



# Bantry's Portrait Artist, & Cork's Stone Sculptor





Sir William Orpen  
photo: [www.irishtimes.com](http://www.irishtimes.com)

William Orpen  
*Bantry's Portrait Artist*

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Seamus Murphy  
*Cork's Stone Sculptor*



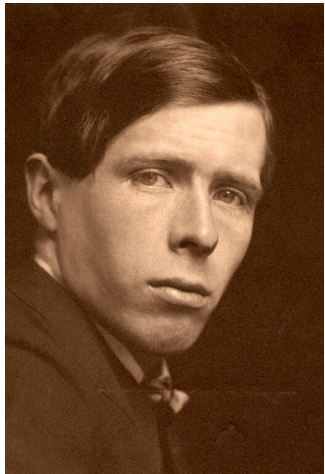
Seamus Murphy  
photo: <https://www.facebook.com/SeamusMurphySculptor/>

### *William Orpen - Bantry's Portrait Artist*

Many artists/Painters visited Bantry area, and some were frequent visitors here. One such was William Orpen, whose father had property at Lisheens near Droichead na Siorraí, Kealkill.

William Orpen is an Irish artist who worked mainly in London. He is described as one of the greatest painters in the history of art. During a lifetime devoted to portrait art, he painted in excess of 600 portraits, including that of David Lloyd George and many other well known figures on the world stage. Born in Stillorgan, Dublin, on 27th November 1878, he studied art at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art and later at the Slade School of Art in London, where he studied the Old Masters, especially portraits.

After the outbreak of the First World War, Orpen, was appointed an official war painter and given the rank of Major. During his stay on the Western Front, he completed drawings and several paintings, including *Dead Germans in a Trench*.



William Orpen  
by George Charles Beresford  
platinum print, 1903  
© National Portrait Gallery, London

Following the armistice, Orpen was made official portrait artist to the Versailles Peace Conference. ‘The Signing of Peace in the Hall of Mirrors’ is an oil on canvas painting by Orpen, completed in 1919. It was one of the paintings commissioned from Orpen to commemorate the Peace Conference in Versailles in 1919. The work is held by The Imperial War Museum in London.

Orpen was deeply affected by the suffering he witnessed in the war, and this may have affected his attitude subsequently.

However, when he married Grace in 1921, he chose Bantry area for their honeymoon, staying at his father’s property in Lisheens near Kealkill. It was then that he painted “A Storm at Kealkill” and also *View of Lisheens Bridge* (Droichead na Siorraí) which he used in an upcoming exhibition at the time. Another work of Orpen’s at that time was ‘The Window Seat’ – Grace at Lisheens House 1901. Lisheens House has been unoccupied for decades, and is now in partial ruin.

overleaf: *The Window Seat* by William Orpen  
Painting shows Grace at Lisheens House 1901  
shown beside is the same window today  
images: [www.sirwilliamorpen.com](http://www.sirwilliamorpen.com)



*A Friend in Need* by Sir William Orpen  
from *An Onlooker in France*, (1917-1919)  
image: [www.sirwilliamorpen.com](http://www.sirwilliamorpen.com)





Writing from Lisheens, Kealkill, William Orpen wrote the following letter to Everett who was in London, regarding his change of plan for having a second studio in London. Note the seal, and the sketch at the bottom of the page, with the coordinates indicated. He mentions Googonbarragh (Gougane Barra), which is just tucked behind the hills shown in the image, as a view from Lisheens.

Ardtullig, situated over the hill from Lisheens, was the main home of the Orpens. They would travel by horse and carriage over the hills to Lisheens, from time to time.

have you got my key - please do not give it  
to Haywood.



My dear Everett.

I am sorry to say I will have to give up the idea  
of your room. as I fear I will not be able  
to afford keeping an extra studio. at least  
I cannot say I will at present - though it is  
not without the bitterest remorse. I say it  
I will keep on my own room till I am  
settled. and will ~~at~~ mention Mr.  
George Haywood. regards Mrs. H.B.

