

Shane Hynan

Beneath | Beofhód



Large-print

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Exhibition Introduction

Photo Museum Ireland presents the premiere exhibition of Shane Hynan's *Beneath | Beofhód*, a landmark, decade-long project exploring the social, cultural, historical and ecological importance of peat bogs in the Irish Midlands. Developed over a decade, *Beneath | Beofhód* has been supported through Photo Museum Ireland's Artist Development Residency, enabling Hynan to expand the work's scope and deepen its engagement with communities and landscape over time.

'Beofhód', an Irish word meaning 'life beneath the sod', evokes the primal and totemic significance of bogs in Celtic tradition. This metaphorical exploration of pre-Christian reverence for elemental energies is grounded in Hynan's commitment to exploring evolving conversations around environmental justice and our shifting relationship to these unique landscapes.

Drawing on Hynan's authentic connection with his local community and region, the work traces the remnants of industrial peat harvesting, which brought substantial economic benefits and helped forge a strong sense of cultural identity and purpose in the area. Since the de-industrialisation of the boglands, large-scale commercial peat extraction has ceased. Tensions have

emerged between the tradition of small-scale harvesting for domestic use and the need to protect remaining peatlands.

Through these immediate concerns, Hynan reflects on the endangered status of bog habitats and the evolving perception and value of peatlands in contemporary Ireland through postcolonial and late-capitalist social lenses. Bogs in the Midlands have undergone significant alteration and a move towards ecologically aware practices, with the construction of new renewable wind and solar farms, which bring their own questions and challenges.

Beneath | Beofhód is a timely and in-depth engagement with urgent issues of landscape, tradition, and community. At a moment of ongoing challenges around the environment and sustainability, restoring our ancient connections to the land seems more vital than ever. Hynan's long-term focus on Irish boglands creates a profound sense of respect for the complexity of these landscapes, in continuous flux and layered with history.

This premiere is the first exhibition in a Photo Museum Ireland National Tour, organised in partnership with Source Arts Centre, Thurles, Roscommon Arts Centre, Regional Cultural Centre, Letterkenny and Galway International Arts Festival, supported by Arts Council Touring & Project Awards. The exhibition is accompanied by an education programme and a catalogue.

Beneath | Beofhód is supported by the Arts Council of Ireland, Kildare Arts Service, Roscommon Arts Centre, and a Photo Museum Ireland Artist Development Residency.



Visit our education resources page.

We offer a diverse range of educational resources for children, young people, and educators.

LEVEL 1, FIRST SMALL ROOM

Left to Right

Machinery tracks near Cushaling River crossing
Ballydermot bog group, County Kildare, 2021.

Aftermath of bog fire near Mucklon, County Kildare,
2020.

Barrel footings, Knockirr Bog, County Kildare, 2018.

Recently laid turf by commercial contractor,
Allenwood South, County Kildare, 2020.

Second seasonal cut of turf by commercial contractor,
Allenwood South, County Kildare, 2020.

Family footing turf for domestic use, Ticknevin,
County Kildare, 2020.



Listen to photographer Shane Hynan reflect on his image “Barrel footings” on Bloomberg Connects.



Listen to photographer Shane Hynan reflect on his image “Family footing turf for domestic use” on Bloomberg Connects.

LEVEL 1, MAIN GALLERY

Turf cutting

Turf-cutting is a rural Irish tradition that goes back centuries and maybe even longer. For many, it is a core element of their cultural identity and one of the last remaining communal and hands-on activities connecting people directly to the land.

Turf is still used as a domestic fuel to heat homes. Historically, this was an entirely manual process carried out by a small team including a sleansman who used a shovel-like tool, called a sleán, to cut turf directly out of the peat. In the mid to late 20th century, the 'cutting' element was mechanised, but the remainder of the process is still done manually, including stacking the turf to dry it and loading it into trailers to be brought home.

The introduction of the EU Habitats Directive in the 1990s resulted in turf cutting restrictions on boglands designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs). In 2022, the commercial sale of turf was made illegal; however, it remains legal to cut turf for personal domestic use outside of SACs and NHAs.

LEVEL 1, MAIN GALLERY

Wall 1: Left to Right

Stacked and unstacked turf, Ticknevin, County Kildare, 2023.

Stacked and unstacked turf, Ticknevin, County Kildare, 2023.

Facebank and turf, Ticknevin, County Kildare, 2023.



Listen to photographer Shane Hynan reflect on his image “Facebank and turf” on Bloomberg Connects.

LEVEL 1, MAIN GALLERY

Back Wall

Top row: Left to Right

Gilltown Bog, County Kildare, 2022.

Recently rehabilitated bog, Prosperous Bog, County Kildare, 2022.

Wet bog after prolonged rain, Ballydermot bog group, County Kildare, 2021.

Large sod peat for horticulture use, Ballydermot bog group, near Kildare–Offaly border, 2021.

Milled peat for horticultural use by private contractor, County Offaly, 2022.



Listen to photographer Shane Hynan reflect on his image “Recently rehabilitated bog” on Bloomberg Connects.

