

YOUNG PEOPLE'S GUIDE



Steve Pyke

Scribendi

Portraits of Irish Writers 1985 - 2025

Edna O'Brien, London, 1991 © Steve Pyke

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE



Start by looking carefully at the photographs.

Take your time to observe what you notice first, and then what details emerge the longer you look.



Use the prompts provided to help you reflect on and analyse the work.

Use the questions to help you think about the work. They can be used with any of the images and are there to support your thinking about what you see, what it might mean, and how it was made.



As you engage with the work, consider your own thoughts and responses.

What ideas, emotions, or connections come to mind? How does this work relate to your own experiences of taking or being photographed?



Refer to the Key Terms Glossary

To help you describe what you see and support your analysis using appropriate visual language.



What do you see?



Steve Pyke's *Scribendi: Portraits of Irish Writers 1985 - 2025* is a major exhibition showcasing over 100 portraits of Ireland's most influential contemporary writers. The exhibition spans four decades of Pyke's work and features leading literary figures, including Seamus Heaney, Edna O'Brien, Anne Enright, Kevin Barry, and Colm Toibín.



What approach is the artist employing?



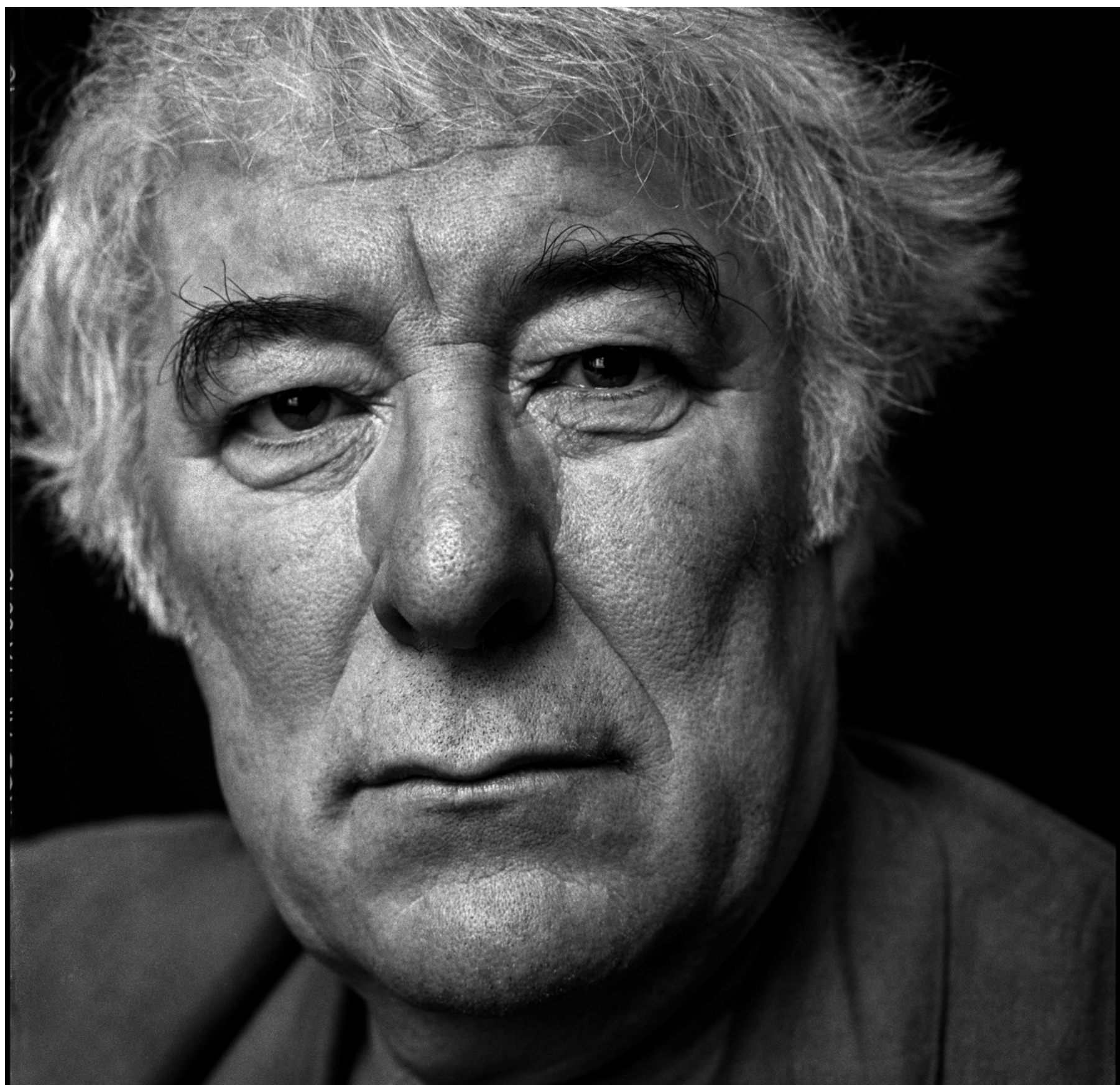
Scribendi positions black & white and colour portraits together to reveal the depth, variety, and vitality of Ireland's literary landscape.

