

PAINTING IN IRELAND: LATE 19TH CENTURY AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY

Throughout the 18th and early 19th century, most Irish artists looked towards England for their training and tended to follow the same career path as British artists. This was to change greatly, however, in the late 19th century when an increasing number of young Irish students went to France instead, where they came under the influence of leading artists and movements of the time.

France

Nathaniel Hone was the first artist to go to Paris in 1853 and others followed his example until it became the established pattern for young artists to study in Paris, Antwerp or Brittany. Some attended the official *École des Beaux-Arts*, but most attended private studios, or *ateliers*.

Plein air painting

Their real education came during the summer months, when they left their studios to join with other nationalities in the great passion of the day, painting from nature out of doors (*en plein air*) in groups of artists working in the village of Barbizon or in Brittany. Painting in the sunshine, colour and brightness of France, their work was transformed, and although small in scale these images of woodlands, farmyards, marketplaces and harbours have a strong feeling of intimacy. The village people of Brittany in their distinctive costumes was a favourite theme, with young girls in white bonnets and children in colourful caps and aprons adding particular flavour and richness to the landscape. The work was largely based on Realism, one of the movements popular at the time, but later Walter Osborne, Roderic O'Connor and William Leech, among others, produced some splendid work in the Impressionist style.

Artists

Nathaniel Hone (1831–1917)

Nathaniel Hone was a member of an artistic family and grand-nephew of the 18th-century painter of the same name. He trained as an engineer but gave this up to study art in Paris. Most of his paintings are landscapes, often enlivened with animals and occasionally with figures. In France he came under the influence of the painter Gustav Courbet and the new Realism movement, but his closest links were with Camille Corot and the Barbizon school of landscape painting. Here he learned to appreciate colour and tone in the landscape and apply it in strong, confident brushwork to the painting of Irish subjects on his return. One of his finest pieces is *Pastures at Malahide* (fig 1), with cows quietly grazing



FIG 1 PASTURES AT MALAHIDE, by Nathaniel Hone, photo © National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

against a low horizon. The atmosphere is typically Irish as the white rainclouds suggest the coming of rain, yet the mood in the painting is one of peace and tranquillity.

Walter Osborne (1859–1903)

Because of his death at a young age, Walter Osborne has been somewhat overlooked as a painter outside of Ireland. The son of a Dublin painter in whose studio he spent some time, he won a scholarship to study in Antwerp. On completion of his studies he went to Brittany with some friends, making contacts with other artists and absorbing all kinds of influences.

One of his best-known early paintings is *Apple Gathering, Quimperlé* (fig 2). The landscape is confidently handled and it shows his natural sympathy for children, but the figures still retain a certain awkwardness.

Returning from France, he spent some time in England where, under the influence of French *plein air* painting, he worked in small rural communities. He probably

returned to Ireland for family reasons after his sister, Violet, died while giving birth in Canada. The child, also called Violet, returned to her grandparents in Dublin. This undoubtedly placed a certain responsibility on the artist because his parents were quite elderly and not in full health.

This new lifestyle soon began to influence his work and he painted his niece and her friends as well as portraits of his friends' children on many occasions. One of his most charming watercolours is *The Doll's School* (fig 3), in which the little girl is sitting on her bed playing with her dolls.



FIG 3 THE DOLL'S SCHOOL, by Walter Osborne, photo © National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin



FIG 2 APPLE GATHERING, QUIMPERLÉ, by Walter Osborne, photo © National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

The influence of French Impressionist painters Renoir and Monet can be seen in the loosely handled brushwork and coloured light and shade in many of Osborne's paintings.

His superb scene *In a Dublin Park, Light and Shade* (fig 4) is a masterpiece of character studies. A woman looking exhausted and ill with a baby on her knee and her young boy by her side sits on a park bench next to two older men, one of whose head is bowed in sleep. The figures represent the story of life from babyhood to old age, but the artist has managed to convey this without sentimentality as well as capturing the atmosphere of the dirty city of Dublin on an autumn evening with the dappled light falling on the group through the trees.



