

## MFA STUDENT, PRINTMAKING, IRELAND

Upon my father's death I was given a great gift. This gift came in the form of a letter discovered in one of the many stacks of personal papers which was my father's nature to collect. The letter, dated 1883 Bohau, County Mayo, had survived over one-hundred years and until my father's passing had remained completely unknown to my siblings and I. The antique words formed with brown ink on cream paper carried news from my great-great grandfather Thomas to his son Michael recently emigrated to America. The letter spoke of misunderstandings, coming harvests, deceased friends and the pain of separation. In 1987 armed with this letter I travelled back to the place where my great grandfather had begun his journey. There I discovered an abandoned farm on property owned by a man with the same name as my father. The three buildings in various stages of decay stood silent, drenched with a history that was my own. The few hours I spent in Bohau revealed clues to a family history that had been lost through emigration and the need of ancestors to avoid the recollection of painful events.

As an artist I have and continue to create prints and paintings that are a response of the history and spirit of everyday places and objects. My work is focused on the mystery and beauty found in the abandoned places and the neglected objects and materials of urban environments. As Irish poet Derek Mahon states, it is the "soulfulness of things, the life of objects..." that intrigues me. It is my goal to use this grant to bring together my aesthetic sensibilities and the history of my family and ethnic culture. For it is these two forces that have had the most profound effect on my development as an artist and person.

It is my intention to return to Bohau and use this ancestral homestead as the subject for a body of work. Thus the farm and its discarded contents will act as a divining rod for self-discovery and creative expression. The local landscape, agriculture, and parish cemetery will also provide strong visual images. I also hope to use this project to contribute to the efforts of such organizations as The Irish American Cultural Institute whose goal it is to "explore the heritage of Ireland, foster its growth, and increase awareness of its rich diversities." My contribution will include the exhibition of this project and a donation of art to the Institute.

The completed body of work will consist of a suite of ten prints based on drawings done at the Bohau farm. Incorporated in the prints will be rubbings taken directly from the buildings and found objects. This technique is one that I have been exploring in my most recent work. The suite of prints will be produced at Graphic Studio Dublin, Dublin. I have been in contact with director James McCreary. He and Robert Russell have assured me that I will be welcome to work at the studio for the length of this grant. I will also execute a series of drawings on Mylar that will be used to produce a limited edition book. The book will include images and history specific to County Mayo along with autobiographical discoveries. Genealogical and geographical research will include visits with neighboring farms, parish priests, and the Presbytery in Westport. In addition, I have made arrangements to use Trinity College Library in Dublin and the Folklore Archive, University College Dublin, which is open to the public.

In order to understand the creative life of the region I will meet with contemporary artists and writers. The poet Michael Cody, who I recently met through the Irish American Cultural Institute, has agreed to assist in introducing me the work of contemporary poets. In particular, he mentioned a group of women writers based in Galway. In his work *Oven Lane*, he uses his discovery of his family's past as a theme.

A hundred years and I will come  
To try the lane for echoes  
The coughing and the crying  
Of children in the dark,  
The nameless incarnations  
Of love and grief and hunger  
Where the river flows  
Coldly past.  
From "The Letter" by Michael Cody

I will begin this project by attending the September arts festival in Galway. From there I will travel to County Mayo and secure living and studio space in Westport, which is approximately 5 miles from the farm. September through November will be spent preparing drawings at the farm and conducting research. The following winter months will include working in the studio and printing in Dublin. April through June I will return to working out of doors on

Mylar drawings and sketches. The time required to complete this project is one academic year beginning September and finishing in June.