



The Ireland-U.S. Council

— A Business Organization —

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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The Ireland-U.S. Council's 2017 Award For Outstanding Portraiture To Be Presented To RHA Member Blaise Smith Prudential Financial's Sponsorship Supports This Important Arts Program

June 1, 2017, New York, NY: Blaise Smith 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)*. The award 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 painting is a portrait of eight scientists, chosen as representatives of a generation of outstanding young female scientists working in Ireland today. Their areas of expertise include light and solar panels, genetics, human aging, immunology and bio-medical engineering among others. 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 Mr. Smith 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 at the Council's Midsummer Gala Dinner on *Friday, June 30, 2017* at a dinner in Dublin Castle.

Blaise Smith was born in 1967 and attended Ireland's *National College of Art & Design*. He was elected an Associate Member of the *Royal Hibernian Academy* in 2012 and has won many awards and has been selected in numerous juried exhibitions. These have included notably the *RHA Annual* in Dublin and the *BP Portrait Award* at the *National Portrait Gallery, London*. The *Irish Times* newspaper has described him as "a realist painter who has shown a particular empathy for rural Ireland – rural Ireland as it is, rather than any of various idealizations of it."

NEW YORK

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In 1999 he completed “*Roadworks*”, a set of 24 paintings depicting the men and machines of Cork County Council for their Centenary. The following year he painted 10 paintings for Kilkenny County Council entitled “*The Millenium Landscape*”. He has had eight solo shows in the Molesworth Gallery, Dublin.

In remarks with the announcement of the winning portrait work, Council President Mr. Brian W. Stack noted “This annual competition and prize is now in its 12th year and has been an important career marker where many of today’s successful portrait painters in Ireland received their initial support and encouragement. It is a tradition that we are delighted to sustain with the *Irish Arts Review* on the prestigious platform of the *Royal Hibernian Academy’s* Annual Exhibition”.

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 *Royal Hibernian Academy*, an all-island institution that is celebrating its 187th Anniversary. The panel of judges included John Mulcahy and Sonya Perkins from the *Irish Arts Review*.

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 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, 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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About the Portrait

The winner of the *Award for Outstanding Portraiture* for 2017 is by Blaise Smith. It is a portrait of eight female scientists, chosen as representatives of a generation of outstanding young female scientists working in Ireland today. Their areas of expertise include light and solar panels, genetics, human aging, immunology and bio-medical engineering among others.

Blaise Smith says of the painting: "A group portrait is always interesting because you have to capture the individuals and their personalities but also make the painting of the group work. The fact that they are all eminent women scientists provides an opportunity to mark the positive change that has happened in society over the last hundred years. It really is a landmark painting about our life and times ... and as the painter chosen to do it, I feel privileged to have been given this responsibility/

About the Portrait's Subjects

- Professor Sarah McCormack (TCD): whose research explores photovoltaic panels which convert solar energy into direct current electricity;
- Professor Aoife McLysaght (TCD): is one of Ireland's leading geneticists and was on the team that analysed the initial sequence of the human genome in 2001. She was also involved in a major discovery about how genes are formed;
- Dr. Aoife Gowen (UCD): investigates how contact with water contributes to fouling or degradation of various synthetic materials, including medical sutures, pacemakers and water filters;
- Professor Lydia Lynch (Harvard Medical School moving to TCD): whose research has found that a type of anti-tumor immune cell protects against obesity and the metabolic syndrome that leads to diabetes;
- Professor Debra Laefer (UCD): Her research aims to prevent damage to buildings above tunnel excavation, by developing a 3D modelling system that can predict what buildings are most likely to sustain damage during tunneling;
- Professor Emma Teeling (UCD): is a world authority on bat genetics. She studies bats for insights into human diseases such as blindness and deafness as well as ageing;
- Dr. Maria McNamara (UCC): is a world expert on the fossilization of color in animals and has conducted ground-breaking work on the evolution of feathers in dinosaurs;
- Professor Caitríona Lally (TCD): is the principal investigator on a project focusing on developing a means of early diagnosis of degenerative cardiovascular diseases. These studies are highly-relevant to stroke patients and those with vascular disease.

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The Winning Portrait



The Artist



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