



Artist-led tours and film screenings with internationally renowned Irish photographer **Alen MacWeeney**

TWO EVENTS SCHEDULED

Thursday, May 5, 2011 | Exhibition Tour & Film at 6 PM

Saturday, May 7, 2011 | Exhibition Tour & Film at 2 PM

Publicity images available

alenmacweeney.com

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Lawrence, KS — Irish photographer Alen MacWeeney will give guided tours of his work and screen his documentary film *Traveller* (80 min., 2002) at the Spencer Museum of Art on Thursday, May 5, at 6 PM and again on Saturday, May 7 at 2 PM.

MacWeeney's visit is made possible in part by KU's [Center for Global & International Studies](#), and is in conjunction with the current SMA exhibition [*That Invisible Dance: Art & Literature under the British Empire from the 1800s to Beyond*](#).

MacWeeney began his photographic career at the age of 16 as a press photographer for the *Irish Times*. In 1961, he was employed as Richard Avedon's assistant in Paris. From there he immigrated to New York where he studied at the "Design Lab" with renowned graphic designer Alexey Brodovitch.

The Spencer Museum of Art owns 31 works by MacWeeney; 15 of these photographs are currently on display in *That Invisible Dance*. All of the images were taken in Ireland between 1965 and 1969 and initially shot to celebrate the poetry of Irish Nobel laureate, William Butler Yeats; the work established MacWeeney's connection to the Irish "tinkers" or Travellers, as they now

identify themselves. They are Ireland's own indigenous ethnic minority, though often marginalized by mainstream "settled" Irish society. W.B Yeats and his brother, the painter Jack B. Yeats, frequently featured or referenced "tinkers" in their work. This literary connection led MacWeeney to an encampment of Irish Travellers outside the city of Dublin in 1965.

Irish Travellers are traditionally nomadic. They maintain a language, Shelta, and a culture separate from that of Ireland's mainstream settled society. They are often ostracized if not the subject of varying degrees of racism at both a local and institutional level. MacWeeney's work with the Travellers is particularly unique in this regard, particularly given the period and the level of personal connections he established with them as an "outsider." From 1965 to 1971 he photographed and tape-recorded clans of Travellers on their encampments, from Dublin to the West of Ireland. Portfolios of this work were published in *Creative Camera* (1967), *Aperture* (1980), *Ais Eiri* (1981) and *Photographers International* (1996), among others. He gathered his striking Traveller photographs into an acclaimed 2007 book, [*Irish Travellers Tinkers No More*](#), which recently was released in softcover for the first time. MacWeeney produced an LP record of the tape-recordings, *Travelling People of Ireland*, with Lyricord New York 1967.

More about "That Invisible Dance: Art & Literature Under the British Empire....."

The 10th edition of the Spencer's *Conversation* series in the 20/21 Gallery, *That Invisible Dance*, was organized by Sorcha Hyland, SMA Youth & Family Outreach Coordinator, and a native of Ireland. The installation investigates the commonalities among visual and literary objects produced within the British Empire during the intensely prolific 19th and early 20th centuries. It features 15 of MacWeeney's photographs and a collection of Yeats material courtesy of the Kenneth Spencer Research Library.

Divided into three physical locations, each exhibition space focuses on a literature-driven context using visual material and installation "notebooks" to explore intersections among selected artists, writers and their creative processes. Notebook one, installed in the Process Space, features quotes relating to Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley. Notebook two, installed in the East Conversation Wall, cites mainly British poets and writers, with an emphasis on the literary nature of scientific writing from the period, and connections there. The third and final notebook references Irish and Anglo-Irish poets with particular attention given to Ireland's post-imperial position.

In investigating the commonalities among visual and literary objects, *That Invisible Dance* questions to what degree, if any, did 19th-and-early-20th century writers and visual artists operate as synergistic networks. How did the new mass media and the development of scientific

observation impact literary and visual media, or vice-versa? What role did literature and art play in subverting or validating the Empire? What did artists and writers choose to make visible or indeed “invisible”?

The exhibition would not have been possible without the participation of two University of Kansas colleagues: Karen S. Cook, Special Collection Librarian, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, and Dr. Kathryn Conrad, Associate Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies, Department of English.

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Spencer Museum of Art

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Also find the Spencer...

On the Web: www.spencerart.ku.edu

E-mail: spencerart@ku.edu

Gallery Hours

Tues., Wed., Fri., & Saturday 10 AM – 4PM

Thurs. 10AM – 8PM

Sun. Noon – 4PM

Closed Monday