



# The Ireland-U.S. Council

— A Business Organization —

## NEWS RELEASE

### For Immediate Release

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### **The Ireland-U.S. Council's 2015 Award For Outstanding Portraiture To Be Presented To Artist Geraldine O'Neill in its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year Prudential Financial's Sponsorship Supports This Important Arts Program**

**May 21, 2015, New York, NY:** An accomplished Dublin artist is the winner of this year's *Award for Outstanding Portraiture*, sponsored by the *Ireland-U.S. Council*, in conjunction with *The Irish Arts Review* and the *Royal Hibernian Academy (RHA)*. It is presented in Ireland to an artist whose work is judged to be of outstanding merit. The Award is an important part of the Council's program to support the arts and arts education in Ireland.

The winning portrait work was chosen from among the entries at the opening of the *Royal Hibernian Academy's* Spring Exhibition held recently in Dublin where Ms. O'Neill was presented with the Council's €5,000 award bursary. A formal presentation of the Award citation will be made by Council Ireland Chapter President Dr. Michael Somers and Council President Brian W. Stack at the Council's Midsummer Gala Dinner on *Friday, June 26, 2015* at a dinner in Dublin Castle. The Guest Speaker at this event will be Leo Varadkar TD, Minister for Health in the Government of Ireland.

Geraldine O'Neill lives and works in her native Dublin. She studied at the *National College of Art & Design (NCAD)* from 1989 thru 1993. She completed her Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree there in 2008. She has lectured at the *Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT)* and at *St. Patrick's College* and was an external tutor for an MFA student at the Massachusetts Institute of Art in 2011. In 2013, she was elected an associate of the RHA. Among Ms. O'Neill's awards are the *Henry Higgins Travel Scholarship*, an Arts Council Bursary and the *Gerry Tornsey Prize for Portraiture*. O'Neill's work is represented in many collections, both private and public, including the *Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA)*, the European Central Bank, the Office of Public Works, and the Glucksman Collection at *University College Cork*.

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The Award program is undertaken with generous financial sponsorship from Council-member firm, *Prudential Financial*, a U.S.-based life insurance company which is not affiliated in any manner with *Prudential plc*, a company incorporated in the United Kingdom. The *Irish Arts Review*, the quarterly publication devoted to Irish culture, art and design throughout the ages, manages the judging process with the support of the RHA, an all-island institution that is celebrating its 186<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. The panel of judges included John Mulcahy and Sonya Perkins from the *Irish Arts Review*, Michael Cullen RHA and the celebrated Irish artist Robert Ballagh.

Over the past decade, the *Ireland-U.S. Council* has contributed a total €50,000 (\$57,000) to this program of *Awards for Outstanding Portraiture* which since 2006 have gone to the following artists not all of whom are members of the RHA but who have exhibited at the RHA annual exhibition: Maeve McCarthy, Garry Coyle, Carey Clarke, Jonathan Dalton, Colin Davidson, Una Sealy, Ian Cumberland, Mick O'Dea, Oisín Roche and now Geraldine O'Neill.

In a commentary on the winning portrait published in the current edition of the *Irish Arts Review*, Robert Ballagh, a member of the judging panel, said this:

*"Today, in this digital age, where so much is possible, a five-hundred-year-old technology, namely the normal application of oil paint to an appropriate substrate, can still achieve results that are both special and unique. With a painted portrait the viewer is not just presented with the outward appearance of the subject but through visual contact with the means of representation – the physical marks on the surface – a special relationship can develop between the viewer and the actual artist."*

*"Looking at Rembrandt's later self-portraits, initially one marvels at the extraordinary representation of the trials and tribulations of the ageing process but closer examination of the painted surface reveals the skilful marks and gestures made by the painter himself. This intimate experience not only dissolves the centuries since its execution, but metaphorically speaking, places the viewer at the artist's shoulder during the creation of the masterpiece. Looking at an art video or installation just doesn't come close! The re-integration of the painted portrait into the artistic mainstream in recent decades has been greatly assisted by the establishment of the National Portrait Awards in London and, here in Ireland, by the National Portrait Exhibition, sponsored by Arnotts department store and organized by artist Jacqueline Stanley and my late wife Betty Ballagh."*

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*“Over the ten years of this exhibition many of today’s successful portrait painters received their initial support and encouragement. This tradition has been continued by the Irish Arts Review and the Ireland-U.S. Council who award a prize each year for the best portrait in the Royal Hibernian Academy’s Annual Exhibition.*

*“This year’s winner is a striking work by Geraldine O’Neill entitled ‘**Drawing**’. Her winning portrait features her daughter Siún, proudly displaying her own drawing, and it is this clever concept that, in turn, provides a key to the interpretation of what is quite a complex picture. It seems to me that apart from creating a likeness of her daughter, the artist has in mind the interrogation of representation itself: the question of how, over the centuries, artists have struggled to devise a satisfactory means of describing the world we inhabit. The monochrome nature of the picture, created in charcoal and conté crayon, provides an opportunity for the artist to use coloured oil pastels in order, by way of contrast, to emphasize complex concepts in the painting; however, perhaps most significant of all is the red heart, symbolizing love, reproduced in the child’s drawing.”*

As part of the sponsorship program associated with the Award, every Council member in the United States and in Ireland receives a copy of the excellent quarterly *Irish Arts Review*. Other benefits for Council members include a program of discounts available through the *Irish Arts Review* to many arts events in Ireland. Also included are calendars of upcoming arts activities throughout the year plus online information on such things as prices of Irish art and results of auction sales.

*The Ireland-U.S. Council* was founded in 1962 by business leaders in the United States and in Ireland. It is the premier transatlantic business organization that encourages and promotes business between Ireland and the United States. Its founding was in preparation for the visit of President John F. Kennedy to Ireland in the Spring of 1963, as a measure to build institutional form around a structure to improve business, economic and commercial relations between the two countries. The Council operates a variety of scholarship programs, undertakes various publishing initiatives in national business media in the United States, stages seminars and hosts frequent events in Ireland and in America aimed at developing communications and dialogue between leaders in business, government and politics on both sides of the Atlantic.

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## The Winning Portrait



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