

Delaney, Edward

by Lawrence William White

Delaney, Edward (1930–2009), sculptor, was born 1 August 1930 (registered as Edmund Vincent Delaney) at Farmhill, Claremorris, Co. Mayo, seventh among nine children of Patrick Delaney (d. 1955), a small farmer who also tended beehives and a wood mill on the estate of Lord Oranmore and Browne, and Catherine 'Kate' Delaney (née Brannick; d. 1980). Receiving primary education till age 14 in the local national school, he formed an ambition to become an artist, originating when he assisted the poster printer of a circus troupe that wintered in the area, and nurtured by tireless sketching in and about the family home. Moving to Dublin in his early 20s, he 'infiltrated himself' into the National College of Art, attending classes and participating in student activities, without enrolling or eventually graduating, but impressing such instructors as Seán Keating (qv) and Maurice MacGonigal (qv) with his talent and diligence (1951–4).

Bronze casting; European studies; early exhibitions Drawn to the art of sculpture upon reading a book in the National Library on the traditional cast-bronze sculpture of Benin, west Africa, he obtained (with the assistance of MacGonigal) an Arts Council scholarship that facilitated his commencing studies at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Munich (1954–9). There he learned the technique of lost-wax (*cire perdue*) casting, an ancient process whereby a wax-coated model is encased in an investment mould and heated in a kiln, after which a molten metal is poured into the space left by the melted ('lost') wax; the technique allows the detailing of a primary model to be faithfully reproduced in the finished metal sculpture. Supporting his studies when the Arts Council scholarship expired by night-work welding tramway tracks, Delaney was awarded a West German fellowship for sculpture (1956–7), and won the Bavarian state foreign students' sculpture prize (1958). Obtaining a master's degree in bronze casting from the Munich academy, he spent time in Bonn and at the Salzburg fine arts summer school founded by Oskar Kokoschka, and worked in foundries in Germany and northern France. An Italian government scholarship facilitated further study at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Rome (1959–61). His observations of post-war poverty and austerity, and immersion in the intellectual and cultural life of societies struggling to recreate themselves after the traumas of fascism and total war – especially the irreverent, anti-authoritarian student and artistic milieu of 1950s West Germany, where he joined anti-rearmament protests – deeply influenced his world-view and supplied endless images and motifs for his art.

Delaney exhibited in several group and one-man shows in Dublin during the course of his continental studies, and represented Ireland at the first two Paris Biennale exhibitions for young artists of all nationalities (1959 and 1961). Returning permanently to Ireland in 1961, he constructed a studio and metal-casting foundry at

his home on Stoneview Place, off George's Street, Dún Laoghaire. Casting nearly all of his own work (assisted for some years by John Behan (b. 1938)), he thus enjoyed complete control of every aspect of the sculpting process, a practice unique among Irish sculptors of the period. He won the Arts Council prize for sculpture (1962) and the council's scholarship for sculpture and bronze casting (1964). First appearing at the Exhibition of Living Art in 1961, at the 1964 show he came to wide attention upon receiving the inaugural Carroll's prize for sculpture for 'Flight', a dynamic abstraction of a bird's wing that exuded freedom and movement. His work appeared in the Irish pavilion at the New York world's fair (1965), and he represented Ireland in international biennial exhibitions in Tokyo (1960, 1962, 1972) and Buenos Aires (1968–9).

Style; religious art Extraordinarily productive throughout the 1960s–70s, and working primarily in bronze, Delaney executed major public, corporate and church commissions, some of monumental scale, while also creating many smaller works for exhibition and private sale. Sculpting figurative works of human, animal, mythological and allegorical subjects (nearly all of which were unique pieces, not editioned), he practised a highly individualised expressionist style, derived both formally and expressively from the post-war European strain of existentialist humanism, to which he introduced a distinctly Irish inflection by drawing on Irish history, folklore and myth in his subjects and motifs. His chief influences were such expressionist figurative sculptors in metals as Giacometti, Richier, Marini and Manzù. While his smaller and earlier pieces, especially of animal subjects, evidenced a feel for integral curvilinear masses, more often he created highly fragmented forms with remarkably variegated surfaces, especially as his style became more abstracted throughout the 1960s. While expressing the anxious, disillusioned, and alienated individualism of post-war expressionism, Delaney's style paradoxically projected the growing self-confidence, optimism and material prosperity of the Ireland of Seán Lemass (qv), by virtue of its sheer modernity, iconoclasm and restless energy, which reflected the loosening of cultural and artistic mores.

