

These Irish eyes are beguiling

Dublin gallerist is bringing a rarely seen Freud to London, says Helen Chislett

The leaves turning gold in Regent's Park herald the

impending arrival of the biggest contemporary art event in Britain. Frieze London attracts 60,000 visitors, many of them intent on handing over millions of pounds for pieces of art. It also acts as a starting gun for a host of related events around the capital. Above all that noise, it is hard to make yourself heard.

One person trying to do just that is the Dublin gallerist Oliver Sears, whose space opened in the depths of the Irish recession in 2010. This week, he is bringing a pop-up show to a Georgian house in London, making it possible to enjoy the full flavour of Irish contemporary and applied art. In Residence will be devoted primarily to the living artists on the gallery's list, but will also include influential names from the past century. Not all the artists are Irish by birth, but all have a connection with the country, both physical and spiritual.

It is a bold move, and an expensive one, for such a small gallery, but Sears is driven by a passion for the artists he represents, and by the belief that people should wake up to the largely unknown talent over the Irish Sea.

"People can often name Irish poets, playwrights, novelists, actors and musicians, but they are not so aware of the small, vibrant and interesting group of artists who are working there today," he says. "These are artists who have not been homogenised into the great gloop of the highly commoditised global art world. They are honest and real and true."

The easy path might have been to apply for a booth at Frieze, something he considered and rejected. "I like to allow a sense of reflection over a number of weeks – not pandemonium of the 'Buy now or lose!' mentality." He does not want to sound too derisive of the Frieze model – he does, after all, take a

stand at the London Art Fair each January – but he is keen to separate himself from a global art world of which he increasingly despairs. "I have reservations about the way people collect art as nothing more than a commodity. Let's face it, people are putting the equivalent of a share certificate on their wall."

One of the artists represented here is Colin Davidson, with whom Sears collaborated on *Jerusalem: 12 portraits of people from all walks of life and all*

to view a never-before-seen-in-public portrait by Lucian Freud. *Donegal Man, Profile (2008)* is of Pat Doherty, whose company, Titanic Belfast, sponsored the show's catalogue. Freud's 2006 portrait of the same sitter, *Donegal Man*, is well documented, but few people even knew of the existence of this second painting. Sears feels privileged to be the first to show it: "Pat generously offered me the chance to include this masterpiece. It has all the character penetration Freud is famous for, and the dry impasto surface of his later period."

Since its beginning, Sears's gallery has questioned the hierarchy of applied and fine arts. As he reflects: "In the west, we are so uptight about objects – we seem to see only in 2D. But why shouldn't we introduce the applied arts into the lexicon of our audience?"

To this end, 8 of the 29 artists are drawn from the field. They include Joseph Walsh, who has evolved a language in wood that defies categorisation as mere furniture; the renowned ceramicist Sara Flynn; and the master wood-turner Liam Flynn (no relation).

In his foreword to the catalogue, Sears writes of his hope that this exhibition "soothes the heart" – in fact, it promises to make it beat that little bit faster. Visitors can be assured of a warm Irish welcome. Unlike some of his peers, Sears does not believe in turning people away or refusing to sell to them because they are not the "right" collector for a piece. "There is a lot of paranoid nonsense that feeds the art world's mythology," he says. "I will be only too delighted if people have the interest, confidence and faith to buy these beautiful things from me." **E**

In Residence, Six Fitzroy Square, London W1, from Thu until Oct 31



Second time round Freud's *Donegal Man, Profile (2008)*

faiths living in that divided city. "The message behind putting all of these portraits in one space was, 'Whether you like it or not, you will have to talk to each other eventually,'" Sears says.

For *In Residence*, he has selected a recent and intriguing portrait of Simon Callow by Davidson, where the sitter has his hand over his mouth. Other museum-class works include Hughie O'Donoghue's *Yellow Man III (2008)* and *Woods*, by Ed Miliano (2015). These are juxtaposed with important works by towering figures of Irish art such as William Scott, William John Leech, Jack Butler Yeats and Paul Henry.

There is also something of a show stopper: a rare opportunity

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