



Arts Office
Kilkenny County Council

LEE SHANAHAN - A HUMAN VOICE

A solo show of poetic and bold works from
emerging painter Lee Shanahan

26.05.22 - 25.06.22

Unit 28,
MacDonagh Junction,
Hebron Rd, Highhays,
Kilkenny





*Macbeth and Banquo Approach
the Witches (2021)*

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENTS

A Human Voice is supplemented with an array of engagements to reach the expanded community.

26th May from 6 – 8pm: Official launch

A memorable evening is promised featuring an introduction by Mary Butler – the Kilkenny Arts Officer, curator Sinéad Keogh and from Lee Shanahan himself.

28th May at 10 – 12 am: Tour and painting response workshop with Kilkenny’s Older Generation

As this is an exhibition of an emerging artist of the younger generation, we would like to work with and learn from members of the community who are older. A respective exhibition of response works from the artists of Kilkenny’s Older Generation will be exhibited at *The Window Gallery* at John’s Green House, John’s Green, Highhays, Kilkenny from the 30th May – 7th June.

Private Event: Tour with *Ormonde College of Further Education* Art Students

A special tour with the college’s arts students of which Lee Shanahan was formally a pupil, linking his educational roots in art back to the local community.

18th June from 2 – 3pm: Tactile tour with the *NCBI*

A tour using non visual elements to explore *A Human Voice*. As this is a primarily “visual arts” exhibition, we developed the following methods to engage and integrate with our audiences who are blind and visually impaired. The first is a tactile tour to explore the stories and language of the works and the second method is a special audio tour.

30th of May: Online Audio Tour

An audio tour will be made available online for audiences who are blind and visually impaired at kilkennyartsoffice.ie and Kilkenny Arts Office social media.



*Portrait of Lee Shanahan
in his studio*

LEE SHANAHAN

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A recurring theme in Shanahan's work is the exploration of the human being and the environment and surroundings in which one is set. This plays a major role in his current series of work. The paintings focus on interaction and relationship, subtle events placed in interior and exterior settings. He is drawn to communication and narrative in their most basic forms. Taking influence from his immediate surroundings in rural Kilkenny we are confronted with images without embellishment or unwanted distraction, images distilled into essential motifs. For his current body of work, Lee takes influence from recent trips to Oslo and Copenhagen. He is drawn to Northern European and Scandinavian artists such as Edvard Munch, Emil Nolde and Jens Sondergaard. Lee is attracted to the mood and atmosphere found in these artists work. Shanahan also takes inspiration from American writers such as Raymond Carver and Charles Bukowski, admiring their minimal heavily charged approach to the written word.

This is something he tries to replicate in visual terms, to strip back all unnecessary details and unwanted distractions. Resulting in a direct visual impact. Lee has exhibited his work as part of *Thomastown Creative Arts Festival 2018 & 2019*. A graduate of Fine Art at *Ormonde College* where he received the *Blackstack Studio Bursary Award 2019*. Lee has participated in *Postcards From The Edge 2021* exhibition in association with *Limerick School of Art and Design* and *The Hunt Museum*. Most recently has work published in *ROPES Literary Journal 2021 and 2022*. Coming later in year, Lee will have his artwork published in emerging poet Paddy Walsh's debut collection. Lee is currently studying Fine Art Painting at *Limerick School of Art and Design*.



SHANAHAN'S WORK IS THE EXPLORATION OF THE HUMAN BEING AND THE ENVIRONMENT AND SURROUNDINGS IN WHICH ONE IS SET.

Signs (2020)



The Winter Coat (2020)

ARTIST OFFICE STATEMENT

*“the words have
come and gone,
I sit ill. the phone
rings, the cats
sleep.”
Charles Bukowski,
So Now? (1994)*

The shadows of loss, of time standing still and of silent desire pass through Shanahan’s work, like a familiar ghost. Images of the everyday transcend the boundaries of familiarity and take us to somewhere else - somewhere dark, but painfully relatable. Reality and fiction, dreams and nightmares cross paths with the characters in Lee’s works to frame a pertinent subconscious. As an artist reared in the countryside, the sense of isolation is prominent in Shanahan’s work. Take for example *Days are Forgotten (2020)* - a triptych of a blonde woman in unspecified dress to any time period solitary in a field, she looks about and sees no one in three distinct gestures. The palette is of dull reds and purples with a dull grey/blue/black sky. In the central work she addresses the viewer with no eyes as a red face in the landscape addresses her. This kind of vulnerability is what makes Lee Shanahan so utterly compelling as an artist. Vulnerability, real vulnerability in modern contemporary art is a very rare trait indeed and it is Shanahan’s human voice that whispers confidently and sometimes shouts in his distinct practice. *A Human Voice* is a haunting and bold collection of work.

This exhibition is part of the *Kilkenny Arts Office Emerging Curator Development Programme*. As I wanted to support the local arts community (in particular the Emerging Artist community who may have less access to opportunities) an open call was held inviting emerging Kilkenny artists from all backgrounds to apply. Lee was selected as the overall awardee of the open call due to his unique imagery and approach to painting. All the applicants were talented and diverse in their practices. For *Lee Shanahan – A Human Voice*, our original venue of 76 – 77 John Street Lower was given to support the local Ukrainian refugee community and so Marion Acreman and the team at MacDonagh Junction were kind enough to play this forward and support us with a space. This sense of sharing is felt throughout the community engagements with the programme and I hope and expect that the emotional impact of Lee’s work in itself will also touch the Kilkenny and national community at large.

I would like to thank *Kilkenny County Council* and the *Arts Council* for their support of the *Kilkenny Arts Office Emerging Curator Development Programme* and *Lee Shanahan - A Human Voice*. I also wish to thank my mentor Kate Strain, Lee Shanahan, Siobhán Fitzsimons, Kasia Kaminska, Darren Caffrey, Damian Swida, Shota Kotake, The *NCBI*, *Active Retirement Ireland*, the *Older People's Council* and *Ormonde College of Further Education* for their engagements. Additional thanks to the *Kilkenny Arts Office* team Deirdre Southey, Bernadette Roberts and *Kilkenny Arts Officer* Mary Butler. *Lee Shanahan - A Human Voice* is greatly supported by Marion Acreman, Donna Byrne and everyone at MacDonagh Junction. Thank you all for your kindness and support.

The *Kilkenny County Council Arts Office Emerging Curator Programme* is pleased to collaborate with our charity partner *Amber Women's Refuge* for 2022. The mission of *Amber Women's Refuge* is to empower women and children, of all cultures and backgrounds, to achieve their rights to live abuse-free lives.

- Sinéad Keogh

Kilkenny Arts Office Emerging Curator Development Programme recipient 2022.



Cover image –
A Foolish Game (2021)