



Norman B. Leventhal Map Center

at the Boston Public Library

PRESS RELEASE

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Norman B. Leventhal Map Center Announces Exhibition Exploring Mythical Island, in honor of Ireland's 2016 Centennial of Easter Rising

Boston, MA – In 1325, an entirely mythical island off the West coast of Ireland started appearing on maps of that era, and persisted as a geographical reference for over five centuries. The public is invited to explore this fascinating curiosity in both online and physical exhibitions at the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library, in honor of Ireland's 2016 Centennial of the Easter Rising.

The island, called Hy-Brasil, is part of Irish folkloric belief in Tír na nÓg, the otherworld. The Leventhal Map Center Gallery displays historic maps and a globe showing the island and its environs, along with imaginative modern day sketches of the island by artist Caoimhghin Ó Fraithile (Quee-veen Ó Frá-ha-la) (Ireland). The three gallery displays allow for side by side comparisons of the varied interpretations of this imagined land that legend has carried across trades in Ireland, from 14th century mapmaking to 21st century art.

The associated online exhibit at www.bpl.org/exhibitions/current-exhibitions/hy-brasil offers a more extensive collection of maps and explanations. Titled *Hy-Brasil: Mapping a Mythical Island*, the virtual exhibit features over forty maps illustrating the transition of the imagined island over the course of five centuries. After first appearing on a nautical chart in 1325, Hy-Brasil appeared in a variety of map formats, including portolan charts, woodcut and copperplate engravings, lithographic prints, and even a 1492 globe before disappearing from maps.



"Europae" (detail) from *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, by Abraham Ortelius (1527-1598), Antwerp, Belgium, 1570

completely in the late 19th century. This online exhibit captures Hy-Brasil's transformation in folklore from a legitimate destination, to a "trick of the eye", to simply a rock, as it was mirrored in cartography.

"In honor of the Irish Centennial, the Map Center began researching its collection to further explore the fascinating story of the mythical island of Hy-Brasil," said Stephanie Cyr, Assistant Curator of the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center. "We are thrilled to be featuring Caoimhghin's sketches alongside the Center's maps as part of this year's international celebration of Ireland's rich cultural heritage."

Caoimhghin's related site-specific work, "South of Hy-Brasil", a floating island, is planned to be installed this summer in the lagoon behind the Museum of Fine Arts. He states, "The quest for 'Hy-Brasil' has intrigued me for a long time. Its mystery belongs in the same realm as *Tir-na nÓg* (land of eternal youth), and the spirits that inhabit the outer world. It is a metaphor for our journey through life."

"South of Hy-Brasil", along with "The Well House", a piece by artist Michael Dowling, will be featured in *Tír na nÓg*, a temporary public art project in honor of Ireland's 2016 Centennial. The artwork will be sited throughout Back Bay Fens section of Boston's renowned Emerald Necklace Park system later this summer. The outdoor artworks by Mr. Ó Fraithile and Mr. Dowling are part of a global initiative to mark the centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising, which set Ireland on its path for independence. Boston is the only U.S. city hosting temporary public art projects to commemorate the 1916 Centennial.

"Easter Rising wasn't just a physical uprising, but also a cultural one, fostered by the will of the Irish people to take ownership of their political and cultural identity," said Kathleen Bitetti, Chief Curator at Medicine Wheel Productions, the lead organization for *Tír na nÓg*. "It is fitting that we celebrate this renaissance of Irish culture today via public art in the Emerald Necklace's Fenway section of the Boston Public Park System and in museum exhibitions, both in galleries and online presented by institutions such as the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library— all open to the public to enjoy for free."

Additionally, these works will also celebrate the 2016 Centennial of the National Park System. *Tír na nÓg*, and its related exhibitions and events, are supported by Culture Ireland as part of the Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme. Medicine Wheel Productions, a 501c3 non-profit located in South Boston that is dedicated to art as public service, is the lead organization for *Tír na nÓg*. Their Cultural Partner is the Fenway Alliance, a non-profit membership service and advocacy organization dedicated to the prosperity and growth of the Fenway Cultural District. Additional key supporters of the project are Mayor Martin J. Walsh, the Consulate General of Ireland in Boston, Boston Parks and Recreation, Boston Inspectional Service Department, the Boston Redevelopment Authority, and the Paraclete Center, who is graciously hosting Caoimhghin for his stay in Boston. To learn more about Medicine Wheel Productions and *Tír na nÓg*, or to see a full listing of project sponsors and collaborators, please visit:

<http://mwponline.org/wordpress/projects/tir-na-nog/>

About the NORMAN B. LEVENTHAL MAP CENTER

The Norman B. Leventhal Map Center is ranked among the top map centers in the United States for the size of its collection, the significance of its historic (pre-1900) material, and its advanced digitization program. It is unique among the major collections because it also combines these features with exceptional educational and teacher training programs to advance geographic literacy among students in grades K-12 and enhance the teaching of subjects from history to mathematics to language arts. The collection is also the second largest in the country located in a public library, ensuring unlimited access to these invaluable resources for scholars, educators, and the general public. The Leventhal Map Center, created in 2004, is a nonprofit organization established as a public-private partnership between the Boston Public Library and philanthropist Norman Leventhal. Its mission is to use the Boston Public Library's permanent collection of 200,000 maps and 5,000 atlases and a select group of rare maps collected by Mr. Leventhal for the enjoyment and education of all through exhibitions, educational programs, and a website that includes thousands of digitized maps at maps.bpl.org. The map collection is global in scope, dating from the 15th century to the present, with a particular strength in maps and atlases of Boston, Massachusetts, and New England. To learn more, visit <http://maps.bpl.org/>.

About CAOIMHGHIN Ó FRAITHILE

Caoimhghin Ó Fraithile is a visual artist who makes large scale temporary, site specific works that reflect the transient nature of the world, humanity, and our place within nature. This is the first time Caoimhghin has created site specific temporary work in Boston. He received a BA in Fine Arts at the Limerick College of Arts and Design and earned a MFA at the University of Missouri. He has received awards from Culture Ireland (2016, 2013, 2012, 2011), awards from Ealian (2014, 2012, 2010), and a project award in 209 from the Irish Arts Council. In 2005, he received an award from the Pollack-Krasner Foundation. To learn more about Caoimhghin and to view his work, visit: <http://cof-art.com/>

About BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

Boston Public Library has a Central Library, twenty-four branches, map center, business library, and a website filled with digital content and services. Established in 1848, the Boston Public Library has pioneered public library service in America. It was the first large free municipal library in the United States, the first public library to lend books, the first to have a branch library, and the first to have a children's room. Each year, the Boston Public Library hosts thousands of programs and serves millions of people. All of its programs and exhibitions are free and open to the public. At the Boston Public Library, books are just the beginning. To learn more, visit bpl.org.

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