Delaney's first major commission was for the Medical Missionaries of Mary (early 1960s), for whom he decorated the dome of the mortuary chapel in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, Co. Louth, with bronze reliefs depicting the life of Christ, and cast a 9-ft, copper 'Resurrection', a fine example of the elongated figuration of his early style. Other catholic church commissions included a crucifix and relief panels for St Michael the Archangel church, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway, and panels for the new altar (designed to conform with the Vatican II liturgical reforms) for St Mary's cathedral, Kilkenny. His treatment of religious subjects was especially influenced by the work of Giacomo Manzù, whom he regarded as 'the greatest sculptor in Christendom' (*Guardian*, 19 Oct. 2009); he perceived parallels between his own warm relationship with the progressive Bishop Peter Birch (qv) of Ossory and that between the communistic humanist Manzù and Pope John XXIII.

Davis and Tone monuments Delaney is best known for two major public monuments in Dublin city centre, to Thomas Davis (qv) and to Theobald Wolfe Tone (qv), both commissioned in 1964 by the Irish state for the semi-centenary of the Easter 1916 rising. While Delaney's initial maquettes for each work referred to traditional representations of the subject, the final versions departed dramatically from tradition into discordant modernist abstraction. The Davis monument, unveiled at Easter 1966 in College Green, comprises a 9-ft statue of the subject atop a granite plinth of comparable height, before which a circular fountain features four winged, trumpet-blowing heralds (representing the four provinces of Ireland); the perimeter of the fountain is defined by six granite slabs each bearing a bronze relief panel, the titles of which refer to poems by Davis. While the heralds and panels were cast by Delaney in his own foundry, the Davis statue was cast in Milan, so that Delaney could learn the Italian foundry's technique of casting such a large sculpture. The heralds' trumpets initially functioned as waterspouts; when recalled in later years to rectify problems arising from poor maintenance of the monument, Delaney reversed the heralds from inward- to outward-facing positions and fixed water jets behind them.

The commission for the Wolfe Tone monument was awarded to Delaney in a partnership with architect Noel Keating after an Arts Council competition against other sculptor-architect teams. Their concept involved a controversial re-landscaping of the north-east corner of St Stephen's Green to create a plaza bounded by the external footpath and the park. Marking a further departure than the Davis from traditional Irish conventions of commemorative monumental sculpture, the Tone monument (completed in 1967) comprises three elements: a 10-ft statue of Tone is placed not on a plinth but at ground level on a low base of rough-hewn granite slabs, and is backed by a concave range of granite orthostats, behind which, also at ground level and facing into the park, is a group of four approximately life-sized figures (three humans and a reclining wolfhound) entitled 'Famine'. Delaney cast all the bronzes, including the 3/4-ton Tone statue, in his own studio-foundry.

The Tone monument was subjected to withering criticism from many quarters, on grounds of situation, scale, composition, iconography and style. Defending the anachronism of linking Tone to the great famine, Delaney asserted that the defeat of the 1798 rising allowed the pursuit of policies that resulted in the 1840s famine, and that any monument true to Tone could not strike a triumphant note: 'I would like to have depicted him in French uniform, plumed hat and victorious sword. But history decided otherwise' (*Guardian*, *ibid.*). In February 1971 the statue was shattered into several pieces by a loyalist bomb (attributed to the UVF); in executing the repairs, Delaney tweaked certain details and softened the rigidity of the figure's posture.

The Davis and Tone statues are both larger-than-life figures, with proportionally small heads on which the facial features are indistinctly sketched. It has been argued that Delaney's intention was not to commemorate two historic personages with recognisable portraits, but rather to express the legacies borne by such personages:

'Rather than being political symbols, they seem to be studies of the weightiness and *gravitas* that we expect in political symbols' (Hill, 202). The awkward ungainliness of the two figures suggests the artist's impression of the burdens borne by each subject, the weight that historical memory has imposed upon them, obscuring the features of the two men as they really were; also expressed is the artist's uncertainties about his own role as a monumental sculptor, commissioned by a political establishment to commemorate its designated, but distorted, heroes. Whatever the aesthetic merits of the two monuments (and in both, it is the subsidiary elements – the four heralds of the Davis, the famine group of the Tone – that are the more artistically satisfying), the official sanctioning of such radically unconventional treatments in major public commissions represented a landmark in Irish art history.