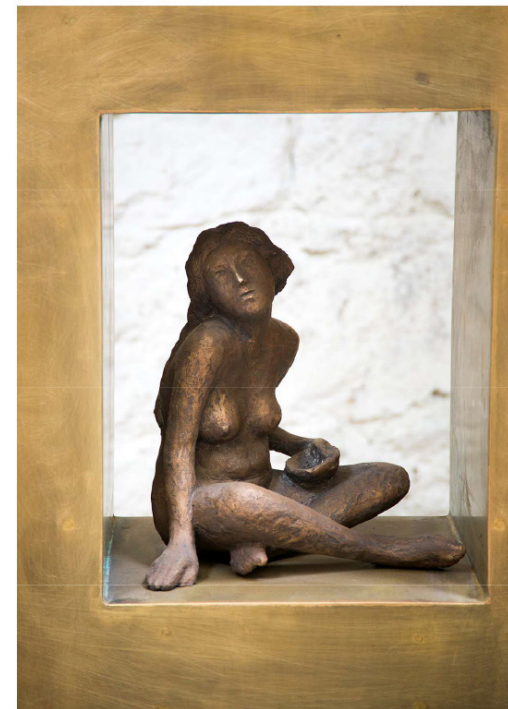


### *Commemoration*

When Orpen heard that a memorial would be erected in Dublin to a friend of his, he expressed his feelings in a sketch that he drew, describing it as a dream.

It shows him on a pedestal with naked ladies all around him adoring him. This image was the inspiration for Stillorgan Chamber of Commerce to commission a sculpture of Orpen and have it erected in Stillorgan, the place of his birth.

An eleven foot high Bronze sculpture of Sir William Orpen was unveiled in 2018 by Ronnie Wood of the Rolling Stones. This was sculpted by Blackrock based sculptor Rowan Gillespie, and stands beside the Talbot Hotel, with a view of Orpen's birthplace across the way. The sculpture is unusual in that it has a bust of Sir William Orpen on top with four "windows" underneath, and each "window" bearing a relevant image of Orpen's work, including one bearing an image of the "Dream" sketch by Orpen which inspired this commission.



above: Orpen Sculpture  
opposite: the four images within pedestal  
photo: Dominic Lee

*A Storm at Kealkill* by William Orpen



### *Orpen and Bantry*

While most of Sir William Orpen's works consisted of paintings or portraits, he also did many drawings, including one of our own Timothy Healy of Bantry who served as MP in the British House of Commons and subsequently became QC and based in Dublin. Healy was appointed Governor General of the Irish Free State in 1922.

Sir William Orpen remains one of the most influential and highly valued Irish artists. Having completed such a vast amount of portraits, and published his wartime memoirs as *An Onlooker in France*, Orpen died in 1931 aged 53. The name Orpen is remembered to this day in the Kealkill area as landlords/property owners at Lisheens.

*We are grateful to Dominic Lee of Priory Studios and [www.sirwilliamorpen.com](http://www.sirwilliamorpen.com) for supplying photos of images and sculpture.*

