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Leaving Certificate
RESOURCE PACK



Introduction

This resource pack has been designed to accompany the exhibition *Roderic O’Conor and the Moderns* (18 July – 28 October 2018) at the National Gallery of Ireland. The exhibition was curated by Jonathan Benington, Victoria Art Gallery, Bath, and Brendan Rooney, National Gallery of Ireland.

The resource pack contains contextual information about the exhibition and suggested activities for students to complete before, during and after their visit. It is intended to assist students preparing for the gallery question of the Leaving Certificate Art History and Appreciation Exam and does not replace a visit to the exhibition.

Sample Question from the 2018 Leaving Certificate Art Appreciation Paper

The primary objective in the design of an art gallery, museum or interpretive centre is to create a space for the interaction of people with artworks/artefacts. Discuss this statement with reference to a named art gallery, museum or interpretive centre that you have visited. In your answer describe and discuss two named works and refer to the ways in which the use of the space affected your interaction with these works. and Briefly outline your visual concepts for the layout of a school-based exhibition of student art work. Give reasons for your design decisions. Illustrate your answer.

Marking scheme

		Marks	Notes
A	Name of gallery, museum or interpretive centre and discussion of statement.	10	5 for name 5 for discussion
B	Describe and discuss two named works and refer to the ways in which the use of space affected your interaction with these works.	15	5 for named works (3/2) 5 for description and discussion of works (3/2) 5 for space and how it affected the interaction
C	Briefly describe and discuss your own ideas for designing a school based exhibition of student art work. Give reasons for your design decisions.	15	
D	Sketches.	10	
Total.		50	

History & Appreciation of Art Paper is worth 150 marks i.e. 37.5% of the total marks for Art

Before your visit

Visit the National Gallery's website. What information can you find out about the exhibition? Is it easy to find? How is it presented? Does it make you want to visit the exhibition? Is there enough/too much/not enough information?

Do some background research on the artist, Roderic O'Connor. What do you anticipate the exhibition will cover? There is more information in the 'Resources' section of this pack.

There have been a number of articles and reviews written about the exhibition. Do you think it is useful to read these before you visit? Do you think reading a review will have an impact on how you view the exhibition?

Consider the exhibition's title, *Roderic O'Connor and the Moderns: Between Paris and Pont-Aven*. How do you think the title sets your expectations for the visit?

During your visit

This resource includes prompts and activities to help you explore *Roderic O'Connor and the Moderns*. Remember to:

Observe & record – use a sketchbook or notebook to record your observations of your visit. Photography is not permitted in the O'Connor exhibition, so it is important that you create an accurate record of your visit. You will be required to include sketches in your LC exam, so make lots of annotated sketches alongside your notes.

Form your own opinion & give examples - every visitor to the exhibition will have a different experience. We bring our own backgrounds, histories, opinions, and perceptions to viewing works of art. Age, gender, education, nationality, and many other factors will impact how we perceive an exhibition. Everyone's opinion is equally valid; there is no right or wrong. When answering the Gallery Question it is important to give your own interpretation of the exhibition, but it is equally important to back up your opinions with examples to support your argument.

First Impressions

Your experience will be influenced by a number of factors that may consciously or subconsciously affect how you engage with the exhibition. Some of these will have been deliberately created by the Gallery to create a comfortable environment for viewing art (eg the lighting, the way the paintings are hung), whilst others will be unique to you (eg your mood, previous positive or negative experiences at the Gallery). How other visitors are interacting with the space will also have an impact.

Before you enter the building, note down:

- External factors: time of day; weather
- Internal factors: your mood; energy levels; how your body feels
- Is this your first visit to the National Gallery? Do you have any preconceptions about what your experience will be?
- What does the building look like?
- What is your first impression?

When you enter the building, note down:

- What can you hear? smell? see?
- What facilities are there? (eg information desk, cloakroom, toilets) Is there signage, maps, information about exhibitions? How can you move around the

building? Are there stairs, lifts, escalators? Are there places to sit? What else can you observe?

Make an annotated sketch of the foyer showing these elements

- Who else is in the Gallery? (eg staff, other visitors, members of your group) What are they doing? How are they interacting with the building?
- How does the Gallery make you feel?