FIG 4 IN A DUBLIN PARK, LIGHT AND SHADE, by Walter Osborne, photo © National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

Walter Osborne was a well-known and loved figure in Dublin society, but unfortunately, at the height of his powers as a painter and probably on the brink of some greater achievements, he died suddenly of pneumonia in April 1903 at the age of 43.

Roderic O’Conor (1860–1940)

Roderic O’Conor left Ireland as a young man and spent most of his life in France. He never really associated with Irish artists there and it seems he only exhibited once among them, with the result that he was virtually forgotten in Ireland until quite recently. However, he is one of the most interesting Irish artists. Born in Co. Roscommon to the well-known O’Conor family of the area, he studied in Dublin and Antwerp but soon went to Paris, where he quickly found a new direction and developed a style of strong, loose, Impressionist brushwork and bright colours that capture the heat and glare of the sunny French countryside. His subject matter included landscapes, figure painting and still lifes with no aspect dominating.

O’Conor’s name has long been recognised for his association with the French artist Paul Gauguin, but Van Gogh also had a considerable influence on him.

O’Conor and Paul Gauguin

O’Conor joined a community of artists that had established itself around Paul Gauguin in Pont Aven in Brittany. Gauguin had already left for his first trip to Tahiti, but the spirit he created in the group remained, and when the artist returned the following year the two became friends. Although he was deeply impressed by Gauguin, O’Conor’s work remained unique and independent and is more comparable to a group of artists working in France known as Les Fauves.

The Farm at Lezaven

One of his best-known works from Pont Aven is *The Farm at Lezaven, Finistère* (fig 5) featuring a sunlit farmhouse, where the studio shared by some of the artists is glimpsed against a glowing sky through dark trees. The field and wild flowers are painted in harmonious reds, greens, pinks, violets and oranges. The picture creates a sense of pattern, with the dark green and purple uprights of the trees breaking the bright horizontal shapes of the pink and purple flowers and layers of greens in the undergrowth.

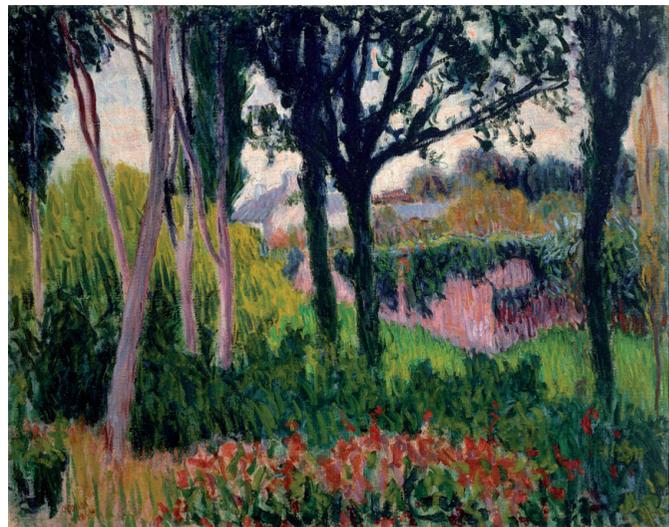


FIG 5 THE FARM AT LEZAVEN, FINISTÈRE, by Roderic O’Conor, photo © National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

Influenced by Van Gogh

O’Conor was one of the first foreign artists to appreciate van Gogh’s work. Using pure colours and influenced by van Gogh, he was at his most expressive in his landscapes and particularly his seascapes, using thick

paint and a striped application of paint in a strong and exaggerated fashion.

Portraits of Breton peasants

O'Connor painted a series of portraits of Breton women in traditional costume. Stripes of colour also feature prominently in many of these, as seen in *Bretonne* (fig 6), a portrait of a young girl with head raised and tilted to one side. Some would say she has a haughty expression as she stares bluntly at the viewer in an unblinking stare, but there is also an innocence in this gesture. It is as if she holds the pose patiently and waits while the artist paints the dark shadow on the near side of her cheek and neck in stripes of bright reds and greens to contrast with the sunny yellow light on her face and clothing.