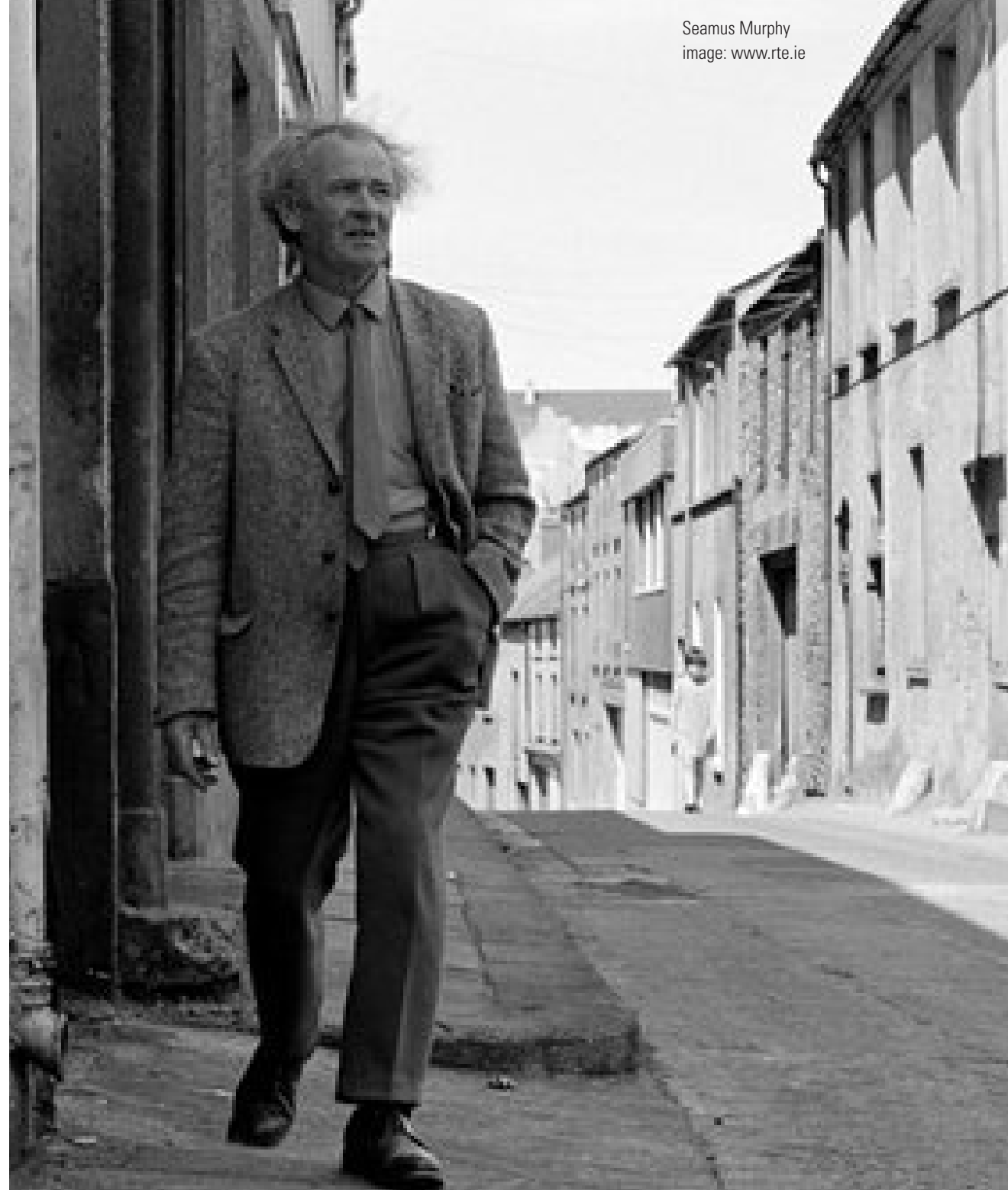
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## *Seamus Murphy - Cork's Stone Sculptor*

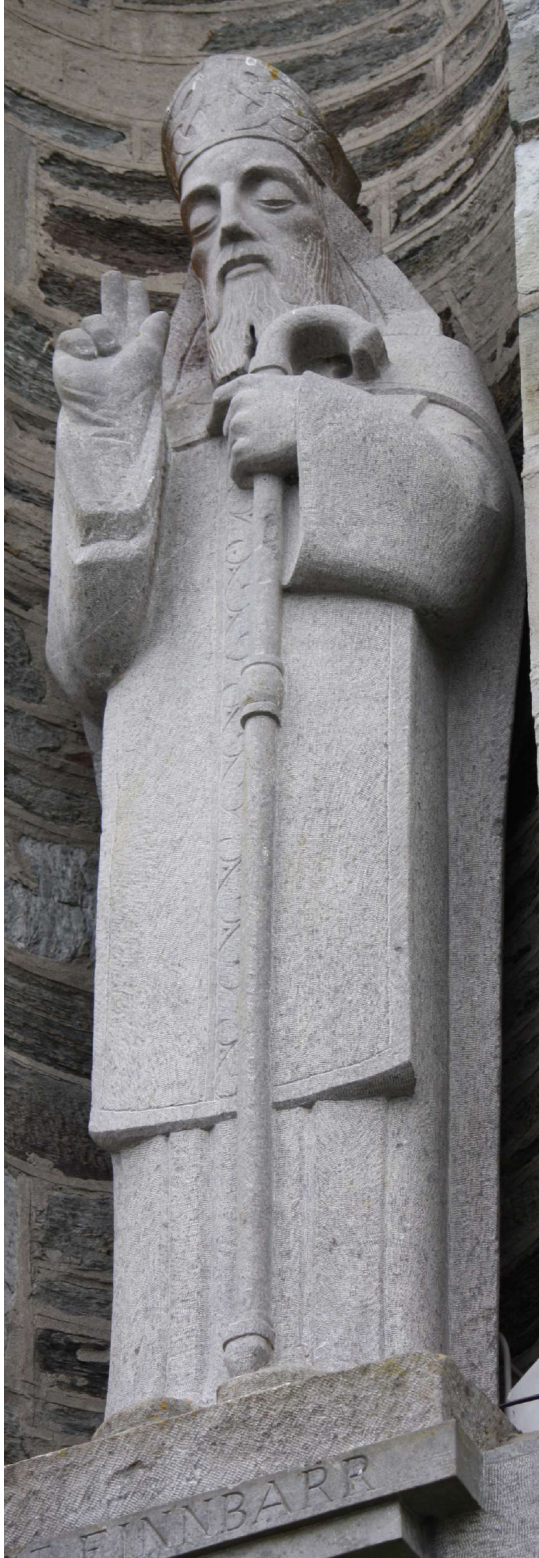
Corkman, Seamus Murphy, a traditional sculptor and one of the giants of Cork Art was born 1907. He attended school at St Patrick's in Cork city between 1912-1921, where he became a pupil of Daniel Corkery who gave him his first drawing lessons. In 1921, on the advice of Corkery, he entered the Crawford School of Art to study modelling.

