

## Gallery 2

### Imprints: Steve Pyke

#### *I Could Read the Sky*

22 February – 16 March 2024

Photo Museum Ireland is delighted to present a selection of images from *I Could Read the Sky*, the landmark 'photographic novel' by Steve Pyke and Timothy O'Grady. First published in 1997 and recently reissued in a new, expanded edition by Unbound, it has been widely hailed as a classic. This hybrid work traces the experience of Irish emigration through O'Grady's prose and Pyke's strikingly evocative images. Pyke made his first pictures in Ireland in 1980 and this exhibition reflects his deep, ongoing association with a place central to the development of his artistic practice.



Steve Pyke, *Three Generations, Inishmaan, 1991*

In *I Could Read the Sky*, Pyke captures an unsentimental view of Ireland, one defined by the tensions between deep tradition and the intrusions of the modern world, among them the alienating effects of emigration. At the same time, there are unexpected continuities, a feeling of reverence for the past, particularly in the form of music, that sustains a connection to older values, as important to those at home as to generations of Irish immigrants in London. The images in this exhibition, an edited selection from a much larger series, present an atmospheric, emotionally charged view of the people, landscapes and traditions that have shaped diverse experiences of Irishness, in Ireland and abroad, past and present.

“First published in 1997, this modern classic of Irish emigration is republished now with extra photographs and an audiobook featuring breathtaking music by the peerless Martin Hayes [...] Steve Pyke's photographs are magnificent chiaroscuros of Beckettian emptiness, looming cloud, crashing breakers on ragged coasts [...] These pictures are not only about what you see, but what you feel. John Berger's introduction invites the reader to 'listen' to the photographs. A few pages in, you know exactly what he's getting at [...] The faces in the images are looked at with care, without judgement [...] This book is a high example of the portrait as a form of storytelling. But it's also an act of reclamation [...] People have been trying to read the sky a long time. Rare masterpieces like this help us do it.”

– Joseph O'Connor, *Irish Times*

Presented as part of *Imprints: Photography as Practice*, Pyke's exhibition gives an insight into the artist's long, illustrious career and the part Ireland has played in it, with important exhibitions at

Gallery of Photography (now Photo Museum Ireland). In the context of our *Imprints* exhibition, this showing of *I Could Read the Sky* highlights the many futures and routes of dissemination that photography can have, from publications, gallery exhibitions and live shows, to the 1999 feature film directed by Nichola Bruce that accompanies the project. A portfolio series of prints will be acquired by Photo Museum Ireland for our Archive of Contemporary Irish Photography, preserving a lasting archival trace of Pyke's important Irish work as a key part of the canon of contemporary photography. This exhibition and the addition of his works to the Archive marks Photo Museum Ireland's ongoing commitment to safeguarding creative legacies for the future.



### **Artist Bio:**

Steve Pyke MBE, HonFRPS is a renowned photographer known for his intimate and intense black and white portraits of extraordinary thinkers, creators, and artists of our time. He has spent the last 40 years seeing the world through a creative lens. Born in Leicester, UK and residing in London and NYC for many years. Steve now lives and works in New Orleans, Louisiana.

### **About Photo Museum Ireland:**

Founded in 1978, Photo Museum Ireland has established a reputation as one of Ireland's leading cultural institutions. Located in an award-winning building in the heart of Dublin's cultural quarter, the Museum is Ireland's national centre for contemporary photography. Photo Museum Ireland is a charitable organisation whose primary goal is to promote the practice and appreciation of photography as an art form in Ireland. For more information visit: [www.photomuseumireland.ie](http://www.photomuseumireland.ie)