Think critically about the elements that have been created by the Gallery. Why do you think they are there? How do they affect your experience? Do you feel any differently to before you walked through the door? Do you feel prepared and ready to view art?

Further activity

There are two entrances to the Gallery. How may your first impressions differ depending on which entrance you use?



Merrion Square Entrance



Clare Street Entrance

You can find out more about the history and architecture of the Gallery here: <https://www.nationalgallery.ie/history>

The Hang

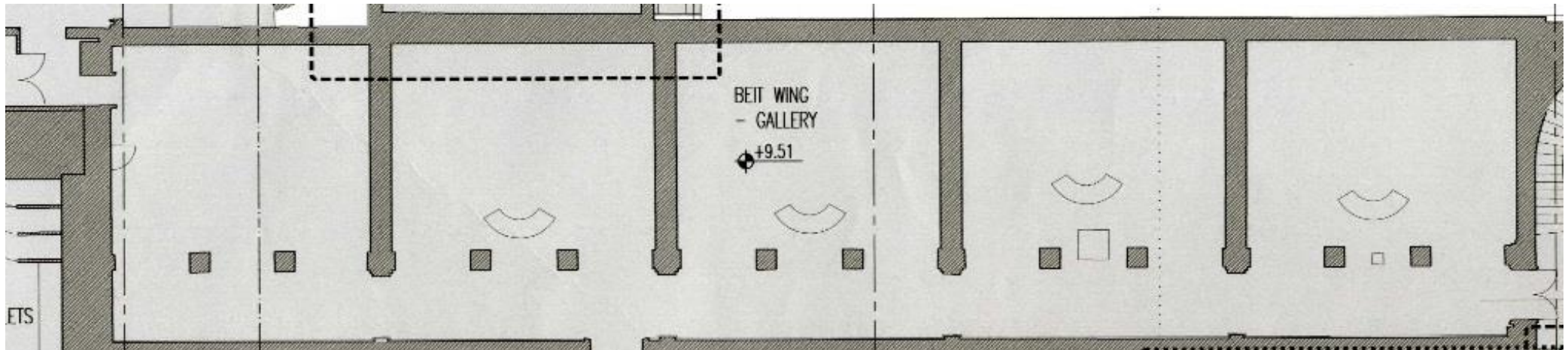
A **hang** is how the paintings in an exhibition are arranged on the walls of the gallery. This refers to both the way they are physically displayed, and the order the curator has decided to put them in. For example, an exhibition may be hung **chronologically**, where the paintings are displayed in order of when they were created; or **thematically** where they are grouped by similar subject matter. Shows may also be hung **aesthetically**, where paintings complement each other. Curators also have to take into account **practical** considerations – some paintings may be too big for certain walls or galleries.

Observe & record:

For each element consider how it affects your viewing and interpretation of the paintings.

- What are your **first impressions** of the exhibition? What is the atmosphere like? What is the temperature of the room? What can you hear? What can you smell? What can you see?
- What is the **architecture** of the gallery? What materials, texture and colours are the walls? Ceilings? Floors? Are there doors between the rooms?
- The **hang** of the paintings. What height are they hung at? Are they close together or far apart? Are they grouped? Is your eye drawn to certain paintings? How are the paintings fixed to the walls? What frames are they in? Are they glazed?
- The **interpretation**. Are there text panels? Signage? Labels? Where is the interpretation? What size is it? Colour? Design?
- The **lighting**. Is it natural? Artificial?
- The **fixtures and fittings**. Is there any furniture? Security devices? Light switches, fire extinguishers, etc? Do they enhance or detract from the paintings?
- How are **visitors** moving through the space? Are they following a set route? How are they interacting with each other?

Sketch: Using the floorplan provided, sketch the layout of the exhibition. Is it hung chronologically or thematically?



