

John KELLY

In December 1846, N.M. Cummins wrote a letter to *The Times* describing harrowing scenes on South Reen Peninsula in west Cork, Ireland. Shortly before Cummins' letter was published, 340 people lived there. By the end of 1847, nearly all were dead. An Gorta Mór (The Great Hunger) killed them.

In 2009, I attended a lecture by Catherine Marshall¹ entitled *Visualising the Unspeakable; An Unresolved Dilemma for Irish Artists*. Marshall addressed the fact that there was a scarcity of visual art relating to An Gorta Mór.

*"Irish artists did not paint their history because of a perception (so widely held that it was not always documented) that such work would not be acceptable to the establishment."*²

In a strange coincidence, at the same time as An Gorta Mór was decimating the population of Ireland, Henry Tate accumulated wealth from his string of greengrocer's shops in Liverpool, later selling those shops to invest in the sugar-cube patent, the success of which allowed him to become the great benefactor of British art. But, there were no images of An Gorta Mór in his collection of 19th century art or later in the Tate Gallery.

N.M. Cummins died in poverty. Sir Henry Tate's motto was *'Think and Thank'*.

As an Australian, an Irish and a British artist who now lives on the picturesque and fertile peninsula of South Reen these events are not only of historical interest but are events that have created my history.

I think Cummins' letter should hang in the Tate Modern as a thank you for being able to 'paint the picture' the artists could not.

1 Catherine Marshall is an art historian and the lecture was delivered at the West Cork Arts Centre

2 Marshall, Catherine, <<http://www.19thcenturyart-facos.com/artwork/irish-famine>>

Survey work
The weight of words 2012
digital print, steel, wood
installation, dimensions variable

01
The white enterprise 2010
mixed media
installation, dimensions variable

02
Mum and Dad @ Tate Modern 2011
steel and mixed media
1219.0 x 762.0 cm

03
The dark enterprise 2010
mixed media
dimensions variable



01



02



03

John KELLY
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John Kelly was awarded a Master of Arts from RMIT (1995) and studied at the Slade School of Art, London from 1996 to 1997 as a winner of the 1995 Anne & Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship.

He has had numerous solo and group exhibitions internationally and has participated in a number of international sculpture exhibitions including the *Monte Carlo Sculpture Festival*, Monaco (2002); *The Hague Sculpture Festival*, Netherlands (2007); the *Guangzhou Triennale* China (2008); and recently in the *Goteborg Biennale*, Sweden (2011). In 1999 *Cow up a tree*, an eight metre high six ton bronze, was exhibited on the Champs Elysée in Paris. His work is represented in public collections throughout Australia, China and France.

Kelly has authored a number of articles and reviews which explore aspects of both contemporary and historical art which have been published in *Circa magazine* in Ireland and *Art Monthly* in Australia.

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