

PATRICIA HURL

IRISH GOTHIC

September 5 – December 12, 2025

Irish Arts Center (IAC) in partnership with Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA)



Introduction

Irish Arts Center, in partnership with Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), is delighted to present Patricia Hurl: *Irish Gothic*, a major retrospective exhibition by one of Ireland's most accomplished and respected artists. Hurl's work is by its nature both personal and political and traverses the disciplines of painting, multi-media, and collaborative art practice. *Irish Gothic* is the first major exhibition of Hurl's work, spanning over 40 years, and features more than 30 of the artist's paintings and drawings.

Since the 1980s, Hurl has created work in a range of media that deals with loss, pain, frustration, humor, and resilience. The exhibition features work mainly drawn from her early paintings, in which she exposed the Irish suburban home as less than perfect.

This guide gives further background on Patricia Hurl, and some of the work in the exhibition. It is organized by location of work.

In 1979, Hurl returned to art college, having been a housewife and mother for 17 years.

“College gave me the opportunity to experiment and develop a new language with which to express myself. I began to work on a large scale, using oils, which allowed me a physical involvement with painting, which would have been impossible at home. My subject matter is archetypal; drawn directly from my experiences in suburbia, taking on the traditional role of homemaker. I paint with an urgency, which still surprises me.”

Hurl's painting style changed quite dramatically at this time. She writes,

“I studied art in my early 20s and had been painting watercolours in the intervening years. Following a personal crisis which left me a confirmed disciple of the thin ice theory of life, painting landscapes seemed superfluous...”

Many of the paintings in *Irish Gothic* come from an exhibition titled *The Living Room Myths and Legends* at the Temple Bar Gallery in 1988. Hurl recreated her version of the suburban idyll, her living room in the gallery complete with

furniture brought from her home; a bookcase, a sofa, TV, and a painted word-carpet. For Hurl, these domestic comforts were a stark contrast to the paintings hanging on the walls which reflected another side of this reality.

“I dealt with this familiar subject as a result of my own evolution. For me this show was a new beginning.”

First Floor and Devlin Café

Exhibition Map: 3 and 4. The four first floor paintings, created between 1988 and the early 1990s, depict the female nude, not as an idealized figure, but as fragmented and disrupted. Produced during an artist’s residency at Annaghmakerrig, *And she never even read Turgenev* (1989) reflects Hurl’s feelings of inadequacy among literary peers, portraying the artist falling from a library ladder, clutching a paintbrush. *Juggler* (1988) and *Pretty Maids all in a row* (1999) examine the objectification of women as they are watched and judged by faceless male figures—one enthroned as a silent arbiter.

Second Floor

Exhibition Map: 5. Hurl’s palette often includes bright yellow. While at art college, Hurl was told not to use yellow on her primary subjects. Hurl defied this “rule” and often included the color in her work, particularly on her figures. Yellow is notable throughout the exhibition, with work such as *The Woman in Yellow in the Box* (1984) and a number of paintings in the theater. Yellow in her work became a symbol of her defiance and gumption to follow her own instincts and challenge the rules.

Exhibition Map: 6. Drawings and notebooks have always been central to Hurl’s practice. The screen outside the theater displays a selection of publications and sketchbooks dating back to 1988 and gives a brief insight into the genesis of Hurl’s work.

Exhibition Map: 7. The catalyst for the ongoing *Warrior* series, seen on this floor, the mezzanine and in the first-floor window facing 11th Avenue, was the treatment of women in media coverage, both internationally and closer to home. Creating helmets as props, Hurl set about producing a series of portraits where her face is totally or partially obscured by the helmet. Hurl

portrays women as warriors—mothers, sisters, friends—all affected by horrific acts of violence but often powerless to ease the suffering of loved ones. In more recent works in the series, on the mezzanine, the eyes are visible and connect with the viewer, conveying a tremendous strength.

Theater Installation

On view from September 5 to September 28, 2025. The works in the theatre will only be available to see during this time, while the work across the rest of the building is up through December 12, 2025.

Exhibition Map: B. and C. As you enter the theater, you are met with early works such as *Act of Union, (Once Upon A Time)* (1986) and *First Day, Holy Faith Convent, Clarendon Street, (State of Fear)* (c. 1985-1985), which demonstrate Hurl's characteristic use of highly expressionistic and layered brushstrokes blurring distinctions between the figurative and abstraction. This stylistic blend intensifies the visceral qualities and emotion in Hurl's work, painted in spontaneous and instinctive bursts. In these pieces, Hurl's work references her experience of growing up in a religious household, where the sacraments and ritual of communion, marriage, and death were revered and firmly abided by.

Exhibition Map: D. Art history has always been a source of inspiration and a valuable resource to Hurl. *Irish Gothic (after Masaccio)* (1987) is drawn from Masaccio's 15th century fresco depicting the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. In Hurl's painting both figures still hold pained expressions of their shame, but the figure of Adam has been wrapped in a cloth of deep blue, while Eve remains exposed.

Exhibition Map: E. *The Company Wife* (1986) comprises a group of men in suits gathered as a jovial unit, juxtaposed with the solitary figure of a seated woman. Typical of Hurl's early work, the faces are obscured and the paint is applied with an urgency that hints at the emotion felt by a woman living in a male dominated society.

