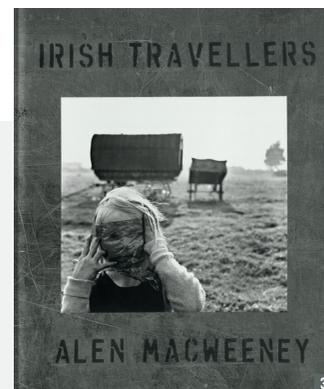


INDOMITABLE IRISHRY

Christian Dupont hails the work of Dublin-born, New York-based photographer Alen MacWeeney, whose archives are coming to UCC



Given his span of years and subjects, photographer Alen MacWeeney should be more recognised in Ireland than currently. Born in Dublin in 1939, he started his life behind the lens with *The Irish Times* as a teenage staffer, but he soon went freelance. His sister, Leslie, a well-known artist, illustrated books for Dolmen Press and helped to establish Graphic Studio Dublin. Alen emigrated in 1961, to work as an assistant for acclaimed photographer Richard Avedon, first in Paris, then in New York.

Avedon introduced MacWeeney to Alexey Brodovitch and his Design Lab. Like others drawn in by the centripetal force of their genius and panache, MacWeeney stationed himself in the city as an editorial, commercial and art photographer.

He returned to Ireland for occasional reportage assignments, but it was the centenary of W B Yeats' birth in 1965 that drew him back for the first of several extended projects. Shimmering horses, clouded landscapes, and carved and resolute faces captured then were later recovered and paired with excerpts

from Yeats' verse in an exquisite, limited edition album published in 2011.

From 1965 to 1971, MacWeeney made several trips to Ireland to photograph Travellers in their caravans and encampments. These captivating portraits have been his most widely collected and exhibited works. MacWeeney also recorded the Travellers' songs and

SHIMMERING HORSES, CLOUDED LANDSCAPES, CARVED AND RESOLUTE FACES... RECOVERED AND PAIRED LATER ON WITH EXCERPTS FROM YEATS

stories, resulting in the largest such collection, now held by the Irish Traditional Music Archives in Dublin.

Between 1984 and 1986, MacWeeney ventured into colour photography, collaborating with science and nature writer Richard Conniff on *Irish Walls*. A dozen years later, the duo issued an expanded version, *Ireland: Stone Walls & Fabled Landscapes*.

Last autumn, MacWeeney's oeuvre was featured in two exhibitions in the United States. 'Looking at the Stars: Irish Art at the University of Notre

Dame' included prints from his Traveller series as well as recent photographs of a country house from a bygone era in south-west Kerry.

At Boston College's McMullen Museum of Art, 'Alen MacWeeney and a Century of New York Street Photography' included ten large-scale panoramas of subway scenes – with two images spliced side-by-side merging into one, like the sliding doors of the trains.

Boston College's Burns Library recently purchased from MacWeeney a unique set of 476 'work' prints from a 1971 photo essay assignment he conducted in Belfast, Derry and Dublin for a magazine to be published by Time Life, which was cancelled before its first issue. Most of the images have never been seen, thus disclosing a startling retrospective on the Troubles.

In Ireland, University College Cork has committed to acquiring MacWeeney's

archives, which are as extensive and varied as its collection of more than 30,000 prints and negatives purchased in 2016 from John Minihan, famed for his portraits of cultural icons.

Now aged 80, MacWeeney is spending more time in Ireland, which he deems the core of his work. Like Yeats before, he is still striving to evoke 'indomitable Irishry' through evanescent imagery. ■

This series explores the interplay of Irish artists with Irish literature in contemporary Irish culture.

Christian Dupont is Burns Librarian and Associate University Librarian for Special Collections at Boston College.

1 Church and burned-out bus, Derry, 1971

2 Donegal, 1965-66. From *W B Yeats, under the influence*, 2011

3 Cover of Alen MacWeeney's *Irish Travellers*, 2007