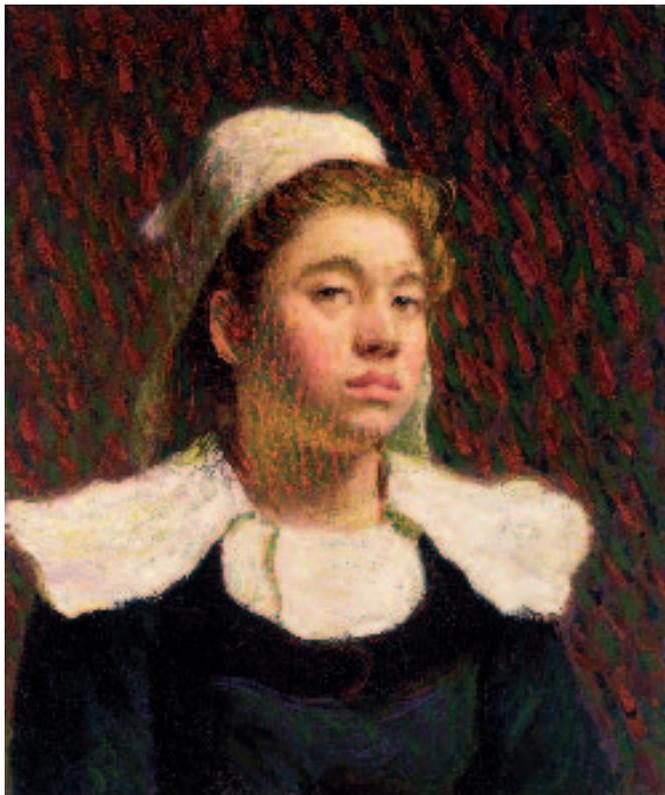


FIG 6 BRETONNE, by Roderic O'Connor, photo © National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

A gentler, more sensitive portrait is that of *La Jeune Bretonne* (fig 7). In this quiet and contemplative work, the model's hands are clasped in front of her as she gazes into a glow of light. One side is strongly

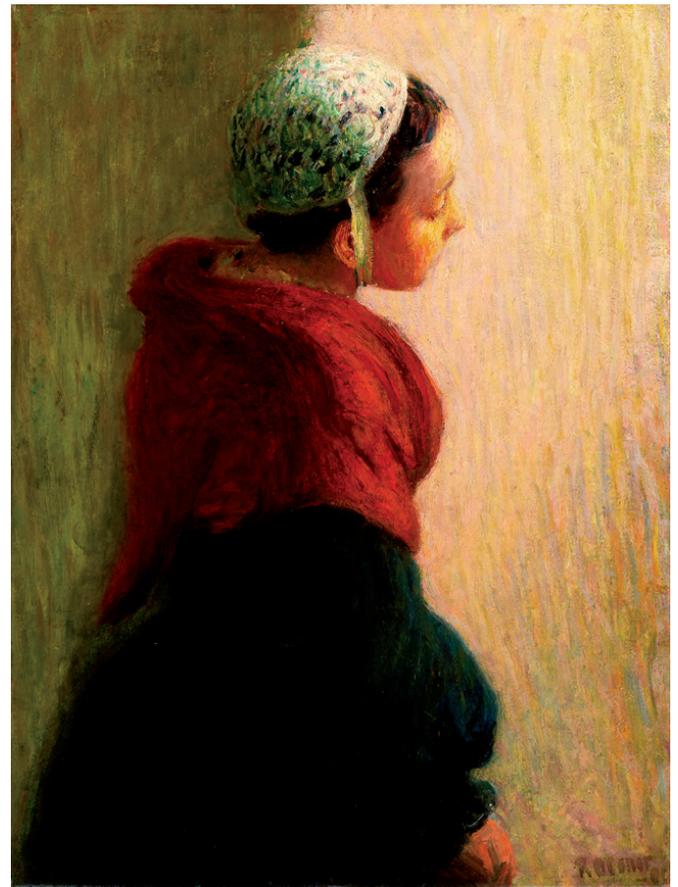


FIG 7 LA JEUNE BRETONNE, by Roderic O'Connor, photo © National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