LEVEL 1, MAIN GALLERY

Back Wall

Middle row: Left to Right

Cadamstown bog, County Kildare, 2020.

Bog harvested for milled peat, Ballydermot bog group, near Kildare–Offaly border, 2021.

The last remaining stockpiles of harvested peat, Ballydermot bog group, County Offaly, 2020.

Drain where large sod peat for horticulture use is extracted and laid out, Ballydermot bog group, near Kildare–Offaly border, 2021.

Stacked turf for domestic use, Knockirr Bog, County Kildare, 2020.

Turf cutting for domestic use, Knockirr Bog, County Kildare, 2018.

Carrowkeel and Bracklin Bog near Castlecoote, County Roscommon, 2024.

Partially dried turf with facebank in distance, Knockirr Bog, County Kildare, 2019.

Turf and rutted bog, Knockirr Bog, County Kildare, 2019.



Listen to photographer Shane Hynan reflect on his image “The last remaining stockpiles of harvested peat, Ballydermot bog group” on Bloomberg Connects.

LEVEL 1, MAIN GALLERY

Back Wall

Lower row: Left to Right

Concrete slab and drain on bog harvested for milled peat for horticulture use, Carbury, County Kildare, 2024.

Wet bog after prolonged rain, Ballydermot bog group, County Kildare, 2021.

Bog harvested for milled peat, Ballydermot bog group, County Kildare, 2021.

Light industrial railway, Giltown Bog, County Kildare, 2022.

Drain on bog harvested for milled peat for horticulture use, Carbury, County Kildare, 2021.

Stacked turf for domestic use, Knockirr Bog, County Kildare, 2019.

Bunding used for bog restoration, Timahoe South, County Kildare, 2024.

Stacked and unstacked turf, Knockirr Bog, County Kildare, 2019.



Listen to photographer Shane Hynan reflect on his image “Light industrial railway” on Bloomberg Connects.



Listen to photographer Shane Hynan reflect on his image “Bunding used for bog restoration” on Bloomberg Connects.

LEVEL 1, MAIN GALLERY

Wall 3

Mounds of milled peat for horticulture use, Carbury,
County Kildare, 2019–2020.



Listen to photographer Shane Hynan
reflect on his image “Mounds of milled
peat for horticulture use” on
Bloomberg Connects.

LEVEL 1, MAIN GALLERY

Free-standing Wall

Top row: Left to Right

Daniel footing turf for domestic use, Knockirr Bog, County Kildare, 2022.

Mickey footing turf for domestic use, Knockirr Bog, County Kildare, 2020.

Eddie and Con footing turf for domestic use, Knockirr Bog, County Kildare, 2022.

LEVEL 1, MAIN GALLERY

Free-standing Wall

Second row: Left to Right

Paddy and James footing turf for domestic use, Knockirr Bog, County Kildare, 2019.

Breda footing turf for domestic use, Carbury, County Kildare, 2022.

John and Josh footing turf for domestic use, Knockirr Bog, County Kildare, 2019.

LEVEL 1, MAIN GALLERY

Free-standing Wall

Third row: Left to Right

Barney footing turf for domestic use, Knockirr Bog, County Kildare, 2019.

Kian footing turf for domestic use, Knockirr Bog, County Kildare, 2020.

Eddie and Con footing turf for domestic use, Knockirr Bog, County Kildare, 2022.

LEVEL 1, MAIN GALLERY

Free-standing Wall

Bottom row: Left to Right

Dominic footing turf for domestic use, Knockirr Bog,
County Kildare, 2019.

Robert footing turf for domestic use, Knockirr Bog,
County Kildare, 2020.

Declan footing turf for domestic use, Knockirr Bog,
County Kildare, 2019.

LEVEL 1, MAIN GALLERY

Free-standing Wall

Facing window

Fionn footing turf for domestic use, Knockirr Bog,
County Kildare, 2023.

LEVEL 1, MAIN GALLERY

Wall beside the lift

Tony's footings, Knockirr Bog, County Kildare, 2017.

LEVEL 1, SECOND SMALL ROOM

Industry

The outbreak of World War 2 and the loss of British coal imports led to concerted efforts by the Irish government to counter fuel shortages and enhance Ireland's fuel security. Although plans to develop bogs and mechanise the process of harvesting turf were already in place pre-war, this was accelerated during the war and post-war years, leading to the setting up of Bord na Móna (Irish semi-state company) in 1946 and significant development in the mechanisation and industrial extraction of many midland bogs for decades to follow.

In 2019, Bord na Móna ceased harvesting peat, which was used for power generation, briquette production and horticulture media, but continued to use stockpiled peat already harvested. The last briquette factory at Derrinlough ceased production on the 26th May 2023, and later that year Edenderry Power Station, the final peat-burning power station, ceased burning peat in its facility and moved fully to biomass.

What followed was the almost complete erasure of peatland industrial heritage, which had shaped the identity and prosperity of the Irish midlands for decades. Evidence of an inconvenient truth was wiped away, and little regard was shown for the cultural and historical importance of an era that shapes the story of the Irish Midlands region.

