

## **“The Ruins of O'Connell Street, 1916”**

**Painting by Edmond Delrenne.**

**National Gallery of Ireland Collection**

### **Senior Cycle Lessons**

Edmond Delrenne was a Belgian artist who came to Ireland to flee the war that was taking place in his own country. This drawing, “The ruins of O’Connell Street, 1916” was produced by a non-Irish national who had fled one war only to stumble upon another.

Paintings/drawings of this kind that were produced on site documenting the Rising are extremely rare. Delrenne observed the Rising as a spectator. He was so close to the fighting that a man standing in a doorway was shot dead by a stray bullet.

Look at the painting and read the introduction to Delrenne and his drawing.

### **Questions and Activities**

1. When did Delrenne arrive in Ireland?
2. He shows that the facade of the GPO was intact. What does this mean?
3. What was the immediate cause of the destruction to the buildings opposite the GPO?
4. A green flag (not a tricolour) flies over the GPO. Would the British military have allowed a flag to fly here after the Rising? Why did Delrenne include it in the drawing?
5. Can you suggest a reason why the GPO and Nelson’s Pillar are coloured as grey while the damaged buildings in the foreground are shown in brighter colours?
6. Based on your interpretation of the drawing, would you say that the artist was sympathetic, hostile or neutral in his feelings towards the rebels who fought during the Easter Rising? Give reasons for your answer.

### **Activity**

During the First World War, the cheap availability of the camera meant that the public and the military did not depend on drawings or paintings to inform people about the war.

Look at the postcard images in the section on “O’Connell Bridge and street, 1916”. Why do historians use photographs more often than paintings to gain an understanding of what happened in Dublin during the 1916 Rising?

### **Activity**

This [Photograph https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/u/0/asset-viewer/general-post-office-g-p-o-%C2%A0from-abbey-street/qwE8jTrAgGliWg?projectId=easter-rising-1916](https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/u/0/asset-viewer/general-post-office-g-p-o-%C2%A0from-abbey-street/qwE8jTrAgGliWg?projectId=easter-rising-1916) of the GPO, taken by Thomas Johnson Westropp after the Rising, shows a similar perspective to that of Delrenne’s drawing. Use the magnifying feature (the + sign on the left) to examine the photograph in detail.

Identify various activities that took place after the Rising that do not appear in Delrenne's drawing.

Why do you think that Delrenne decided to leave out these details?

### Activity

The green 'Irish Republic' flag was flown above the GPO over the Prince's Street corner, and it can be seen in Delrenne's drawing. Go to the Scoilnet website on the [Irish Flag www.scoilnet.ie/irishflag](http://www.scoilnet.ie/irishflag) where you will find evidence about the use of the tricolour and the green flag at the GPO during the Rising. [Eamon Bulfin's statement https://www.scoilnet.ie/irishflag/post-primary/stories/stories/eamon-bulfin-on-the-green-bannerette/](https://www.scoilnet.ie/irishflag/post-primary/stories/stories/eamon-bulfin-on-the-green-bannerette/) of the raising of the green 'Irish Republic' flag and the tricolour are included. Look also for the section on Gearoid O'Sullivan, who raised the [tricolour https://www.scoilnet.ie/irishflag/post-primary/stories/stories/osullivans-role-in-raising-the-tricolour/](https://www.scoilnet.ie/irishflag/post-primary/stories/stories/osullivans-role-in-raising-the-tricolour/) over the GPO.

### Activity

Delrenne, as an artist, is conveying a personal truth about war than cannot be conveyed through a photograph of an event or a scene. Delrenne, by focusing on the physical devastation, hides the human cost of the fighting that took place. Unlike many war pictures, there are no soldiers or military objects included. This bleak urban landscape is the result of five days of brutal battle in a modern city. Urban warfare did not allow artists to focus on the cavalry charges, or other important episodes that concentrated on the soldier.

Delrenne's decision not to include a human element in his drawing is partly explained by a French writer, Robert de la Sizeranne. He wrote during the First World War that modern battles were of great use for writers, psychologists, poets, and playwrights, but of "no use whatsoever to painters", because so much of the action in a modern war was invisible. Artists often talk about the power of abstraction.

Are there any elements here that have a symbolic importance, in your view?

**Written by Pat Callan**