

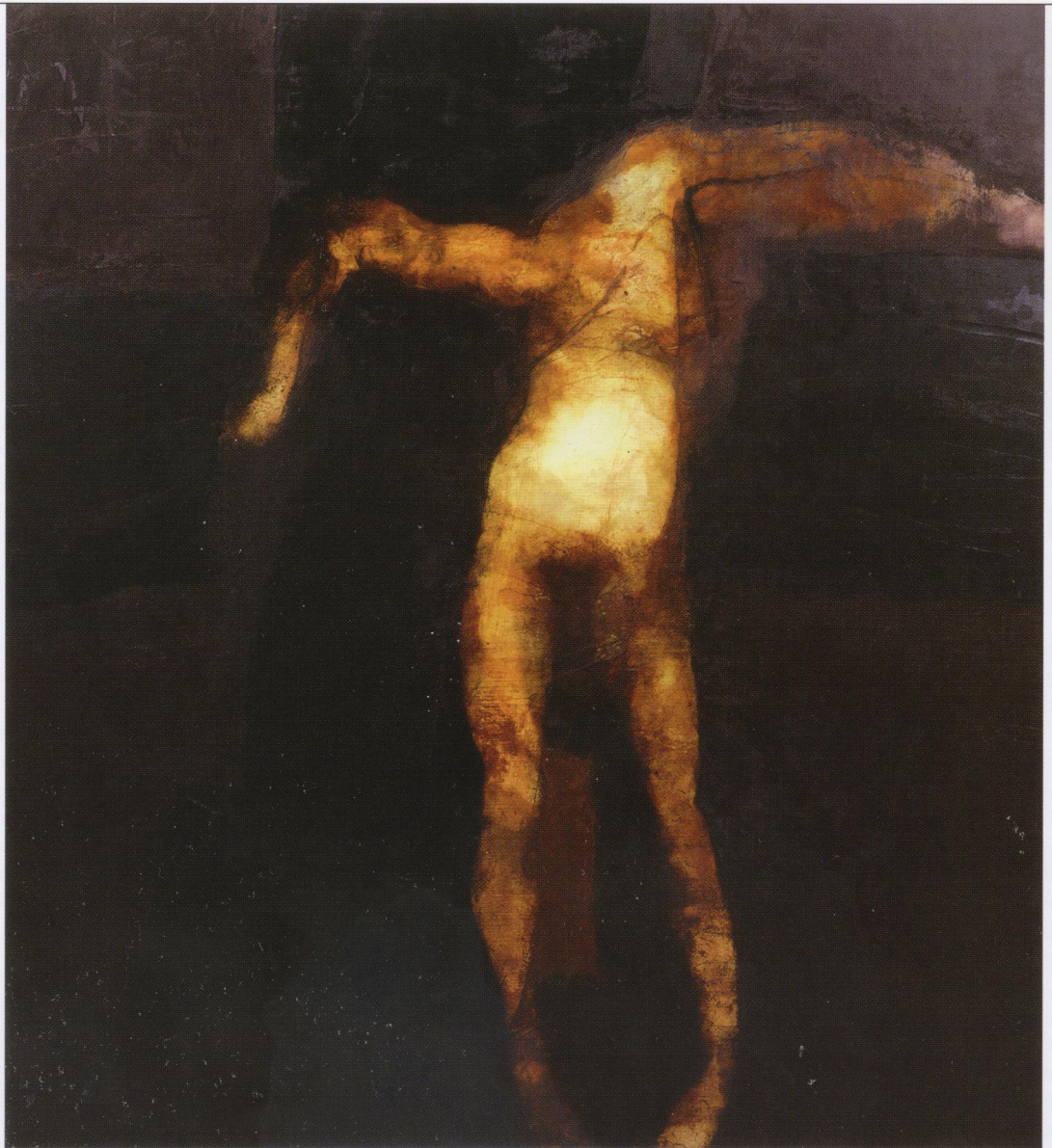
## Knocknalower, Hill of the Lepers

Hughie O'Donoghue  
2001

Oil on canvas

248 x 279 cm

Purchased from the  
Fenton Gallery



## Artwork of the Month

The subject of this painting is a hill in the Erris region near where O'Donoghue's mother was born and where he spent his summer holidays in his youth. His many paintings based in this area do not compare in volume with the war paintings based on his father's stories, letters, documents and photographs or with his massive series on the Passion of Christ. Yet there are multiple connections and cross-references in line and colour, in shape and texture between these three distinctive sets of paintings.

The connections lie buried in myth and memory, in the painterly hand and mind of O'Donoghue himself. In Knocknalower as in other works he is revisiting childhood memory and myth of a neighbouring hill, so-called because it was either believed to have therapeutic properties for the sick (the lepers) or acted as a place of isolation for them or both. The ambiguities of legend and of life are the stuff of art for

O'Donoghue, who may select the topic but does not, as he admits, necessarily control the meaning.

The picture is dominated by the elongated dead figure resting in the earth signalling the death of the local people of which O'Donoghue speaks elsewhere, and echoing the melancholia which his mother suffered in her enforced departure from Erris to Manchester. The visual connections with the Crucified are strong and the deaths of his father and the unknown soldier in World War II cannot be far from the hand.

However O'Donoghue's discovery through a photograph of Tollund man at rest in his Danish bog after so many years, was his original insight into how the human figure is at home in the earth. The bogs of Mayo and the legends of Knocknalower provide a further focus for this painterly vision.

*Professor Enda McDonagh  
Chairperson of the Governing Body, UCC*