National Gallery of Ireland, Beit Wing, Rooms 6-10, architectural plan

Interpretation

Exhibition text is skilfully written to convey complex information in a clear and accessible way, within strict word counts. A curator will often do a great deal of contextual research about a work or artist that they then have to condense into a short amount of space. When someone visits an exhibition, they don't want to read a book on a wall! The curator will have to decide what they have to leave out, as much as what they will write. This process can be very difficult, but curators have lots of practice in writing in this particular style. The text will also be proofread by a number of different people who will check for accuracy, clarity and style. The final text that you see in the exhibition will have gone through lots of drafts and edits before it is printed.

There are different layers to exhibition text. In the O'Connor exhibition there is:

- An introduction panel for the whole exhibition
- Introduction panels for each room
- Room titles and years
- Labels for each artwork
- Audioguide commentary

The curators of this exhibition want O'Connor to stand as equal with his contemporaries (eg Van Gogh, Gauguin, etc). Usually the National Gallery displays labels with the name of the artist at the top. However, in this exhibition the name of the painting is first.

Knowing this, why do you think this information is included? Is there anything more you would like to know about the painting? Is there any information you don't think should be included? What information do you think is the most important?

The Farm at Lezaven, Finistère, 1894

Roderic O'Connor 1860–1940
Oil on canvas

With this Pont-Aven landscape O'Connor ushered in a new, more painterly approach, replacing the stripes of 1892–4. Now using shorter, more calligraphic brushstrokes, he found he could still achieve chromatic variation on a broad spectrum, well suited to a luminous summer scene such as this. The prevalence of pink, orange, red and violet in the artist's palette implies knowledge of Gauguin's Tahitian landscapes with their exotic colours.

In the background is the manor of Lezaven where O'Connor rented a studio. Gauguin also used the building in 1889 and 1894, on the latter occasion borrowing the space from O'Connor. The property belonged to Marie-Perrine Lollichon and was located on a hillside above the west bank of the River Aven.

National Gallery of Ireland. Purchased 1961

515

Labels on the right:
Title of work and year
Artist's name
Materials
Description
Provenance and accession number
Audioguide No.

Further activity

Choose one of the paintings from the exhibition and write your own label. Think about:

- What is the most important piece of information you want to share with the visitor? Put this first.
- Use active rather than passive language.
- Don't just describe what's in the painting – include something that the viewer can't see for themselves.
- Use language a 10 year old would understand – keep it clear, accessible and interesting.
- Prompt the visitor to look deeper at the painting – you might want to ask a question.
- Remember to stick to the word count – maximum of 80 words for the description.

Two named works

In the LC exam you will be asked to discuss two named works in detail and use sketches to illustrate your answer. Whilst you are in the exhibition space, use this time to make detailed notes and sketches of two works. Some of the work in the show is under copyright restrictions so you may not be able to find images of the works online after your visit, so it is important you take down as much detail as possible.

Note

- Title of work
- Date
- Materials
- Information included in the label

Sketch & annotate

- How the painting is hung (is it high, low, close/far away from other works, make a note of other works nearby)
- Lighting
- Wall colour
- Frame
- Interpretation (where is it positioned, what does it say, how does it affect your viewing of the work)
- The formal elements of the painting (shapes, colours, textures, etc)

Observe & record: Make annotated sketches of how O'Connor uses colour and form in his paintings

Roderic O'Connor

Rosary Cox, **NGI Tour Guide**

O'Connor's Background

Roderic O'Connor was born in 1860 in Milltown, County Roscommon, Ireland and died in 1940 in Nueil-sur-Layon, France.

O'Connor's family moved to Dublin when he was five. Later he was educated at Ampleforth College in Yorkshire, England. He excelled academically and he decided to study art. He studied at The Metropolitan School of Art, Dublin (1879-1881) and at The Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin (1881-1882). He was an excellent student and won prizes on a number of occasions. In 1883 he went to The Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts, Antwerp where he studied under Charles Verlat (1824-1890) who encouraged him to use vivid colours and to apply these colours with vigour on the surface of the canvas. He arrived in Paris in 1886, where he studied under Emile-Auguste Carolus-Duran (1837-1917).