Avant-garde artist and apologist Delaney's execution of the Davis and Tone monuments established him as the foremost modernist sculptor in Ireland in the eyes of critics, clients, collectors and the general public. Outspoken and opinionated, 'direct to the point of brazen' (*Guardian*, *ibid.*), Delaney cultivated his image as a bohemian iconoclast in interviews with print and broadcast journalists and in public debates about the merits of avant-garde art. As both practitioner and apologist, arguing passionately for expressive artistic freedom, he significantly influenced Irish opinion regarding modernism in the arts.

In fulfilling further public and corporate commissions, including work for banks, hotels and other businesses, he continued to strike a subversive note, creating discordant images far removed from the sleek blandness typical of commissioned corporate sculpture. 'The fisherman' (1967), for the foyer of Lansdowne House, Dublin, the modernist headquarters of the newly amalgamated Allied Irish Banks, was a highly abstracted, roughly textured presence, disproportionate to and incongruously rustic within its urbane setting. Typifying his mid-1960s style on a smaller scale are two 'Bronze groups' (1968; DCGHL), each consisting of a pair of abstract, elongated, multi-headed figures, one with male and one with female attributes, that can be read as two individuals or two sets of multiple individuals; they are akin to the larger-scale 'Adam and Eve' in Fitzgerald Park, Cork city. 'The bather' ('Snamhaí'; 1966), a life-sized bronze of a woman bending over to wash her hair (formed by welded copper), was purchased by doctor and former rugby international Karl Mullen (qv).

Delaney's work intersected with other art forms, including aspects of popular culture. 'The great hunger' (1964), a skeletal figure with arms stretched upwards (similar to one of the figures in the Tone monument famine group), was placed onstage during the 'Finnegan wakes' show featuring the Dubliners ballad group at the Gate theatre (April–May 1966), and appears on the cover of the eponymous LP. Several of Delaney's finished and unfinished sculptures featured as props in *Dementia 13* (1963; dir. Francis Ford Coppola), a horror film shot in Co. Wicklow with a sculptor as a major character; these included 'Anna' (1960), a figure seated on a bench with outstretched hand, inspired by an elderly beggar of Delaney's acquaintance in Munich. Delaney designed several album covers for the traditional music group the

Chieftains, depicting abstracted human forms with fragmented outlines (resembling studies for his sculptural groups); the commissions arose out of his long, close friendship with Garech de Brún (b. 1939), founder of Claddagh Records and son of Delaney's childhood landlord Dominick Geoffrey Browne (1901–2002) and his second wife, the socialite Oonagh Guinness (qv); a 'Good Shepherd' by Delaney was purchased by de Brún and placed along the woodland drive on his estate at Luggala, Co. Wicklow. Delaney executed twelve highly expressionist screen prints in a meandering black line, inspired by 'The Samson riddle', a play by Wolf Mankowitz, several of which illustrated the published text (1972).

Connemara; work in stainless steel From 1967 Delaney summered on a property he bought in Connemara at Keeraunmore, Carraroe, Co. Galway, converting an existing cottage into a studio and constructing a residential extension. Wearying of what he perceived as the increasingly superficial and commercially driven Dublin arts scene, upon the breakup of his marriage he settled permanently on the Connemara property in 1980, where he sculpted and worked a small vegetable farm. The move occasioned a radical departure in his aesthetic. Concluding that bronze, while an alluring presence in urban environments, was overwhelmed amid the landscape of the barren west, where surrounded by the natural sculpture of living stone and the fabricated sculpture of stone walls and cottages, he abandoned casting and worked in cut and welded stainless steel, fashioning both free-standing sculptures and wall pieces; some included kinetic elements, many suggested such organic forms as trees, shrubs, or sea life, and all had a strong element of assembly and arrangement. His first major one-man exhibition of such work occurred at Dublin's Solomon Gallery in 1984. A collection of works in his newfound style was created *in situ* and formed part of an open-air sculpture park, 'Beyond the Pale', laid out by Delaney on a twenty-acre site adjoining his Connemara property. In the 1990s he installed a small foundry at his Connemara studio and returned to casting, producing small sculptures and jewellery in bronze and silver, which he exhibited alongside his steel pieces. 'Celtic twilight', a monumental, 6-m high, steel-rod and tubular stainless-steel sculpture executed in the early 1980s for the Clanwilliam Court development, Dublin, was given in 2007 by developer David Arnold to UCD Belfield, where it was installed in the courtyard of the Conway Institute.

