

Hunt museum puts Li

THE Hunt Museum has been re-opened. The Hunt collection of Irish Archaeology and Medieval works of art have been given a conservation cleaning, put into a new exhibition, and are now situated in the University Limerick, Foundation Building.

Presented to the people of Ireland by the Hunt family, with the University of Limerick designated custodian in perpetuity, this is a unique collection of material. The pieces on display range in date from stone balls used for a game in the neolithic period, about 4,000 BC, to a Belleek Candelabra. The glories of the Hunt Collection are the ivories, bronzes and limoges enamels of the 12th to 14th centuries.

The Hunt Museum is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Saturday and closed on Sunday.

Admission: adults £1.60; group £1.30. Children 90p; group 75p.

The Friends of the Hunt Museum has been established in order to encourage people to become more involved in the Hunt Museum and in what it represents. The Hunt Museum is unique not just because of the works of art which John and Gertrude Hunt collected, but because each item was selected on the basis of the quality of its design and standard of craftsmanship. The Hunt Museum then, with locations at the university and, from summer 1994, at its new home in the Custom House, intends concentrating on design, craftsmanship, decorative and fine art and on social and economic history — of Ireland and of the Western civilisation.

An ad hoc committee of The Friends was established with Trevor Morrow as chairman, Stephanie MacMahon as secretary, Margaret Stapleton as treasurer and Ann O'Malley as membership-secretary. They have put together a programme of lectures for next year and will issue a newsletter soon. The intention is that the Friends of the Hunt Museum will be an active organisation.

The Hunt Collection is an internationally important collection of major art and antiquities, ranging over the centuries from pre-Christian times to the 20th century. The nucleus of the collection was presented to the people of Ireland in 1976, and has been on display in the University of Limerick since 1978. The university has been designated custodian in perpetuity of the collection. A small selection of medieval artefacts have also been on display in Craggaunowen Castle, Co. Clare. With the remainder of the collection now being offered by the Hunt family, the Hunt Collection will now be placed on a comparable footing with The Burrell Collection, Glasgow; Musée Cluny, Paris, and The Cloisters, New York.

The Hunt Collection is a personal one, formed by a couple who appreciated the craftsmanship and design of objects. John and Gertrude Hunt were scholars with an abiding interest in the lifestyles of our ancestors.

One of the strengths of the Hunt Collection is its medieval material. Its range covers objects commissioned and used by both



This magnificent bronze figure of a rearing horse has been attributed to the workshop of Leonardo da Vinci. It is one of four similar horses: of the other three, one is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the second is in the Szépművészeti Museum, Budapest, and the third is in the Jeannerat Collection, London. Each horse seems to be derived from the same model, mouldages cast from a lost original sculpture in wax or terracotta by Leonardo. There has been much scholarly discussion on the relationship of these pieces to one of Leonardo's drawings of a rearing horse, preserved among the Leonardo drawings in Windsor Castle. Leonardo left no bronze sculptures, but it has been argued that another artist had these pieces cast from a model found in his studio after his death.



A silver decadrachm of Syracuse, the obverse shows the head of the nymph Arethusa, reeds in her hair, surrounded by four dolphins. The reverse depicts a quadriga driven by a female charioteer, with the goddess of victory, Nike, flying above to crown the charioteer's head with a wreath. In the exergue there are a shield, a cuirass between two greaves, and a helmet. Given the quality and fame of this issue of coins it is not surprising that in the Middle Ages, when the cult of relics was at its highest, people should have come to accept this coin as one of the Thirty Pieces of Silver given to Judas for betraying Christ. It can be argued that, to the medieval mind, the reward for this betrayal could only have been coins of the first quality. But it is most unlikely that this coinage was in use in Palestine four hundred years after its issue. The phrase Quia precium sanguinis est comes from St. Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 27, Verse 6, which reads: "And the chief priests said, it is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood."

ecclesiastical and lay patrons in the medieval period, and includes statues in stone, bronze and wood, crucifixes, panel paintings, metalwork, jewellery, enamels, ceramics and crystal. Many of these items have also been shown in international exhibitions, and some are currently on loan to the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

The links between the collection and other museums can be illustrated by the fact that a fragment of the Beaufort late 14th century armorial tapestry is currently on display in the present Hunt Museum in the university, while other fragments of the same tapestry are in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and The Burrell Collection, Glasgow.

