

# BUTLER ■ GALLERY

BARRIE COOKE

## PORTRAITS

March 14 – April 26, 2009

The Butler Gallery is extremely proud to host an exhibition of the portraits of Barrie Cooke.

In sixty years of painting Cooke has made over twenty-five portraits of poets, writers and artists, all of whom are his friends. They make an illustrious gathering of cultural icons and include poets Seamus Heaney, John Montague, Ted Hughes, Nuala Ní Dhómhnaill and Leland Bardwell; writers, John McGahern and Dermot Healy; artists, Dorothy Cross, Camille Souter and Nick Miller. These portraits have never before been exhibited together.

Cooke approaches the portrait as if it were a landscape – a bog to penetrate, a river to dive into. He embraces the rigour demanded of painting portraits, a tradition he has favoured throughout his career, averaging about two a year. All his portraits are from life. The time spent working on a portrait can differ greatly and can take anything from two to twenty sittings, as was the case with the exceptional painting of John McGahern.

Cooke has had long associations with the Butler Gallery since the 1970s where he served on the board for over twenty years. During his tenure, he encouraged many artists of international repute to exhibit in the catacombs of Kilkenny castle and was integral to the establishment and growth of the Butler's important Permanent Collection. The Butler Gallery is delighted to welcome Barrie Cooke back to Kilkenny to celebrate this important body of work.

In 2009, Kilkenny celebrates its 400<sup>th</sup> year as a city. In honour of this occasion, a full-colour catalogue will accompany this exhibition, which is gratefully sponsored by the Kilkenny 400 Committee and the Kilkenny Borough Council.

*Barrie Cooke was born in 1931 in Cheshire, England. He moved to the US as a teenager and studied Art History at Harvard University. He moved to Ireland in 1954 and had his first solo exhibition in Dublin the following year. He lived in Kilkenny from 1965 – 1990 and then moved to Sligo, where he has resided ever since. Though based in Ireland, he is widely travelled and his richly expressionist, semi-abstract paintings have been strongly influenced by time spent in such far-flung places as Lapland, New Zealand, Borneo and Malaya. Nature in its infinite variety and irresistible flux is his chosen environment and subject matter. In addition to his portraits he has also painted a number of nudes, as refracted through what Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney has referred to as his 'aqueous vision'. He has collaborated with a number of prominent poets including Heaney, John Montague and the British Poet Laureate Ted Hughes, who share his fascination with the elemental. Though primarily a painter he also produced a series of 'bone boxes' in perspex during the 1970s.*

*He has exhibited widely throughout Europe, the US and Canada. Major retrospectives include the Royal Hibernian Academy Gallery in Dublin, LAC, Perpignan, France in 1995, the Haags Gemeentemuseum in 1992 and the Douglas Hyde Gallery in 1986. Recent exhibitions include the Irish Museum of Modern Art (2008), Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town (2007), Model Arts and Niland Gallery, Sligo (2002). His work is represented in the collections of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the Ulster Museum, the Butler Gallery, the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, Holland and in many other public and private collections worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Barrie Cooke is represented by the Kerlin Gallery, Dublin.*

*Barrie Cooke will lead a talk on his work in the exhibition on the 16 March at 11am. Poet Nuala Ní Dhómhnaill, the subject of one of Cooke's portraits, will read related poetry in the gallery on the 16 April at 11am (School's Talk) and at 2pm (Public Talk). All are welcome. Booking essential – please call the Gallery to book a place.*

**Butler Gallery  
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<sup>1</sup> Pic courtesy of Kerlin Gallery