

Cillín

Tommy Weir

7 November to 22 December 2020

An exhibition of new work by photographer Tommy Weir initiated by the RHA Gallery, Dublin and shown there in autumn 2019 before travelling to The Dock in Carrick-on-Shannon and Uillinn, West Cork Arts Centre.

From the 7th Century, through the Middle Ages and continuing to the late 20th Century, unbaptised children were rarely buried in consecrated ground. Denied access to the graveyard, they were buried in cillíní instead. These remote places were aligned with boundaries in the landscape, on the edges of townlands, at the bottom of cliffs, along the coastline of the sea or the edges of lakes. These unofficial graveyards form a part of the Irish landscape, numbering several thousand across Ireland.

The babies were buried in the dark. The day the infant died, the father would take the body from the home and journey on their own to the cillín which could be some distance away. They would then bury the infant between nightfall and dawn. Weir's body of work forms both the outcome of a period of research and an evolution of his prior work which focused on death, landscape and the making of art. Weir's practice in the making of these images is partly performative, and recreates the night time journeys these fathers made. This exhibition opens up for discussion the cultural and social structures which have enabled this very particular Irish phenomenon.

Weir's process involves online preparatory research using archaeological websites alongside various mapping and photographic resources to determine good locations and key information relating to the sites, from history to access and ownership. He says "Nothing fully prepares you for the initial site visits, recce walks and shoots, and then the subsequent night time shoots over a period of days. Conditions must be right, nightfall, no rain, little wind, lighting, framing. These are a solitary experience and quite meditative and considered. I repeat them as needed, weather conditions and other factors having their impact."

Weir has also collaborated with poet, Una Mannion and archaeologist, Marion Dowd on this body of work, bringing together photography, science and poetry, looking at the Irish relationship to death and ritual over the centuries.

The exhibition at Uillinn includes two new works "Maunvough" (between Bantry and Drimoleague) and "Gloun" (between Schull and Durrus) photographed last winter in Cork.