

Robert Ballagh

Born: Dublin, Ireland on 22 September 1943

Died: Irrelevant

Robert Ballagh grew up in Ballsbridge, as an only child to his Catholic mother, Nancy, and Presbyterian father, Robert.

Before making art his career, Ballagh spent 3 years as a musician. He never completed an art related education. Instead he was hired by his friend Micheal Farrel, who had returned from the New York art scene, and took him on as an apprentice for his newest mural commission.

Because Ballagh was largely self taught, his earlier work take inspiration from the pop art movement, he did several painting series in this style. After that he worked more with political themes, mostly connected to Northern Ireland, but also global issues.

He furthermore started to work on portraiture with Irish contemporary art collector Gordon Lambert in 1971. You can see this skill be used in his later works a lot more.

The work he's most known for now, even if many may not know his name, are his designed collection of 70 Irish postage stamps as well as his series of Irish banknotes, "Series C", which was the final series of authentic Irish notes before the introduction of the euro. His depictions of figures from Irish history became so famed, that they became the main images people associate with these historical figures. The intricate designs make you stop and think about the beauty of small artworks like these. One's we see so much, but never really stop to admire.



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His depictions of figures from Irish history, became so famed, that they became the main images people associate with these historically important characters. For example, on the old Irish 10 pounds, he depicts James Joyce, a famous Irish writer, smiling and with his eyes wide open, something Joyce rarely did, but is now remembered by.

Looking at his designs on these banknotes has had me looking out more for small pieces of art that are all around the place, as standardised as they may be, they're still influential and worth appreciating.

¹ Central Bank of Ireland, “Series C 1990s–2000s Irish Banknotes,” accessed June 9, 2026, [Central Bank of Ireland](#).

² Holly Brown, "Robert Ballagh and Pop Art as a Medium for Politics," *Radius*, December 1, 2016, [https://universitytimes.ie/2016/12/robert-brallagh-and-pop-art-as-a-medium-for-politics/].