Created through a careful process of connection and conversation, Pyke engages with each writer's work, ensuring that these portraits go beyond likeness to reflect the personality, insight, and creative presence of each subject.



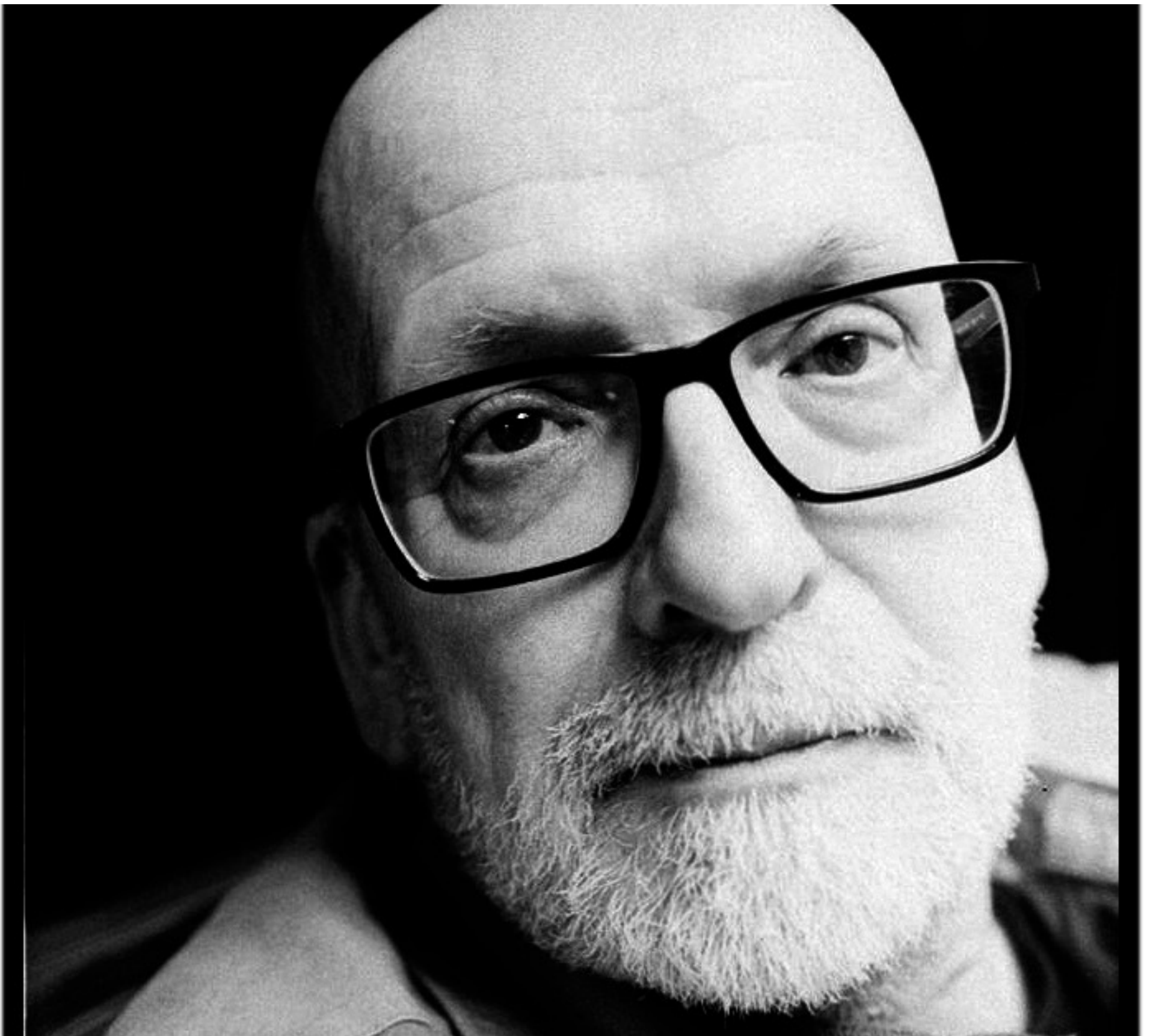
How does the lighting affect the mood of the image?

