

Text of the introductory address delivered by: **PROFESSOR COLM Ó BRIAIN**, on 7 April, 2006, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Fine Arts, *honoris causa*, on **PHILIP TREACY**



A Sheansailéir, agus a mhuintir na hOllscoile,

The current exhibition of hats by Philip Treacy “When Philip met Isabella” at the National Museum of Ireland is drawing such enormous crowds that the run of the exhibition has had to be extended. This exhibition, on a world tour for the past three years, celebrates Treacy’s work through the spectacularly imaginative and diverse hats which he was commissioned to design and make for Isabella Blow, the fashion style editor he first met in 1989.

Two women from middle Ireland, working their way around this exhibition, stopped at the display case to which I was giving serious attention. “Oh look at this hat Margaret” one of them said, “It would look gorgeous on you. Most of the other hats though are pure art!” This overheard snippet of conversation reflects perfectly how Philip Treacy in his work straddles triumphantly the realms of both art and design. His hats are equally striking whether on the catwalk or in the gallery. His work is simultaneously accessible and aesthetically breathtaking. Philip Treacy hats are fantastically conceived and meticulously crafted. He creates magical headdresses with an unerring feel for the paradox of fashion which is at once thrillingly frivolous and dangerously serious. He understands the endless power of illusion.

The work of Philip Treacy has been displayed at prestigious art exhibitions like the Florence Biennale in 1996 and at the Venice Biennale in 2001, at the Hayward Gallery London and here in IMMA in Dublin. Less unusually, he has exhibited in London at the Design Museum, the Victoria and Albert, as well as at the Crafts Council Gallery. He is in fact an ideal role model for other students from the National College of Art and Design, from which he graduated with an honours degree in 1988.

He came to NCAD to study fashion from his home village of Ahascragh in County Galway.

He grew up at a time in Ireland when hats had been discarded. They were seen as conservative, stuffy and restricting.

Philip’s tutor at NCAD, Frances McDonogh, recalls that his work as a student on the fashion course was both amazing and amusing. All his work had a quality of finish that marked him out as a perfectionist. While at NCAD his interest shifted from designing

outfits to making hats. As part of work experience during the course, he arranged placements with the young Stephen Jones, who was breathing new life into the hat world in London. Not surprisingly, after NCAD he was awarded a postgraduate place at the Royal College of Art on their MA Fashion Design course. Responding to Philip's fascination with and talent for hat making, the RCA developed a specially dedicated programme of tutorial support, from which he emerged with a first class honours Masters Degree in 1990.

The first five years of professional practice after college is a period of challenge and adjustment for any graduate, but none more so than a practitioner of art and design. For Philip Treacy, these were years of extraordinary achievement and recognition.

At the age of 23 he was introduced to Karl Lagerfeld, the chief designer at Chanel in Paris and went on to design hats for Chanel for the next ten years. Philip also won his first British Fashion Council Award as British Accessory Designer of the Year. This was the first of five such Designer of the Year Awards that Philip was to receive.

He staged his first fashion show during London Fashion Week. It consisted entirely of black hats; and by the time he was 26 he had opened his own shop in Belgravia. A fashion writer in the early '90s wrote: "Only occasionally does a fashion talent emerge that is so in tune with the spirit of the time that it is instantly and universally hailed. Such a talent belongs to Philip Treacy."

Philip has recently extended his design activities to a range of glassware and furniture as well as to hotel interiors. In 2004 he was named as International Designer of the Year at the China Fashion Awards in Shanghai.

The world's most acclaimed milliner, Philip Treacy, has worked with the most famous designers and crowned many of the most celebrated heads in the world. His acclaim is won through his consummate creativity, his virtuoso skill and his professional dedication. He has greatly enhanced all our lives by re-establishing the hat and adding drama and magnificence to the theatre of living.

Praehonorabilis Cancellarie, totaque universitas. Presento vobis hunc meum filium, quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in Artibus Elegantibus, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.