

Speech by President Michael D. Higgins at the presentation of Kerry Association in Dublin Arts Award to Pauline Bewick

Áras an Uachtaráin, Thursday, 18th April, 2019

Cuireann sé an-lúcháir orm a bheith anseo inniu agus muid ag thabhairt onóir do ceann denár ealaíontóirí is mó cáil agus cumas, Pauline Bewick.

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all here today as at the initiative of Kerry Association Dublin we honour one of Ireland's most talented and renowned artists, Pauline Bewick.

This award is an important acknowledgement of all that Pauline has gifted to the cultural and artistic dimension of our society, throughout a long and distinguished artistic career. Indeed it is a career that started earlier than most. Pauline was aged just two and a half when she completed her very first pencil sketches, sketches which have survived and now form part of Pauline's Seven Ages Collections, which she so generously donated to the State in 2006.

The Kerry Association in Dublin Arts awards were initiated to recognise excellence in the arts by an artist who was either born in Kerry or has spent a significant part of their life in that part of the country. The Kerry Association in Dublin Arts award is now in its third year.

Its previous recipients were the distinguished writers Brendan Kennelly and Anthony Gaughan, and Pauline now becomes the first visual artist on whom this honour is bestowed.

Pauline Bewick was born in England and, while she has lived in many different places, it is Kerry that she always called her home. It is in Kerry that she spent many years as a wife and mother, and now grandmother, producing works of quite startling artistic brilliance, works that never fail to surprise, to provoke questions and to reveal new truths and insights.

Pauline's watercolours, tapestries, wallhangings and sketches are works with a very unique and original creative expression. In her own words, her advice on the best way to approach art she has told us is to

"...look into your own soul and heart, and feelings and loves and dislikes and then be an illustrator; illustrate it, bring it out"

There can be no doubt that Pauline's work provides an intriguing and profound insight into her life's journey – into the emotions, joys, sorrows, contemplations and revelations which have driven that journey. Hers is the journey of an artist who has always followed her own path, who reflects on the world in her own unique way, eluding categorisation, refusing to fit into any one genre.

#For Pauline art is about freedom, the freedom to imagine all that is possible, to create worlds without boundaries, unconditional landscapes where anything is

conceivable. Her work is, as a result, expression in its truest form, unburdened by purpose or expectation, pulling us away from the everyday and towards alternate existences.

She has herself described her work as “wishes....they are wishes to be totally free.... People think that it is me in my paintings but it is not – it is a wish”.

We are so greatly privileged that, despite her many travels, Pauline chose to make Ireland her home. We are also privileged and very grateful that she so generously donated 500 pieces of her life’s work to the Irish Nation to mark her seventieth birthday. That was an extraordinarily generous gift from which we, as a society, have and will continue to greatly benefit.

I am delighted that Pauline is the chosen recipient of the Kerry Association in Dublin Arts award for 2019. I can think of no person more worthy of this accolade. Pauline’s work is drawn from places as far apart as Wales, Tuscany, Turkey, China and the South Pacific, and leads us into worlds not realised. But it is Kerry that claims her, proudly calling through this award her ‘one of our own’, and may I add, how proud Sabina and I are to have her among our special friends.

Inniu aithníonn muid saothar ar leith Pauline, agus táimid ag súil le gach rud atá le teacht ó duine de na ealaíontóirí is cumasaí agus is cruthaithí atá againn.

As we recognise Pauline’s distinguished and unique body of work, and look forward to all that is still to come from one of our most original and talented creatives. It is a pleasure and an honour to present Pauline with the Kerry Association in Dublin Arts award.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh go léir.