During his visits to the galleries and museums in Paris, he may have seen works by Impressionist artists. He absorbed what they had to offer, but like Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890) and Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) he wanted through the use of line, texture, and colour to represent his emotional response to the

world. He wanted to move away from Impressionism and beyond simply observing reality. In that sense he is a very Modern artist. Like Van Gogh he knew he needed to leave the city and move away from the stifling effects of the academic approach to art.

His father was a wealthy landowner and lawyer and gave O'Connor a very generous annual allowance. Subsequently he inherited his father's estate, on the death of his father in 1893. O'Connor returned to Ireland for the last time and settled his affairs. Moving back to Pont-Aven in 1894 and being financially secure, freed him from the worry of having to ever sell his paintings. He was free to choose how he painted and what he painted.

The Artists' Colony of Pont-Aven

Brittany was in many ways as far as one could go away from Paris and still be in France. Historically and culturally detached, the Breton people remained rooted in their Celtic origins, with their own language, costumes, rituals of work and prayer. Generations of artists arrived there to record its picturesque beauty and to paint the local people. When O'Connor arrived in Pont-Aven in 1891 it was the most famous of the Breton artists' colonies. Over one hundred artists were in residence. Discuss: Looking at the art in the exhibition, how do you think Conor's environment in Pont-Aven affected his art?

The Influence of Van Gogh, Gauguin and Pont-Aven

“By the end of the decade O’Conor had found a way of reconciling non-descriptive colour with the expressive calligraphy of his Van Gogh phase. These shifts of gear, each radical in its own right, reveal an artist who was committed to cultural internationalism. Rather than satisfying himself with being affiliated to the most progressive developments of his time, O’Conor became a very active and significant contributor...to one of the most dynamic periods in the development of modern art.”

Sean Rainbird, Director, National Gallery of Ireland

This timeless haven was first discovered by Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) in 1886 when his distaste for modern industrial life and his fascination with “primitive cultures” led him to leave Paris and to head to Brittany. In Pont-Aven he met Émile Bernard (1868-1941) and Paul Sérusier (1864-1927).

Pont-Aven was connected to Paris via railway, and O’Conor was surrounded by examples of colour and composition like Van Gogh, Gauguin, and the Impressionists and Pointillists. From the 1890s onwards, O’Conor adapted a new template of painting with rhythmic brushstrokes loaded with paint, sometimes straight from the tube (also known as impasto). His characteristic stripe method came about during his experimentation and development of this painterly language.

When O’Conor first arrived in the village, Gauguin was in the South Pacific. O’Conor met Paul Gauguin for the first time when he returned to Pont-Aven in 1894.



Landscape, Pont-Aven, 1892, Roderic O’Conor

In *Landscape, Pont-Aven*, we can see that O’Conor is more influenced by the elongated and unblended brush strokes of Vincent Van Gogh. Though Van Gogh never visited Pont Aven, O’Conor was well aware of his “strongly felt lines”. Émile Bernard had seven paintings and some drawings by Van Gogh when he was in Pont-Aven and would have shown them to his fellow artists.

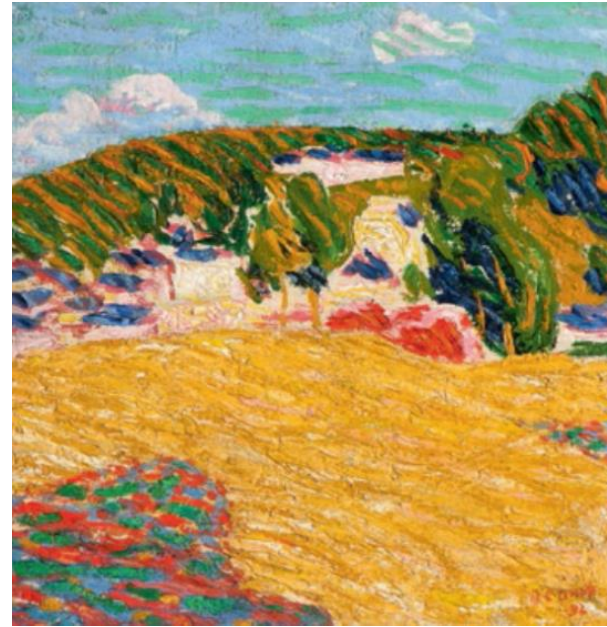
Cuno Amiet, a Swiss artist, arrived in Pont-Aven in summer 1892. He was impressed by the Symbolist works on display in his lodgings. In the absence of Gauguin he developed a friendship with O'Connor. Over the course of that Summer it is possible to see the benefits for O'Connor, Amiet, and indeed other artists in living in a colony. Each artist could view and absorb styles and ideas from their fellow artists and reinterpret them in their own fashion.



