

The Trinity College Dublin Art Collections

Artist: John Behan
Title: *Bull Fight* (1978)
Medium: lithograph
Dimensions: 38cm x 53cm
Notes: signed: John Behan 1978

b. 1938, Dublin

John Behan is a painter and sculptor and a figure of great significance in Irish art. Behan is perhaps best known for his bull sculptures, drawn from the rich symbolism of Irish myths, including the Táin legend. His work as a sculptor, which is expressive, and generally figurative, has been described as being 'characterised by a certain roughness and raw sincerity'.

At the age of 15, Behan was apprenticed to the metalworking company J. & C. McLaughlin on Pearse st for several years, during which time he also studied with Paddy McIlroy in Art Metalworking at North Strand Technical College and undertook life drawing classes at NCAD, studying under Seán Keating, Maurice McGonigal and John F. Kelly. McIlroy was a teacher of particular significance for Behan, as it was under his tutelage that Behan learned to use copper and steel resulting in his first small bull sculpture which was exhibited and sold in 1960 at the Irish Exhibition of Living Art. Behan went on to study at Ealing College of Art in London and also at the Royal Academy School in Oslo.

The artist has been a major contributor to the development of sculpture in Ireland and its representation at home and abroad, having been commissioned to create large scale works such as *'The Ghost Ship' / National Famine Memorial* at the foot of Croagh Patrick in Mayo (1996), *Arrival* (2000), a bronze sculpture of a famine ship, seven metres long by eight metres high, populated by 150 bronze figures for the UN Sculptural Plaza in New York and *the Wings of the World* (1992) located in Shenzhen, China.

Behan was a founder member of the Project Arts Centre in Dublin as well as the Dublin Foundry which has allowed a generation of Irish sculptors to benefit from the foundry's modern sculptural facilities.

Behan was member of the Arts Council from 1973-78, the artist was also elected to Aosdána in 1978 and made member of the RHA in 1990. Behan's works have attracted the admiration of many, not least the poet Séamus Heaney who formally opened Behan's exhibition at the Kenny Gallery in Galway in 1998, as well as broadcaster and writer, John Quinn who described Behan as having 'something of the Druid about him'. He was honoured with a Doctor of Literature by NUI Galway in 2000. Behan's works are in various public outdoor locations across Ireland, as well as the collections of the Hugh Lane, the National Gallery of Ireland, the Arts Council, the Crawford Art Gallery and Trinity College Dublin.

Information in this article has been taken from "John Behan." *Art and Architecture of Ireland Volume III: Sculpture 1600-2000*, Edited by Andrew Carpenter and Paula Murphy, 1st ed., III, Royal Irish Academy, 2015 and "Deconstructing John Behan.", Brian McAvera in *Irish Arts Review* (2002-), vol. 30, no. 4, 2013.

This information has been compiled by Art Collections assistants, interns, and volunteers
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