Soon afterwards, he became an apprentice stone carver at John Aloysius O'Connor's Art Marble Works, Cork. Murphy started his career at a difficult time for visual arts in Ireland. The country had just been through a war for Independence and a Civil war, and art was not a priority for the newly formed government. Funds from state and private individuals were scarce.

Nevertheless, Murphy continued sculpting as a traditional sculptor and in 1931 he was awarded the Gibson Bequest Scholarship Exhibits at the Royal Hibernian Academy Exhibition. The following year he studied at the Academie Colarossi in Paris, under the American Sculptor Andrew O'Connor. Following on, he returned home and opened a studio and stoneyard in Blackpool in Cork.







### *Seamus Murphy and the Bantry Connection*

It was at this stage Murphy was commissioned to sculpt two statues – St Finbarr and St Ita, (Naomh Íde) for the niches already waiting to be occupied, on the front of St Finbarr’s Church in Bantry.

St Ita has been linked with St Finbarr in Irish history and folklore. She may have been related to him, perhaps an aunt. She was a poet and teacher. It has been suggested she was a teacher of some Irish saints including St Mochomóg.

“Though they come my friendship craving  
Sons of princes and of kings,  
Not from them my soul finds saving  
But to tiny Jesu clings.”.

The lines above, from ‘St Ita’s Fosterling’ translated by Robin Flower, are taken from Marian Broderick’s book *Bold Brilliant and Bad - Irish Women from History*

Seamus Murphy, an important figure in the history of Irish art, was best known for his ecclesiastical limestone statues and portrait heads, as well as public monuments and commemorative plaques. His most notable works include St Brigid and the Twelve Apostles for a church in San Francisco, and his United Nations monument in Glasnevin Dublin. He also produced bronze portrait heads of public figures, writers and musicians. Furthermore, he created bronze portrait busts of five Presidents of Ireland and there is a sculpture, created by Seamus Murphy, and unveiled in 1964, of J. F. Kennedy in the United States Embassy in Dublin.

A bust of Timothy Buckley, better known as The Tailor of “The Tailor and Ansty” fame was created by Seamus Murphy. Of course Buckley, and indeed his wife Ansty too, were somewhat dubious about the project initially, as they had never heard of such works before, and it was seen as an interruption of their daily lives. However, it is also

reported that The Tailor later said “Two heads are better than one”, and that the “new” head would outlast the older one that he already had! Conscious of his own mortality, it is further suggested that The Tailor was considering asking the sculptor to make him a complete new “body” as it would last longer than he himself would! The sculpture of Timothy Buckley is proudly displayed in the Library of Farmleigh House in Dublin.



Bronze Bust of Timothy Buckley  
at Farmleigh House  
Photo: Farmleigh.ie

More recent work of Murphy involved the design in 1945 of Blackpool Church for William Dwyer and in 1947 he carved the Apostles and St Brigid for a church in San Francisco.

Seamus Murphy rarely exhibited his works, although he was elected a full member of the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1945. Later, he was appointed Professor of Sculpture at the RHA. He joined the Arts Council of Ireland and was awarded an Honorary LLD by the National University of Ireland for his contribution to Irish art. He died in Cork in 1975 and is buried at Rathcooney Cemetery, County Cork.





**B A N T R Y**  
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