Pont-Aven, 1892, Cuno Amiet

In this painting Amiet shows why so many artists were charmed by this village. It was situated on the river Aven surrounded by wooded hills. The stone cut houses were quaint. The local people still wearing their traditional dress were willing models

for the artists and the climate was suitable for working "en plein air" (outdoors).



Field of Corn Pont-Aven 1892, Roderic O'Connor

O'Connor has become more confident in his brush strokes, been influenced by some of the simplified forms of Bernard and Sérusier and begun to use searing colour.



Breton Woman Approaching Pont Aven ,1892/3, Cuno Amiet

Here we can see how Cuno Amiet has been influenced by the style of O'Connor's new brush strokes and the flattened forms of Gauguin.

Discuss: Can you see the influence of Van Gogh and Gauguin in O'Connor's work?

In O'Connor's later seascapes we can see how animated handling, heightened colours, and simplified forms have become his means of communication.



(left) Orange Rocks and Sea c. 1898/9, Roderic O'Connor

(right) Blue Sea and Red Rocks, Brittany c. 1898/9, Roderic O'Connor

Discuss: Has O'Connor found his own voice and created his own style of painting?

O'Connor's unique handling of colour, and his new approach to landscape representation, assure his position as one of Ireland's most important early Modernist painters. This explains well why contemporary writers felt that his works shone among the great painters and the Pont-Aven legacy still enriches Modern art today.

Resources

Q&A with Jonathon Benington, Victoria Art Gallery, Bath

Tell us a bit about yourself and your job

I manage a public art gallery in the city of Bath, England, but I grew up in Northern Ireland and still have relatives there. I love my day job (I work on O'Connor at evenings and weekends) because there are always new challenges, both artistic and financial, and always something new to discover. You never stop learning!

How did you get your job?

I got my first gallery job after volunteering in the Tate Gallery. I had a loan to fund the MA I was studying for, and at weekends to earn some pocket money I travelled across London to work as a steward in Dulwich Picture Gallery. Here I could picture gaze to my heart's content when it was quiet.

What was your role in the development of the exhibition?

I was the guest curator, assisting the senior curator who is a full-time member of staff. Aside from writing most of the catalogue and label texts, I helped to shape the show by making the initial selection of works, and then adapting this as the responses starting coming in from lenders.

What was the idea behind the exhibition?

To show O'Connor in the context of his time when he was at the forefront of developments in modern European art. He was a great networker and collaborator in the 1880s and 1890s, so the idea arose to place his works side by side with those of his eminent contemporaries such as Van Gogh and Gauguin.

Who were the target audiences for the exhibition?

An artist like O'Connor had his feet firmly in the Irish, English and European camps, all at the same time, so I had high hopes that the show could be pitched to a wide cross-section of people, both Irish residents and visitors from abroad.

What were the learning objectives for the exhibition? (What are the key things that you'd like visitors to learn from the exhibition?)

I would like visitors to drop their preconceptions about who are the most famous and best artists. In the show we deliberately decided to create labels that give the titles of the works first, with the artists' names placed in a more subordinate role than is normal in a major gallery. For instance, you might see a Gauguin still life next to a similar subject by O'Connor. The instinctive reaction is to value the Gauguin more highly, but the way we have structured the show allows visitors to make their own minds up.

How did you choose the works in the exhibition?

Our aim all along was to show only the best O'Conors we could get our hands on, whether paintings, drawings or etchings. We

also confined ourselves to a narrow date range, 1886 to 1904, because this was the era in which O'Conor joined artists' colonies in rural locations and was stimulated by the camaraderie and friendly competition to work at his most daring.

