



## NEW INSPIRING IRISH ART WEEKENDS WITH THE MERRION AND BALLYFIN

**TWO LUXURY HOTELS: TWO PRIVATE ART COLLECTIONS: THREE ILLUMINATING WEEKENDS**

*March 2013* – Two of Ireland’s finest hotels, both created within beautiful Georgian houses and both with their own private collections of Irish art, **The Merrion** in Dublin and Co. Laois’s **Ballyfin**, will be coming together to showcase the best of Irish art over three weekends in October 2013 and April 2014.

Guests will be delighted by these superb paintings enlivened by the thread of generous Irish luxury hospitality which unites both hotels. The Merrion’s spectacular collection focuses on 19th and 20th century Irish art, whilst Ballyfin’s collection runs its course from the mid-17th century onwards.

Together, the new *Inspiring Irish Art Weekends* will reveal and celebrate Irish art through the works in both hotels. On each of the three weekends, experts from the National Gallery of Ireland, in Dublin, and Irish art connoisseur William Laffan, at Ballyfin, will share their knowledge and bring the works to life, giving guests a uniquely privileged insight into Irish art. It will also take guests on a luxurious, all-inclusive journey, from The Merrion at the heart of Georgian Dublin, to the glorious countryside of Ballyfin’s 600-acres of parkland, just over an hour away.

### ***Two astonishing art collections***

The Merrion’s collection of art is widely considered to be one of the most important in Ireland, stretching to more than ninety works. In fact, on visiting the National Gallery of Ireland – just around the corner from The Merrion – guests will recognise many of the works on display, because the paintings displayed in the gallery are by many of the same artists whose work graces the walls of The Merrion.

Created from four magnificently restored Grade I listed Georgian townhouses, The Merrion’s graceful and elegant interior is the perfect setting for the paintings, resulting in a dramatic marriage of classical architecture and contemporary art.

Works include a specially commissioned series created for the neo-classical stairwell by Martin Mooney, one of Ireland's finest young painters, and paintings by Jack B. Yeats, the younger brother of the poet W.B. Yeats, and renowned as Ireland's greatest painter – his 'Hour of Sleep' (1951) hangs in the Front Hall.

Ballyfin has long been admired as one of Ireland's most lavish late Georgian houses, originally designed in the 1820s by great Irish architects, father and son, Richard and William Vitruvius Morrison. After eight years of restoration, Ballyfin reopened in 2011 as a five-star country house hotel, telling the story of Ireland's art, history, topography and social life, reflecting both the splendour of the Great House and the humble life of the cottage too. Leading figures of Irish Art are represented in the art collection, alongside continental and American artists who have painted and drawn from Irish subject matter. Among the principal highlights are the ancestral portraits of the Coote family (Ballyfin's 19th century owners) which have now returned to the house after almost a century, fine neo-classical paintings by Robert Fagan and Irish landscapes by William Ashford and Thomas Roberts. More modern acquisitions - ranging from 20th-century Irish masters to young artists embarking on their careers - are exhibited on the way downstairs to, and within, the Ballyfin Bar and the spa.

The two hotels have three notable Irish artists in common: the pioneering abstract painter, Mainie Jellet (1897-1944) credited with introducing Cubism to Ireland, holding a special place in the growth of modern art in the country; William Leech (1881 - 1968) who like most Irish artists of his time was strongly drawn to France and French art and Louis le Brocqy (1916 - 25 April 2012), born to a prominent Dublin family of Belgian descent, self-taught, and who was arguably the most cosmopolitan Irish painter of his generation.

### ***The Details / Need to Know***

*Friday* - After arriving at The Merrion, guests will join an expert from the National Gallery of Ireland for a private tour of the Merrion's collection, followed by 'Art Tea' – The Merrion's witty confectionary homage to its paintings. Dinner will be at the hotel's Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud, Ireland's only two Michelin starred restaurant.

*Saturday* – Guests will depart for Ballyfin after breakfast at The Merrion, just over an hour from Dublin. Curator, historian and Irish art expert William Laffan will introduce guests to Ballyfin's art collection with a private tour, before a drinks reception and a five-course dinner in the State Dining Room. William will join dinner to offer further insight into Ballyfin's collection, its significance, and its place in the context of the Ballyfin estate.

*Sunday* – Guests can make the most of Ballyfin's 600 acres of parkland after breakfast discovering the wide-ranging facilities indoors and around the private parkland.

**'Inspiring Irish Art' weekends from €2,727 per couple, or €1,364 per person, based on two sharing, subject to availability. Price includes return airport transfers, and transfer between The Merrion and Ballyfin, and two night's accommodation on an all-inclusive basis.**

**Friday 11 – Sunday 13 October 2013 | Friday 4 – Sunday 6 April 2014 | Friday 11 – Sunday 13 April 2014**

For further information, and to book, contact:

**The Merrion** – 00 353 1 603 0600 | [info@merrionhotel.com](mailto:info@merrionhotel.com) | [www.merrionhotel.com](http://www.merrionhotel.com) or

**Ballyfin Demesne** - 00 353 (0)5787 55866 | [info@ballyfin.com](mailto:info@ballyfin.com) | [www.ballyfin.com](http://www.ballyfin.com)

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NOTE TO EDITORS:

*About The Merrion* – Dublin's finest five-star address, The Merrion stands directly opposite Government Buildings in the heart of Dublin city centre. On the doorstep is Upper Merrion Street, where Government Buildings, The National Gallery and The Natural History Museum are located. Created from four magnificently restored grade I listed Georgian townhouses, The Merrion is a short walk from the "golden mile" of lively pubs, shops and restaurants dotted around St. Stephen's Green. Grafton Street is a leisurely stroll away for all the latest designer shops. The Merrion is a member of The Leading Hotels of the World.

*About Ballyfin* – Re-launched as a hotel in May 2011 after an ambitious, eight-year restoration project, Ballyfin has recaptured its original purpose as a house that is home to superb hospitality and entertainment while also ensuring its guests (a maximum 29 people at any one time) private enjoyment of 600 acres of parkland, a 28 acre lake, ancient woods, follies and grottoes plus a boutique spa with two beauty treatment rooms, a gym and indoor pool.

*About William Laffan* - William Laffan has published extensively in the field of Irish art. Recent books include *The Cries of Dublin, Drawn from the Life* by Hugh Douglas Hamilton (2003); *Miscelanea Structura Curiosa* by Samuel Chearnley (2005); *Painting Ireland* (2006); *Thomas Roberts, Landscape and Patronage in Eighteenth- Century Ireland* (with Brendan Rooney 2009); *Ancestral Interiors, Photographs of the Irish Country House* by Patrick Prendergast (2010). Laffan also writes frequently for periodicals such as *Apollo*.