

'Irreplaceable loss' felt as iconic artist Jack Donovan, 80, dies

■ Tributes paid to the former head of the Limerick School of Art and master painter

ANNE SHERIDAN

TRIBUTES have been paid to the great Limerick artist Jack Donovan, who has passed away at the age of 80 after a short illness.

The father of three who lived in Ballykeeffe and whose work is held in collections in Ireland and across Europe, was cremated in a private ceremony this Wednesday in Cork.

His work was most recently exhibited in Limerick this March, as part of a collection by his former student, the artist John Shinnors', who selected some of the great works artists from the school have produced over the past 50 years.

Speaking to the Limerick Leader, Shinnors said the death of his friend is an "irreplaceable loss".

"He was a pivotal figure in Limerick from the 1950s on, and was the first real artist we ever saw in the Limerick School of Art. He was an iconic figure," he said.

He described the late artist's work as "mesmeric" and having the power "to stop you in your tracks".

Asked recently if he was still painting, Jack replied: "Of course I'm bloody painting. It's a disease, I couldn't stop if I wanted to."

He once told Shinnors that to him painting "was always about saying something, saying something that meant something to me...painting should be visual poetry really. You know you paint the things you love."

His work, he said, was inspired by imagery from his childhood - Duffy's circus, the cinema, and plays in the hall in Rathkeale, county Limerick.

One of five children born to Dan and Peg Donovan, Jack was brought up in a thatched cottage, Grouse Lodge, by his grandparents, as his mother passed away, 77 days after he was born, at the age of 35.

The Listowel writer and playwright John B Keane was one of his first subjects to portray, as the author worked for a time in Dan Donovan's pharmacy in Rathkeale.

Collections of his sketches feature many of the Limerick poet Desmond O'Grady, and the actor Richard Harris.

According to his family, in school he only had one red and blue pencil, but became enraptured by colour when Duffy's circus came to town, which would later inspire his work.



The late Jack Donovan, pictured this March, in front of one of his paintings, which is on display in the Clare Street campus of the Limerick School of Art & Design

Born in Limerick on March 11, 1934, he began his studies at the Limerick School of Art in 1951. Between 1962 and 1978 he was the head of the Limerick School of Art where he taught other artists such as Shinnors, Brian Mac Mahon and Henry Morgan.

In the Irish Arts Review magazine, Shinnors wrote in an article that his favourite painting by Donovan was The Barber and His Wife on Vacation, which he first saw when he was a student in the Limerick school, aged 17.

The current whereabouts of that work are unknown, but Shinnors said the painting had a "profound" effect on him. "Donovan is that breed of artist who sees the

universal in the local. The complex, mysterious, the banal and the simple are uncovered in the life as he lives and experiences here

**"Of course
I'm still
painting. I
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wanted to"**

Jack Donovan
1934 - 2014

on this small rock on the edge of Europe.

"To me and my fellow students,

Donovan was an artist who practised his art almost with us. His self-imposed presence was unique and even in those heady days, unorthodox," he wrote.

In a speech at the launch of his exhibition in Rathkeale in 1999, Paul M. O'Reilly, the then director of Limerick City Gallery of Art, said: "Jack Donovan paints like no one else. Not even remotely like he does. There is the element of almost child-like fun and humour in the stylisation and caricature found in much of his work".

For over four decades he worked prolifically honing his skills as a painter and experimenting with new ways to visually communicate his curious narratives.

In the 1960s he began incorporating collage into his paintings, pasting sections of faces and bodies from magazines and photographs further distorting the line between the real and the imagined. His very individual style comprised elements of humour, politics, history, religion and the human form creating a puzzle of imagery and meaning that draws the viewer into his work. In 2004 the Limerick City Art Gallery held a large retrospective of his work, and his work is held in the collections of the Arts Council of Ireland, Arts Council of Great Britain, Swedish Academy of Visual Art, CIE, Limerick City Gallery of Art and the National Self-Portrait Collection.

Heat is off as Hazel leaves Bake Off show

ANNE SHERIDAN

THE HEAT of the kitchen - and being on national TV - is off, but Limerick baker Hazel Ryan Sheehan won't stop cooking, after being eliminated in the closing stages of The Great Irish Bake-Off.

The 31-year-old mum of two left the TV3 show in episode six this Wednesday night as part of a double-elimination, after first being pitted against 10 other "outstanding bakers" who are all competing to be crowned Ireland's best amateur baker.

"I'm absolutely loved the show, and watched all the first series, but it was really surreal being on it.

"I watched the first season thinking I could totally do better, but when I met the other bakers in the tent they were streets ahead. The talent is incredible," she told the Limerick Leader.

Watching yourself on the telly is very strange," she admitted.

"You wonder - 'do I really say those things? Why don't people tell me I sound like that! But it is good fun and the feedback that I have gotten has been that I am natural."

"I have had friends reconnect from secondary school who have said I am the very same as I was then, which is nice."

The pre-school teacher for children with autism who



Baker and mum of two Hazel Ryan Sheehan graduated from Trinity after studying applied behavioural analysis, said she had made "12 new friends instantly" through the rest of the bakers on the show.

She has also learned to "try new things and use new tips and techniques that I picked up on the way".

"I definitely didn't challenge myself in my own baking," she said.

"I am capable of more and I need to further my repertoire and increase the things that I do and this brought it home to me."

In a recent episode, she fell faint during one of the technical challenges, as she hadn't slept the night before and didn't eat properly.

She learnt her skills in the kitchen from her mother Doris Ryan, and her daughter Caitlin, age 12, is now hanging on her apron strings watching her bake. She now bakes about four times a week for her blog, and her ultimate dream is to turn her blog into a book. See www.cupcakerys.com/

AAA hit back at Leddin over austerity claim

NICK RABBITS

household bills and