“The portraits offer a glimpse into the minds behind the words, their thoughts and identity. As I continued the work, I realised I had created something more expansive: a collection capturing the richness, variety, and vitality of Irish literature today.. This exhibition and accompanying book bring these writers even closer to the viewer, pairing each portrait with a personal narrative to deepen the connection.”
—Steve Pyke, 2025



“Steve Pyke is a renowned photographer known for his intimate and intense portraits of extraordinary thinkers, creators, and artists of our time. Pyke created his first photographs in Ireland in 1980 and has maintained a deep, ongoing association with a place central to the development of his artistic practice. Widely hailed as a classic landmark ‘photographic novel’ *I Could Read the Sky*, created with the writer Timothy O’Grady, was first published in 1997. In 2024, it was reissued in a new, expanded edition. *Scribendi* is Pyke's 11th book.

Pyke was born in Leicester, UK and resided in London and NYC for many years. Steve now lives and works in New Orleans, Louisiana and continues to work in Ireland and internationally. His work has been exhibited widely in the UK, Europe, Japan, Mexico and the US and is held in many permanent collections, including the National Portrait Galleries in Washington and London, the Imperial War Museum, the V&A in London, the New York Public Library and the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford. A selection of works from his *I Could Read the Sky* series was acquired in 2024 for the Photo Museum Ireland collection. He is currently an Artist-in-Residence at Photo Museum Ireland in 2025.

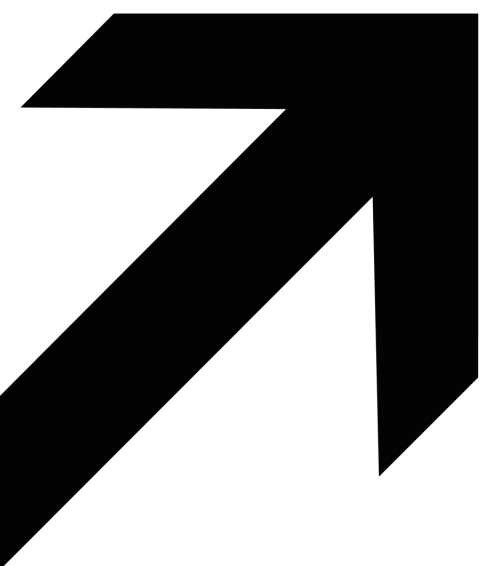


How has the portrait been made?

Where is the focus in the image?



What did the artist choose to include and exclude?



CREATE & RESPOND

Steve Pyke has worked with over 100 artists to create a new series of portraits of Ireland's leading writers. Choose one artwork that feels resonates with you.

How has the artist taken the portraits?

How do they differ from social media selfies?

Inspired by the work you have selected - take a photo that represents something that you believe is important in your community or society now.

Share your photograph @PhotoMuseumIRL

CURRICULUM LINKS

Visual Studies (Leaving Cert Art); Critical and Cultural Contexts and Drawing and Art Elements.

Specifically, the Portrait in Art History, Irish Art and Culture, The Artist's Role and Purpose and Conceptual Art.

For Drawing and Art Elements consider Form Texture, Contrast and Focal Point.

Wellbeing/SPHE

(Junior Cycle & Cross-Curricular):

Strand 1: Who am I?, Strand 2: How I relate to others & Strand 3: Respecting diversity

GLOSSARY

Term	Definition
Curator	A person who selects and organises artworks for exhibition. They design how the public experiences the show and guide its themes.
Portraiture	A public invitation for artists to submit work for consideration in an exhibition or project. Usually judged by a panel.
Photographic series	A group of related images, often telling a story or exploring a concept over time.
Representation	A story told through images, often without words.
Identity	How someone sees themselves or is seen by others - includes gender, nationality, culture, or lived experience.
Documentary photography	A style of photography that captures real people and events, often focusing on social issues.
Representation	The way people, places, or ideas are shown in art or media - which can include or exclude different groups.
Empathy	The ability to understand or feel what another person is experiencing.
Chiaroscuro	The use of light and shade to create a sense of volume and drama.
Short depth of field	In Steve Pyke’s work this is often a close focus on the eyes that directs the viewers gaze while softening the background.
Physiognomy	The practice of assessing a person’s character from their outer appearance.
Humanism	Steve Pyke approaches his subjects with a deep respect for the human condition.

What terms are new to you? Add them here	

We'd Love Your Feedback

If you have suggestions or ideas for how we can improve this resource, we'd love to hear from you.

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