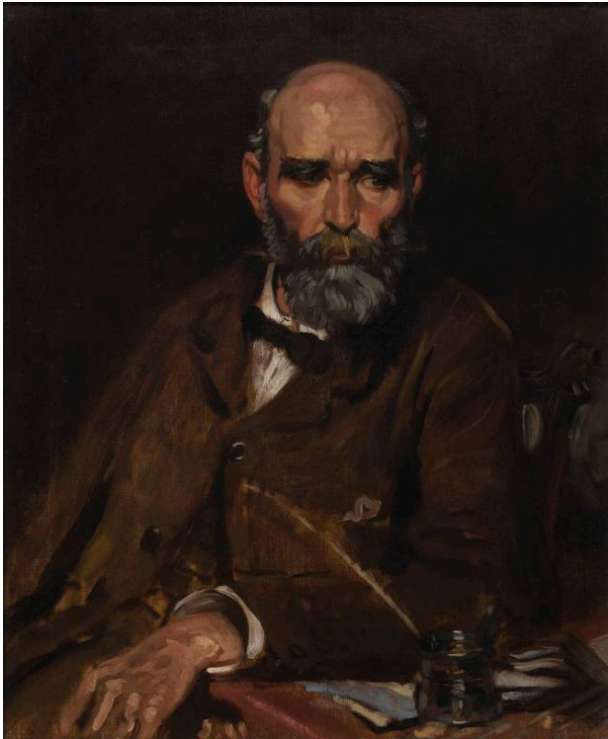


Basic Detail Report



Michael Davitt, M.P.

Date

1905

Primary Maker

Sir William Orpen

Medium

Oil on canvas

Dimensions

74.9 x 62.2 cm

Description

This portrait by Orpen shows Michael Davitt (1846-1906) sitting with his left arm resting on the side of a table wearing a dark brown jacket. There is an inkwell with a quill in it and paper lying on the table. Davitt glares

earnestly out towards the viewer. Michael Davitt was born in County Mayo. In 1852, after being evicted from their farm, his family emigrated to Lancashire where Davitt was employed as a child labourer. He lost his right arm in a factory accident at the age of nine. Orpen refers to this fact by showing the right arm of Davitt's jacket limply hanging by his side. In 1865 Davitt joined the Fenian movement and, in 1868, he became Secretary of the Irish Republican Brotherhood and an armaments agent in England. In 1870 Davitt was arrested for smuggling guns to Ireland and sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment. On his release in 1878 Davitt gave lecture tours in England, Ireland and in America. In 1879 he founded the National Land League with Charles Stewart Parnell. He was imprisoned again in 1881 in Portland Prison. While imprisoned he was elected an MP for County Meath but his election was declared void due to his imprisonment. He was released in 1882 and published 'The Prison Life of Michael Davitt'. Davitt was elected MP for South Mayo in 1895 and in 1898 he, together with William O'Brien, founded the United Ireland League. In 1899, Davitt resigned his parliamentary seat over the Boer War. In 1903 he visited Russia and in 1904 he published 'The Fall of Feudalism'. Davitt helped found the English Labour Party with Kerr Hardie in 1905. In 1901 Hugh Lane became fired with the idea of creating a modern art gallery in Dublin and he commissioned John Butler Yeats to paint a series of portraits of distinguished Irishmen and later Sir William Orpen continued the task adding portraits including this one. All of Orpen's portraits commissioned by Lane were presented to the Gallery.