

## The Trinity College Dublin Art Collections

**Artist:** Michael O'Dea (Mick O'Dea)  
**Title:** *Portrait of Prof. George W.P. Dawson* (1985 - Study for Portrait in HEDCO collection)  
**Medium:** pen and wash  
**Notes:** signed: Michael O'Dea, 9. 6. 85

b. 1958, Ennis, Co. Clare

Michael O'Dea studied art at the National College of Art and Design and the University of Massachusetts from 1976 to 1981. He taught at NCAD from his graduation until 1999, and was awarded his M.A. in fine art from Winchester School of Art in Barcelona in 1997. He has been involved with many teaching programmes, notably at Dun Laoghaire School of Art, Portlaoise Prison and the National Gallery of Ireland. He has also been a visiting lecturer at institutions such as Crawford School of Art in Cork, Manchester Polytechnic, St. Patrick's and Wheatfield Prison.

Observation is imperative to O'Dea's artistic process, and he previously discussed his approach to the blank canvas: "You begin by getting familiar with the geography," he said, "then go about trying to capture the essence of the person." [<http://www.thekennygallery.ie/artists/odeamick/>]. He sees himself as a draughtsman above all else, believing that drawing enables the expression of ideas in other mediums, such as pastel, acrylic and oil. In terms of oil painting, the finished pieces are a result of several sketches, giving them dynamism. With acrylic, he appreciates their quick-drying properties, which he believes to be comparable to the calligrapher's ink. He sees himself as situated in the academic humanistic tradition, but not in a classical sense. Instead, there is a sense of urgency, and a great belief in the history of his craft.

In his portraits, O'Dea is highly interested in the communion between sitter and artist, an issue that was explored in his 1999 exhibition at the R.H.A., Edaín; the artist Edaín O'Donnell posed for the series of nude and clothed portraits, which enabled an overthrow of the "traditional" relationship between passive model and intellectual artist. He enjoys staging innovative shows, especially relating to portraiture. In his 2004 exhibition, *Audiences*, he painted forty visitors to the Kevin Kavanagh Gallery in Dublin and exhibited the canvases.

O'Dea has won many awards, including a major Arts Council Bursary in 1986, four awards at the Arnotts National Portrait Awards, and the K.M.P.G. award at the Annual Oireachtas Exhibition in 1992 and 1998. He was elected an A.R.H.A. in 1993, and three years later was elected an R.H.A. and a member of Aosdána. He has participated in a number of

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residencies: at the Watercolour Symposium in Latvia in 1990 and 1991, at the Centre d'Art i Natura in Catalunya, Spain in 1996, at the Cill Reilig Project, County Kerry in 2000 and 2001, and at the Vermont Studios, USA in 2002 (where he was awarded a Fellowship).

He has exhibited in Ireland, the U.K., the U.S.A., Latvia, and Spain, and his work is featured in many collections in each of these countries. Other works by the artist can be found in: National Gallery of Ireland; The Royal Hibernian Academy; the Arts Council of Ireland; the University of Limerick; the National Self-Portrait Collection and The National Drawing Collection, Limerick City Gallery.

Information contained in this article is from The Modern Art Collection Trinity College Dublin (David Scott 1989).

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This information has been compiled by Art Collections assistants, interns, and volunteers  
For further information please consult [www.tcd.ie/artcollections](http://www.tcd.ie/artcollections)