



BACK IN BLACK

ELIADAS OCHOA OF BUENA VISTA
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SCREEN IRELAND
PRIX PICTET
KWAIDAN



Close Encounters of a Ghostly Kind

A major print exhibition highlights the life and works of Lafcadio Hearn, Ireland's most important literary outsider.

WORDS Kieran Owens



Running at Farnleigh Gallery until the end of August 2025 is *Kwaidan – Encounters With Lafcadio Hearn*, an exhibition of contemporary fine art prints by twenty Irish and twenty Japanese artists, whose works represent their individual response to *Kwaidan*, the Greek-born Irish writer Lafcadio Hearn's collection of strange and wonderful Japanese ghost stories. The book was first published in 1904, the year of Hearn's death, in Tokyo, at the age of 54.

Lafcadio Hearn was born in 1850 on the Greek island of Lefkada, to Charles Bush Hearn, an Irish Surgeon-Major in the British army, and Rosa Cassimati, his Greek mother. Charles' branch of the Hearn family hailed from the townland of Correagh, near Kilbeggan in Co. Westmeath. An Anglo-Irish Protestant family, Lafcadio's great-great-grandfather, the Reverend Daniel Hearn (1693-1766), was the Archdeacon of Cashel and Rector of St. Anne's Church, on Dublin's Dawson Street, where he is buried in its crypt.

Charles Bush Hearn and Rosa Casimatti married in the village of Santa Maura, on the Ionian island of Lefkada, in November 1849, and their surviving second son was born there on the 27th June 1850. The future author was baptised Patrick Lafcadio Hearn, his middle name reflecting the name of the place of his birth. When Lafcadio was just two years old, he was brought to Dublin by his mother Rosa, through arrangements made by his uncle, Richard Holmes Hearn, a painter of some note who resided in Paris for most of his adult life. Rosa received a poor reception from her new Irish family connections, partly due to her religious convictions and partly to do with not speaking any English, and she soon returned to Greece alone, never to be seen again by her son. Lafcadio's parents eventually divorced, following which his father remarried in Dublin 1857, starting a new family of three daughters, though one with which the young boy would have no involvement during his early life. Having last been seen by Lafcadio on the beach at Tramore, when he was just seven years old, Surgeon Major Hearn would eventually die onboard the steamship Mula in the seaport of Suez, in Egypt, in November 1866, when Lafcadio was sixteen years old. His legal affairs were sorted out by his brother Richard, though in none of the resulting settlements was Lafcadio mentioned.

Having effectively been abandoned by his parents, Lafcadio was raised in Dublin until his early teen years, during which time he spent summers with his great-aunt Mrs. Sarah Brenane in Tramore, Co. Waterford, and with other Elwood relations in Cong. Co. Mayo. Mrs. Brenane was a convert to the Catholic faith and through her financial support, the young Lafcadio was sent to Ushaw College, a boarding seminary school in Durham, England. His time here was a miserable one, compounded by an accident that occurred during a game where he lost the use of his left eye, resulting in a disfigurement that would trouble him for the rest of his life. Through his upbringing in Dublin and his school years at Ushaw, he developed

an enduring hatred for the Catholic religion and a deep interest in exotic alternatives. Existing school records show that, between his arrival in September 1863 and his departure in October 1867, he excelled in English and French, two subjects that would shape his future literary destiny.

In September 1869, aged 19, Lafcadio was packed off to the USA, ostensibly to stay with some distant relations with whom the arrangements never worked out. Following on from some difficult experiences in New York, including temporary homelessness, he eventually made his way to Cincinnati, where, after some challenging years, he created for himself an important career in writing and journalism, most particularly by reporting on and sometimes illustrating vivid accounts of horrific accidents and gruesome murders, such as the notorious 'Tan Yard Case'.

Moving on to New Orleans in November 1877, aged 27, he was quickly appointed as associate-editor of the Daily City Item. Living initially on the now-famous Bourbon Street, his experiences of the city's cultural and spiritual diversity inspired him greatly, particularly in regards to the Creole peoples, and especially in relation to voodoo and food, two topics about which he wrote passionately. In 1884, his *Stay Leaves from Strange Literature* was published, followed by *Gombo Zèbes*, a Little Dictionary of Creole Proverbs and *La Cuisine Créole*, both in 1885.

After subsequent jobs with the New Orleans Commercial and the New Orleans Democrat newspapers, his stay in the city was followed by a two-year sojourn in the French West Indies, in particular in Martinique, where he again absorbed all aspects of the diverse cultural influences that were on offer.

In 1890, Lafcadio emigrated to Japan, where his writings on that country gained him serious recognition for his sympathetic understanding of that country's deep and ancient culture. In 1891 he married Koizumi Setsuko, a Japanese lady from a noble Samurai family and with her fathered three sons and a daughter. His great-grandson, Bon Koizumi, supported by his wife Shoko, currently is the Director of the highly-regarded Lafcadio Hearn Memorial Museum in the Japanese city of Matsue.

The exhibition to be seen at Farmleigh Gallery emerged due to conversations held between the Irish artists Stephen Lawlor, Kate MacDonagh, and Ed Millano, each of whom had spent time making prints in Japan. During visits to the country, Lawlor, who had, in 2017, been responsible for touring a major print exhibition there, based on the poetry of W.B. Yeats, kept hearing, with some disbelief, that there was an Irish writer, known there by his Japanese name of Koizumi Yakumo, who the Japanese of all ages and for over one hundred years revered.