How did you choose the themes in the exhibition?

The themes follow a chronological route, from the 1880s through to the twentieth century, and with a final room looking at the legacy in terms of how these early years impacted on his later work. I knew that we had five 'rooms' to fill and was encouraged from the start to think about what would go where. We even had a rough hanging plan at the very early stages.

Do you have a favourite work in the exhibition?

Hard to say, but the little 'Field of Corn' by O'Conor from 1892 that has been reproduced so brilliantly on the risers of the National Gallery's staircase in the Beit Wing is a real humdinger - brilliantly evoking nature's bounty and the strength of the midday sun.

What was the biggest challenge?

The biggest challenge was securing the agreement of lenders to allow us borrow key works by Van Gogh. His works are always in very high demand and of course extremely valuable, but through dogged persistence we were able to secure the loan of a key late oil painting and a drawing that we know was taken to Pont-Aven in 1888 by the painter Emile Bernard.

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Yes, one of the aspects that gave me most satisfaction was to be able to include 11 works by the Swiss painter Cuno Amiet who was O'Conor's closest collaborator in Pont-Aven. His works are seldom seen outside his native Switzerland, but I like to think of him and O'Conor as two mountaineers roped together, each trying to outdo the other and yet remaining firm friends.

Glossary

Impressionism

Impressionism is the name given to one of the most important artistic developments of the nineteenth century. It was the first of the Modern Movements. The Impressionist artists painted scenes from their everyday lives. For the first time, particularly in their landscape paintings, they tried to capture the fleeting effects of light, weather and atmosphere. This movement was new, hence the title of 'avant-garde,' and not necessarily accepted or understood. It began the breaking down of the Salons and the Academy, who were the primary authority in the exhibition and education of art that the time.

Impressionists include: Claude Monet, *Argenteuil Basin with a Single Sailboat*, 1874; Alfred Sisley, *The Banks of the Canal du Loing at Saint-Mammès*, 1888; Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Young Woman in White Reading*, 1873.

Modernism

During the twentieth century artists responded to the social, political, and technological changes which had taken place in a variety of ways. Artists strove to produce paintings that were innovative, different from anything that had been seen before.

Post-Impressionism

Post-Impressionism is not a separate style in itself. It is a term that relates to four main artists and their responses to Impressionism – Cezanne, Gauguin, Seurat and Van Gogh. These

artists built on the changes in painting styles from the Impressionist style after the last Impressionist group show in 1886. The artists were very interested in using impasto (putting paint onto the canvas straight from the tube), brilliant colours, and form to describe the subject more fully than in 'a fleeting moment' as was the 'Impression'-ist style.

Post-Impressionists include: Vincent Van Gogh, *Wheatfields with Cornflowers*, 1890; Paul Cézanne, *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, c. 1902-6.

Pointillism

Pointillism was also known as Neo-Impressionism. It was based on a scientific theory of optical mixing. The theory was that different colours placed side by side in dots, or very small brush strokes merged together when viewed from a distance. The mark of the dot or the stroke was most important to these artists as a tool to create form, shade and whole images.

Pointillism examples: Paul Signac, *The Terrace, St. Tropez*, 1898.

Symbolism

Symbolism was a literary and artistic movement. Symbolist artists were not interested in the truthful representation of reality. Instead they focused on expressing emotions, opinions and moments through colour and symbols as the medium. By introducing certain symbols into their paintings, they developed a technique where the idea behind a painting was more important than the way in which it was painted.

Symbolist examples: Paul Gauguin, *The Day of the God*, 1894.

Education Programme

The exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive Education & Public Programme. Pick up a paper leaflet outside the exhibition, or find out more on our website:

<https://www.nationalgallery.ie/art-and-artists/exhibitions/roderic-oconor-and-moderns-education-public-programme>

The programme has been designed by the Gallery's Education Department to support the exhibition and enable a range of target audiences to engage with it at their own level.

The word 'O'CONOR' is written in a bold, purple, hand-drawn style. The letters are thick and irregular, with some ink splatters and drips around them, giving it a dynamic and artistic feel.

RODERIC O'CONOR AND THE MODERNS