Exhibition Map: F. *Irish Gothic (Living Room)*, 1985, the painting from which the exhibition borrows its title, presents a newly married couple standing

solemnly in front of a quintessential suburban house complete with picket fence, their faces obscured as they are faced with a lifetime mortgage.

Exhibition Map: G. *Hush a Bye Baby* (1987) and *The Visitation* (1988) reference the pain of child loss, the often-lonely path and lack of support that accompanies such a traumatic experience.

Exhibition Map: H and I. Grappling with the grieving process, *Pietà* (1984) was produced following the death of the artist's beloved sister. Originally, the figure had the head of raven. Responding to discomfort of family members with the imagery, Hurl replaced the head with a self-portrait; the new canvas is visible on inspection. Grief is also illustrated in *The Sleeping Woman* (1981), a triptych depicting a figure in a state of sorrow. *The Sleeping Woman* is a mixed media work in which a collage of cuttings from women's magazine are applied to the surface of the work, documenting the escapism found within the pages.

In works such as *All Fall Down* (1989) and *Three Moons* (1989) abstract backgrounds refuse to provide any clues as to how to read these absences and displaced figures. These immersive works make use of distinctive palettes that map stages of the artist's life and mirror preoccupations in her work, such as the muted tones of a marital breakup in *Annagh* (1989).

Mezzanine

Exhibition Map: 9. Prompted by media portrayals of violence against women, Hurl created a series of portraits featuring herself in hand-crafted helmets. Though partially hidden, her gaze is powerful, bearing the weight of trauma yet standing resilient. More intimate in scale, recent paintings like *Warrior II* (2021) focus tightly on the face. With direct, unwavering eye contact, these works invite viewers to engage with quiet strength and dignity. Together, they form a powerful reflection on women's endurance in the face of adversity.

Artist Biography

Originally from Dublin and a former member of Temple Bar Galleries and Studios, Dublin, Hurl often works in collaboration with artist Therry Rudin. Hurl was a lecturer in Fine Art Painting at the Dublin Institute of Technology.

She studied at the National College of Art and Design, 1975 and at Dun Laoghaire School of Art and Design, 1984. Hurl was previously co-director of the Damer Gallery in Co Tipperary along with Therry Rudin and is currently part of the Na Cailleacha collective.

Hurl's work was recently included in *Acts of Creation: On Art and Motherhood*, VISUAL, Carlow, 2025-2026; *Who Will Write the History of Tears*, Warsaw Museum of Modern Art, *The Narrow Gate of the Here-and-Now: Queer Embodiment*; IMMA, Dublin 2021 - 2022; *Elliptical Affinities: Irish Women Artists and the Politics of the Body, 1984 to the present*, Highlanes Gallery, Drogheda, Co Louth and Limerick City Art Gallery, 2019 - 2020. Hurl has exhibited in selected group and solo shows and has represented Ireland in symposiums in Atlanta, USA, Caversham, S.A. and Zaragoza, Spain. She was a contributor to *The Great Book of Ireland*. Her work is included in the recent publication *Art and Architecture of Ireland Volume V: Twentieth Century*, Royal Irish Academy, 2015. Hurl's work is represented in private and public collections including IMMA; The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon; Drogheda Municipal Collection, Highlanes Gallery and the Collection of University of Limerick. *Irish Gothic* at Irish Arts Center is her first solo show in North America.

IAC and IMMA would sincerely like to thank Patricia Hurl for her ongoing dedication to the project, we would also like to extend our thanks to Patricia's family for their support, especially Therry Rudin. We also extend thanks to Aoife Ruane of Highlane Gallery, Drogheda, for her support of Patricia Hurl.

Curated by Johanne Mullan.

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Exhibition Design:

The exhibition at Irish Arts Center is designed by Rachael Gilkey in collaboration with Mac Smith, Thomas Short, Manuel da Silva, and Kestrel Wolgemuth of Irish Arts Center and Johanne Mullan of IMMA.

Irish Arts Center Exhibition Team:

Rachael Gilkey, Director of Programing and Education

Kestrel Wolgemuth, Associate Director of Programming

Mac Smith, Director of Production

Thomas Short, Stage Supervisor

Manuel da Silva, Production Manager and Lighting Supervisor

Peter Lopez, Michael Harbeck, Kiel Fuller, Jason Collins, Installation team

Andy O'Reilly, Artist Services Manager

Zohra Coday, Program Associate

Anah Klute, Audience Services Manager

Stephen Peterson, Colleen Litchfield, Sarah Jack

Anne Marie Mascia, Michael Lester, Francis Rosario, Anne Rutter, Audience Services team

CopyCats: Printing services

Atomic Signs NYC: Vinyl Printing and Installation

IMMA Exhibition Team:

Annie Fletcher, Director

Christina Kennedy, Senior Curator: Head of Collections

Johanne Mullan, Curator: Collections

Nuria Carballeira, Assistant Curator Collections: Registrarial and Access

Jennifer Phelan, Programme Production Co-ordinator

Cillian Hayes, Technical Crew Supervisor

Ciara Murray, Curatorial Assistant: Visitor Engagement Team

Patrice Molloy, Communications & Marketing Executive

Front image: Patricia Hurl, Irish Gothic (Living Room), Oil on paper,
123 x 90cm

Photography: Denis Mortell Photography. Image © the artist

