds. In 1773, Gardiner commissioned one of Reynolds' finest painting, *Three Ladies Adorning a Term of Hymen* (Tate Britain). Sometimes called *The Irish Graces*, it depicts Gardiner's wife Elizabeth Montgomery and her two sisters beside a statue of the Greek god of marriage. Although a champion of the Catholic cause in Ireland, Gardiner was one of several residents of Henrietta Street killed in the 1798 Rebellion—he died at the Battle of Three Bullet Gate, in New Ross. Once the most exclusive street in Dublin, Henrietta Street had begun to change even before the Act of Union of 1800. Friendships that had united Anglo-Irish families were fractured, and new faces replaced older inhabitants such as Speaker Henry Boyle. The peers and MPs left in droves, particularly after the Act of Union. In 1795 Charles Viscount Dillon leased No. 14 but remained on the street for only four years before moving to Merrion Square. The opening up of new Georgian squares and streets nearby contributed to the street's decline, which was hastened by the building of Carlisle Bridge (O'Connell Bridge) and Westmoreland Street in 1794.

Gradually abandoned by their fashionable inhabitants, the houses were taken over firstly by lawyers, then eventually many became tenements. The last peer to live in the Street was Robert Edward Viscount Lorton, who resided in No. 15-16 until 1828, when he disposed of the house, which was then divided into two. But these magnificent houses were able to adapt to changing times and in 1864 there were almost a thousand pupils attending the school of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, a religious order that owns three houses in the street, that are maintained in excellent order. The process whereby other houses became tenements was described briskly in 1952 by Maurice Craig in his *Dublin 1660-1860* "... in the early twentieth century many of them fell into the hands of Alderman Meade,



Irish Architectural Archive, David Davison  
*Henrietta St*, c.1880–1910

who ripped out the grand staircases and made tenement rooms in their place, and sold the chimney-pieces in London.”

The street also features in James Joyce’s *Dubliners*, where Little Chandler emerged “from under the feudal arch of the King’s Inns, a neat modest figure, and walked swiftly down Henrietta Street. The golden sunset was waning and the air had grown sharp. A horde of grimy children populated the street. They stood or ran in the roadway or crawled up the steps before the gaping doors or squatted like mice upon the thresholds. Little Chandler gave them no thought. He picked his way deftly through all that minute vermin-like life and under the shadow of the gaunt spectral mansions in which the old nobility of Dublin and roystered.”

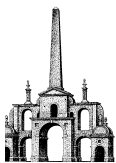
Although Joyce wrote *Dubliners* around 1904, it was ten years before it was published. In the meantime, the houses of Henrietta Street were being

documented in a series of large volumes, illustrated with photographs, published by the Georgian Society, under the presidency of the curmudgeonly Classicist John Pentland Mahaffy. Over the decades that followed, the dilapidated houses were recorded by many photographers, among them Maurice Craig, Elinor Wiltshire, David Davison, Anna Rackard and Perry Ogden, the latter famed for his film *Pavee Lackeen, The Traveller Girl*, which documents a marginalized family, living on the side of the road in an industrial suburb of Dublin.

This exhibition is of selected works from the studios of Henrietta Street. Presented in the Irish Georgian Society’s headquarters in the City Assembly House, it gives a glimpse into a half-century of artistic creativity, inspired in some measure by the magnificent houses and their ghosts. The setting is ironic; the City Assembly House was built in the 1760’s for the Society of Arts to their annual exhibitions, its location south of the Liffey underlining the change in fashion that led to the decline of Henrietta Street. Today, the role of Henrietta Street as a haven for contemporary artists is drawing to a close, and there are few alternative options for those in search of studio space in the city centre. In 1813, a legendary wake was held in No. 10 for Lady Blessington, one that lived on for many years in Dublin’s folk memory. Perhaps in times to come this exhibition in the Knight of Glin Room may also be viewed as a wake; but it would be infinitely better for the arts in Dublin were it seen as a wake-up call.

PETER MURRAY, June 2026

Exhibition curated by FRANCESCA FLOWERS  
and PETER MURRAY



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COVER IMAGE: Fergus Martin, *Chair*, 2014, No. 2, of an edition of 3.  
Image courtesy of the artist and Green On Red Gallery, Dublin