Delaney's work is represented in public, private and corporate collections in Ireland and abroad, including IMMA, DCGHL and the Ulster Museum. A member of the RHA, Delaney received the academy's award for sculpture of distinction in bronze (1991). Named Mayoman of the Year (1965), he was a founding member of Aosdána (1983). A retrospective of his bronzes from the 1960s was held at the RHA (December 2004–January 2005). For all his modernity, he remained committed to an intimate working of the plastic material, shunning the conceptualism that emerged in the 1960s, and faithful to the continental tradition of his training rather than prevailing Anglo–American fashion.

Delaney married (27 November 1961) Nancy O'Brien, from Cootehill, Co. Cavan. They had five sons and one daughter; the firstborn, Eamon Delaney (b. 1962), is an author and journalist. The marriage breaking up c.1980, Delaney's partner in later life was Dr Anne Gillan, a general practitioner in Carraroe, with whom he had one son and one daughter. Suffering declining health and afflicted with Alzheimer's disease, Delaney lived his last seven years in Áras Mac Dara nursing home, Carraroe. He died 22 September 2009 at University College Hospital, Galway city, after a short bout of pneumonia, and was buried at Crossboyne cemetery, near Claremorris.

In the week of his death, Delaney's restored sculpture 'Eve with apple' (1958) was unveiled in an outdoor location on the IMMA grounds. It was among several statues purchased from Delaney in the 1960s by businessman Jack Toohey and displayed in the garden of his home, Costelloe Lodge, near Carraroe. In October 2009 another Delaney work from the Toohey collection, 'King and queen' – two larger-than-life companion figures, each with head and torso defined by porous, mesh-like loops (a recurring stylistic motif of Delaney's work of the 1960s) – sold in auction for €160,000, ten times the upper limit of the estimate range, a then record price for a sculpture by an Irish artist; three other of the Toohey Delaneys also sold at multiples of the estimates. All the auctioned pieces had been refused when offered earlier in 2009 by Toohey's widow to both IMMA and the NGI, the latter because they were outside its chronological remit, and the former on the grounds that necessary conservation would be too costly; Mrs Toohey claimed to have paid under €6,000 for restoration of the pieces prior to auction.

GRO (birth, marriage, death certs.; parents' marriage cert.); *Ir. Times*, 12, 13 Aug., 16 Oct. 1964; 30 Nov. 1965; 10, 14 Jan., 10 Apr. 1969; 9 Apr. 1970; 8, 9 Feb. 1971; 4 May 1984; 29 Apr. 1992; 11 Dec. 2004; 11, 21, 25 July, 24, 26 Sept., 17, 24 Oct. 2009; Wolf Mankowitz, *The Samson riddle* (1972); *ITWW*; Hugh Lane Gallery of Municipal Art, *Images and insights* (1993), 146–7; *Aosdána* (1996); Judith Hill, *Irish public sculpture: a history* (1998); Peter Murray, 'Refiguring Delaney', *Irish Arts Review*, xxi, no. 4 (winter 2004), 80–85; *Edward Delaney: bronzes from the sixties* (2004; RHA exhibition catalogue); 'Edward Delaney's "Celtic twilight" sculpture moves to Belfield', *UCD News*, 5 Sept. 2007, www.ucd.ie; Eamon Delaney, *Breaking the mould: a story of art and Ireland* (2009); *Guardian*, 19 Oct. 2009; Ruth Ferguson and Paula Murphy (ed.), *UCD sculpture trail* (n.d.); aosdana.artscouncil.ie; Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, www.hughlane.ie; Irish Museum of Modern Art, www.imma.ie; Noelene Beckett Crowe, 'Edward Delaney (RHA)', www.ouririshheritage.org; internet material accessed Jan.–Feb. 2016