Besides the medieval material, there is a wealth of artefacts which reflect the Hunts' respect for craftsmanship and design, ranging from Egyptian, Greek and Roman material through to 18th century metalwork and ceramics. There is also an important collection of Irish archaeological material ranging from neolithic flints, through bronze age gold, the unique 8th century Antrim Cross, hand-pins, penannular brooches, down to penal crucifixes of the 18th and 19th century.

Irish decorative arts are represented in a range of items from 13th century glazed pottery to Belleek porcelain and from

engraved 18th century Dublin tapestries to ecclesiastical and domestic silver.

In 1991 the Hunt family generously offered another large segment of the collection to the nation. Among the many important items included in this gift are works by Picasso and Gauguin, a bronze horse considered to be from the hand of Leonardo da Vinci, a Greek silver coin revered since the Middle Ages as one of the biblical "30 pieces of silver", and a personal seal of Charles 1st of England.

These art and archaeological items were collected with the intention of displaying them together to illustrate the progression of craftsmanship and the decorative arts through the ages, and to illustrate that Irish material can stand on an equal footing with its European counterparts.

To ensure that this important collection can be enjoyed by the people of Ireland the Government has made available the Custom House in Limerick city for this purpose. A fine example of Irish Georgian architecture, the Custom House was built in 1769 by Davis Duckart. With the help of the Office of Public Works, refurbishment of the Custom House is now being undertaken by Limerick Corporation. Mairead Dunlevy has been appointed as the director of the Hunt Museum and is now actively promoting the project. Building work is expected to commence in 1993, with a target opening date in 1994.

Born in 1900, John Hunt was reared in England, his parents having come from Co. Limerick and Co. Clare respectively. In his youth he studied both medicine and architecture before dedicating his life to the study of antiquities.

His wife, Gertrude, was born in Mannheim, West Germany, in 1903. Their mutual love of art brought them together in London in the early 1930s, where they opened their own antique shop. It was a good time for antique collectors as European museums were devoting their resources to restoring their buildings and the American museums had not yet entered the market. Acknowledged even then as leading experts in medieval art, they assisted in the formation and recording of many important collections, such as that of Sir William Burrell in Glasgow, the Hearst Collection in San Simeon, California, and that of the Aga Khan among others. They both also worked in an advisory capacity for Sotheby's of London.

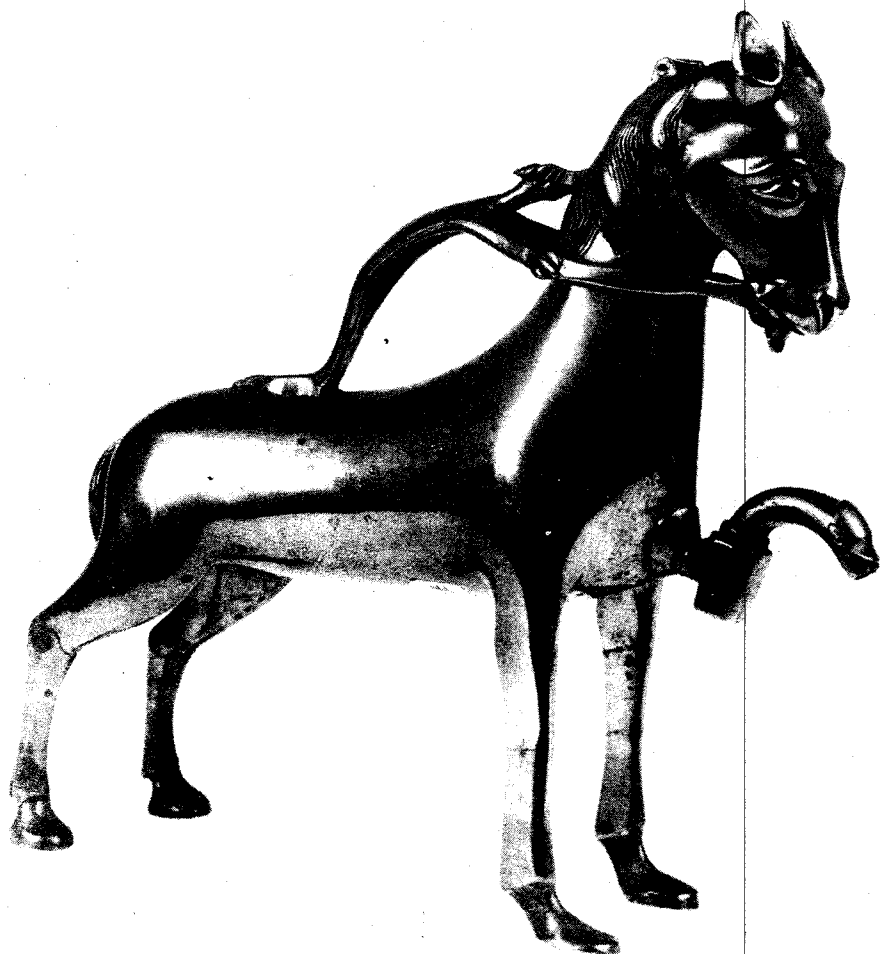
With their love for, and appreciation of craftsmanship and design, it was in the 1930s and 40s that they set about the formation of their own collection. With the break-up of many fine collections at this time they recognised intuitively quality pieces often missed by others. By selecting the best from other collections they formed what would become a great collection in its own right in years to come. Among their priorities was the seeking out of quality Irish material that could then return to its rightful homeland.