A number of private peat harvesting facilities are still operational, and many are being pursued by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for operating without the necessary environmental licenses and planning permission.

LEVEL 1, SECOND SMALL ROOM

Wall 1

Disused machine, Giltown Bog, County Kildare, 2022.

Disused wagon, Adamstown Bog, County Kildare,
2022.

Turf collector, Ballydermot bog group, County Offaly,
2024.

LEVEL 1, SECOND SMALL ROOM

Wall 2

Derrinlough briquette factory, County Offaly, 2023.



Listen to photographer Shane Hynan reflect on his image “Derrinlough briquette factory” on Bloomberg Connects.

LEVEL 1, SECOND SMALL ROOM

Wall 3 - Facing Entry

Mechanical hopper and conveyor belt for loading turf for horticultural use, County Offaly, 2020.

Peat separator for grading milled peat for horticultural use, County Kildare, 2019.



Listen to photographer Shane Hynan reflect on his image "Peat separator for grading milled peat for horticultural use" on Bloomberg Connects.

LEVEL 2, SMALL ROOM

Architecture

When World War 2 broke out, Ireland's larger urban centres and many of its institutions were dependent on British coal for fuel. For centuries, much of rural Ireland harvested turf by hand for their fuel needs and the Irish government looked to this natural resource to counteract fuel security and shortages during the war. This led to the setting up of many turf camps in the Irish midlands to house the workers who harvested hand-won turf to fulfil Ireland's fuel requirements.

Many of these camps continued post war as it was seen as a valuable source of employment and a way to utilise the bogland, which was considered wasteland or brown deserts impractical for agriculture. Many of the workers in these camps were from the western counties and living in cramped billets and camps that were hastily built.

Bord na Móna sought to provide more permanent housing for the workers and in the 1950's, they commissioned Architect Frank Gibney to design and build a number of

Bord na Móna workers' villages or estates across the midlands to house workers and their families. Many of these estates have similarities in layout and design features and were considered state-of-the-art in terms of planning, sustainability and liveability. Examples of these housing schemes include: Coill Dubh, County Kildare; Kilcormac, County Offaly; Rochfortbridge, County Westmeath; Lanesborough, County Longford; Cloontuskert, County Roscommon; and Bracknagh, Co. Offaly.

LEVEL 2, SMALL ROOM

Frank Gibney designed Bord na Móna workers' village #3, Rochfordbridge, County Westmeath, 2023.

Frank Gibney designed Bord na Móna workers' village, Cloontuskert, County Roscommon, 2024.

Frank Gibney designed Bord na Móna workers' village, Lanesborough, County Longford, 2024.

Frank Gibney designed Bord na Móna workers' village #2, Rochfordbridge, County Westmeath, 2023.

Frank Gibney designed Bord na Móna workers' village #1, Rochfordbridge, County Westmeath, 2023.



Listen to photographer Shane Hynan reflect on his image “Frank Gibney designed Bord na Móna workers’ village, Lanesborough, County Longford, 2024” on Bloomberg Connects.

BRIDGE

Solo image

Disused machine, Blakes Bog, County Kildare, 2023.

BRIDGE

Top row: Left to Right

Disused Bord na Móna tea hut #2, Mount Dillon Bog Group, County Longford, 2025.

Disused Bord na Móna tea hut, Ballydermot Bog Group, County Offaly, 2020.

Disused Bord na Móna tea hut #1, Mount Dillon Bog Group, County Longford, 2025.

Disused Bord na Móna tea hut #3, Mount Dillon Bog Group, County Longford, 2025.

Disused Bord na Móna tea hut, Giltown Bog, County Kildare, 2022.



Listen to photographer Shane Hynan reflect on his image “Disused Bord na Móna tea hut, Gilltown Bog, County Kildare, 2022” on Bloomberg Connects.

BRIDGE

Lower row: Left to Right

Disused Bord na Móna tea hut, Ballydermot Bog Group, County Offaly, 2022.

Disused Bord na Móna tea hut #1, Ballydermot Bog Group, County Offaly, 2023.

Disused Bord na Móna tea hut, Mount Dillon Bog Group, County Longford, 2025.

Disused Bord na Móna tea hut #2, Ballydermot Bog Group, County Offaly, 2023.

Disused Bord na Móna tea hut #4, Mount Dillon Bog Group, County Longford, 2025.

LEVEL 2, BALCONY ROOM

Lodge Bog, County Kildare, 2025.

Mount Lucas wind farm, County Offaly, 2020.

Walsh Island with Mount Lucas wind farm and
Croghan Hill in the distance, County Offaly, 2025.

Frank, Allenwood South, County Kildare, 2025.

Timahoe South solar farm #1, County Kildare, 2024.

Timahoe South solar farm #2, County Kildare, 2024.



Listen to photographer Shane Hynan reflect on his image “Lodge Bog” on Bloomberg Connects.



Listen to photographer Shane Hynan reflect on his image “Walsh Island with Mount Lucas wind farm and Croghan Hill in the distance” on Bloomberg Connects.



Listen to photographer Shane Hynan reflect on his image “Timahoe South solar farm #2” on Bloomberg Connects.

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