Lawlor was to learn that, following Hearn's arrival in Japan in 1890, his output of articles and books on the country and its people,

and especially of its folklore and its ancient social and religious traditions, had garnered for him a reputation, both domestic and international, as a writer with a deeply sympathetic understanding of Japanese culture. During the relatively short fifteen years that he lived in Japan, the author saw published a prolific output of his books, including *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (1894), *Out of the East* (1895), *Kokoro* (1896), *Gleanings in Buddha-Fields* (1897), *Exotics and Retrospectives* (1898), *In Ghostly Japan* (1899), *Shadowings* (1900), *A Japanese Miscellany* (1901), *Fantastics and Other Fancies* and *Kotto* (1902), and, finally, his eerie masterpiece, *Kwaidan* (1904). His *Japan, an attempt at Interpretation* was posthumously published in 1905.

During the intervening years since the death of Lafcadio Hearn, his popularity as a writer has waxed and waned, and in particular he fell out of fashion following the Japanese involvement in World War II. However, he was restored to popular appreciation by the release in 1964 of the film director Masaki Kobayashi's cinematic sensation *Kwaidan*. Since then, several successful feature-length films based on his ghost stories have been made, including Tokuzo Tanaka's *The Snow Woman* from 1968, which was re-released last October in a three-film box set by Radiance Film called *Daiei Gothic*. More recent film treatments of Hearn's stories include the director/actress Kiki Sugino's 2017 version of *The Show Woman* and the Irish-resident director/actor Jack Reynor's 2019 supernatural short *Bainne*. Currently in Japan, the English actor Tommy Bastow, who appeared in the magnificent Shogun TV series, is filming a role based on Lafcadio for the upcoming TV series *Bakebake*, which is due to air in November.

As a high-quality example of a successful cultural co-creation initiative, the *Kwaidan* touring exhibition has already been seen in Japan in the cities of Matsue, Yaizu, Nagoya and Kyoto, and in Ireland at the Ballyinglen Museum of Art in Ballycastle, Co. Mayo, the Coastguard Cultural Centre, in Tramore, Co. Waterford, the Hyde Gallery in Sligo, and the Hunt Museum in Limerick. It will be a key feature between April and October in Ireland's pavilion at the Osaka World Expo and at the end of this year will find a permanent home at Ireland House, the new Irish Embassy complex that is currently being constructed in Tokyo.

One of the main goals of the exhibition is to raise the profile, in Ireland especially, of this most important but largely unknown writer, whose Irish roots should be celebrated and whose beautifully crafted and still relevant books and essays should be sought out and read. Through the efforts of the Tuttle book company, his original writings and several biographical appreciations continue to be published - including the recently released biography *The Outsider* by Steve Kemme - and are always available to purchase at the bookshop in the Chester Beatty in Dublin. He is also the focus in Tramore, Co. Waterford, of the living



Previous pages:
 Left: Kanami Hano
 Mujina
 Right: Lafcadio
 Hearn, 1891,
 Courtesy of the
 Koizumi Family
 Clockwise from above
 left:
 Kelvin Mann
 The Cherry Tree of the
 Milk Nurse
 Alice Maher
 Rokuro-Kubi
 Niall Naessens
 Uozakura, in the
 Garden of Saihaji
 Shoko Oeigi
 The Dream of
 Akinosuke



biographical tribute to his life that is the Lafcadio Hearn Japanese Gardens. Celebrating its tenth anniversary this coming June, it is a spectacular achievement, one that mirrors perfectly the author's own literary and cultural significance.

The full list of participating artists in the Farmleigh Gallery exhibition are:

Artists from Ireland
 Yoko Akino / Ailbhe Barrett / Nuala Clarke / Niambh Flanagan / Richard Gorman / Richard Lawlor / Stephen Lawlor / Sharon Lee / Kate MacDonagh / Alice Maher / Eimear-Jarjan McCormack / James McCreary / Ed Millano / Niall Naessens / Kelvin Mann / David Quinn / Barbara Rae / Robert Russell / Amelia Stein / Dominic Turner

Artists from Japan
 Kanami Hano / Yoko Hara / Jin Hirosewa / Aya Ito / O JUN / Mayumi Kimura / Chie Matsui / Seichiro Mida / Yuuka Miyajima / Shoji Miyamoto / Junko Ogawa / Shoko Oeigi / Yuki Saito / Michael Schneider / Sudi / Azusa Takahashi / Yo Takahashi / Kanako Watanabe / Toshiya Watanabe / Katsutoshi Yuasa

The exhibition support programme of talks includes:

Saturday 8th March:
 Paul Murray
 Ghosts and Ghouls - The Undead Imagination of Lafcadio Hearn

Saturday 12th April:
 Bill Emmott
 The Foreign Correspondent as Double Agent

Saturday 17th May:
 Sean Golden
 Lafcadio Hearn & W.B. Yeats - The Writers Who Brought Japan to Ireland

Saturday 7th June:
 Agnes Aylward
 A Biographical Garden - Ireland's Living Tribute to Lafcadio Hearn

Saturday 12th July:
 Rebecca Salter
 Japanese Woodblock Printing - The People Behind the Craft

Kwaidan - Encounters With Lafcadio Hearn runs at Farmleigh Gallery, in Dublin's Phoenix Park, until Sunday 24th August. Further details can be found at www.kwaidanexhibition.com and at www.farmleigh.ie

Farmleigh Gallery is open Tuesday to Sunday, and every Bank Holiday Monday, from 10am to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm (closed for lunch). Admission is free. Tickets for the support events, at €10 each, can be booked at www.eventbrite.ie