With the advent of the Second World War, the couple moved to Lough Gur in Co. Limerick. Besides fine arts, John Hunt's other

merick to cultural fore



Beautifully carved, this ivory object is thought to have been used as a chess piece. The group scene presents an intriguing puzzle. It shows four knights, two with heads missing, another holding an axe and looking away, surrounding two tonsured men, taller than any of the knights. There are three tall figures on the other side, and archbishop or bishop holding a staff, and two clergymen wearing dalmatics and albs. That there are four knights in the group, the number involved in St. Thomas á Becket's murder, suggests that the scene represents an episode in that event. There is a socket in the centre of the group, perhaps for a cross. This piece was shown in The Year 1200 exhibition in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, in 1970.



This grass aquamanile is in the form of a horse, the handle in the shape of a mythical beast. The mane and tail are deeply engraved. It has a small hinged lid on the head and a tap with a snake-head mouth on the breast.

abiding interest was archaeology. During the 40s and 50s he worked on numerous excavations, including those at Lough Gur and Caherguillamore. At Lough Gur he made the first reconstruction of a Neolithic house, which was featured on a BBC documentary. This reconstruction was the prototype for later similar reconstructions at Craggaunowen, Co. Clare.

It was John Hunt's brainchild to restore Bunratty Castle and initiate the construction of the Folk Park there. He encouraged Lord Gort to restore and refurbish the Castle, and shared his great knowledge of the medieval period to ensure the historical accuracy of the project.

A regular contributor of research papers to The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, The North Munster Antiquarian Journal and The Connoisseur, his magnum opus was his two-volume publication, Irish Medieval Figure Sculpture, 1200-1600, published in Dublin in 1974.

A visionary, idealist and a scholar, he, encouraged by Gertrude, began the Craggaunowen project in 1973. The tower house at Craggaunowen was restored, and a crannog and ring-fort reconstructed in

the grounds, so as to allow the visitor to experience first hand the life-styles of our ancestors. After his death, his wife continued to encourage the further development of Craggaunowen, and over the years further attractions have been added, such as the fulachta fiadh, the Iron Age road and the Brendan Boat, donated to the project by Tim Severin after his voyage in it to America.

Conscious of the need to improve visual arts educa-

tion in Ireland, a small segment of the Hunt collection was put on display in Craggaunowen Castle. The Hunt family had hoped to build a museum on site to display the collection in its entirety, but economic factors prevented this from becoming a reality. But, owing to the generosity of Dr. Edward Walsh, President of the University of Limerick, space was allocated within the university to display many of the archaeological and medieval items.



Well known Limerick barman Sean Maher celebrating the recent opening of the Tango Club, Desmond Arms, with Pat Butler.

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