

Party time as ‘finest Gerard Dillon work on the market for past 35 years’ boosts Irish art

by Alex Capon

The latest round of art auctions in Ireland showed a marked buoyancy with totals and selling rates up on recent years.

The series at the end of May was helped by a new name on the market breaking through the €1m barrier.

The artist in question was Gerard Dillon (1916-71) whose *Tea Party*, a large oil on board from 1955, was offered at Adam's (25% buyer's premium including VAT) in Dublin on May 27.

Measuring 2ft 10in x 3ft 3in (86 x 99cm), it was a major work by the Belfast-born artist depicting several of his close friends in a house in Roundstone on the west coast of Ireland.

While the central male figure gazing directly at the viewer and wearing a red neck scarf is thought to represent Dillon himself, the artist's characteristic impish humour was evident in the sitters' facial expressions such as those of his good friends Madge and George Campbell.

The picture was originally purchased by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland from Dublin's Dawson Gallery, where Dillon held a series of solo shows. However, it later appeared in an auction of works from the ACNI collection at Sotheby's in 1993 where it was purchased by Frank Hughes, a leading bookmaker from Warrenpoint,



Far left: *Tea Party* by Gerard Dillon, **€1.1m (£950,735)** at Adam's.

Co Down, and his wife Reeta.

The Hughes collection provided Adam's with 11 works at the latest sale but *Tea Party* proved the highlight and led the sale by some distance, and the Dublin series overall. Pitched at €150,000-200,000, it drew multiple bidders who took it up to a final €1.1m (£950,735) – more than tripling the artist's record.

“In our opinion it was the finest work by Dillon to come on the market in the past 35 years,” said director of Adam's James O'Halloran. “The subject matter, the scale, the palette and composition all had a part to play. It really did tick all the boxes.”

“We had four bidders in total – a phone, a commission bid, in the room and an online bidder on Adam's Live.”

Two bidders remained in contention after around €200,000, one on the phone and the other online with the

latter eventually securing the lot. O'Halloran said he was hopeful that the painting will remain in Ireland.

In terms of Irish artists whose works have sold for over €1m, Dillon now joins the likes of Jack Butler Yeats, John Lavery, William Orpen and Louis le Brocqy, as well as Francis Bacon and Sean Scully in the Post-War and Contemporary field.

With two works by Yeats (1871-1957) from the Hughes collection making €280,000 and €210,000 apiece, the 91-lot sale at Adam's generated a hammer total of €2.46m which was well up on the equivalent sale last year.

“The market is strong at the moment for quality works that are fresh to the market,” said O'Halloran. “Good provenance is also important, as we saw with very strong results across all the works from the Hughes collection.”