illuminated and soft reds and golds contrast with the blues of the shadow, while soft brushstrokes contribute to the peaceful atmosphere.

Later life

Throughout the early 20th century, O'Connor maintained his independence from any group or movement and for some years he did not exhibit although he painted continuously. Because of his family connections in Ireland he never had to worry about money, having private means. In his later years he married a much younger woman, had a studio in the south of France and had one exhibition in 1937. He died in 1940.

Sir John Lavery (1856–1941)

Towards the turn of the 20th century, an Irish painter was one of the most famous celebrity portrait painters in London. Sir John Lavery received huge patronage from the British establishment and he and his beautiful wife,

Hazel, were one of the most famous couples in London society.

Born in Belfast, Lavery moved to Scotland after he was orphaned as a child and later studied in Glasgow. Like most Irish artists, he spent some time in France, where he absorbed the ideas and methods of the Impressionists and painted out of doors (*en plein air*).

Portrait of the Queen

He returned to Glasgow in 1888 and shortly after was given the commission of painting the state visit of Queen Victoria to the Glasgow International Exhibition. This was the turning point for him and it launched his career as a society painter. He moved to London soon after, where he set up a portrait studio.

Portraits

As well as painting many figures from the British establishment, Lavery also painted Irish figures. He always saw himself as an Irish painter and a recorder of events, so he became more involved with Irish politics in 1921, during the Anglo-Irish negotiations over the Irish Treaty. He painted many portraits of the members of the Irish delegation and even the Irish Republican leader Michael Collins after his death as he lay in state (fig 8).



Fig 8 LOVE OF IRELAND, by Sir John Lavery, photo © Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane

Hazel

Lavery is perhaps best known for his numerous portrayals of Hazel. Lavery's first wife, Kathleen, died and in 1909 he married Hazel Martyn, a young widow from Chicago. Lavery was captivated by her beauty and she became his muse, appearing in over 400 of his paintings (fig 9, fig 10). After the establishment of Irish independence, the Irish Free State government asked Lavery to design the new banknotes. He included a



Fig 9 MRS LAVERY SKETCHING, by Sir John Lavery, photo © Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane



FIG 10 THE ARTIST'S STUDIO: LADY HAZEL LAVERY WITH HER DAUGHTER ALICE AND STEP-DAUGHTER EILEEN, by Sir John Lavery, photo © National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

portrait of his wife as Kathleen Ní Houlihan, the figure that represents Ireland as a woman, and it remained the image on the notes until the 1970s (fig 11).

Lavery presented a large collection of his work to the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery (now the Ulster Museum) and after Hazel's death in 1935 he also presented work to the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art (now called Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane). He died in Kilkenny at the age of 84.

William Orpen (1878–1931)

William Orpen was one of Ireland's most influential and best-known painters of the late 19th century. As a teacher in the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin, he was quite an overpowering personality and his pupils found it difficult to progress beyond his style, but he moulded a whole generation of students, many of whom became successful painters in their own right.

He began his own training in the Metropolitan School of Art at the age of 11 in 1890 and remained there until 1897, when he went to the Slade in London, where his talent was developed under the direction of Henry Tonks. These years in London were very successful for Orpen and a time when he got to know many people who were later to become important names in London's art establishment. His early pictures are mainly interiors based on the realistic Dutch tradition. One of his favourite devices of the period is a convex mirror similar to that seen in *The Arnolfini Marriage* (see Chapter 31,

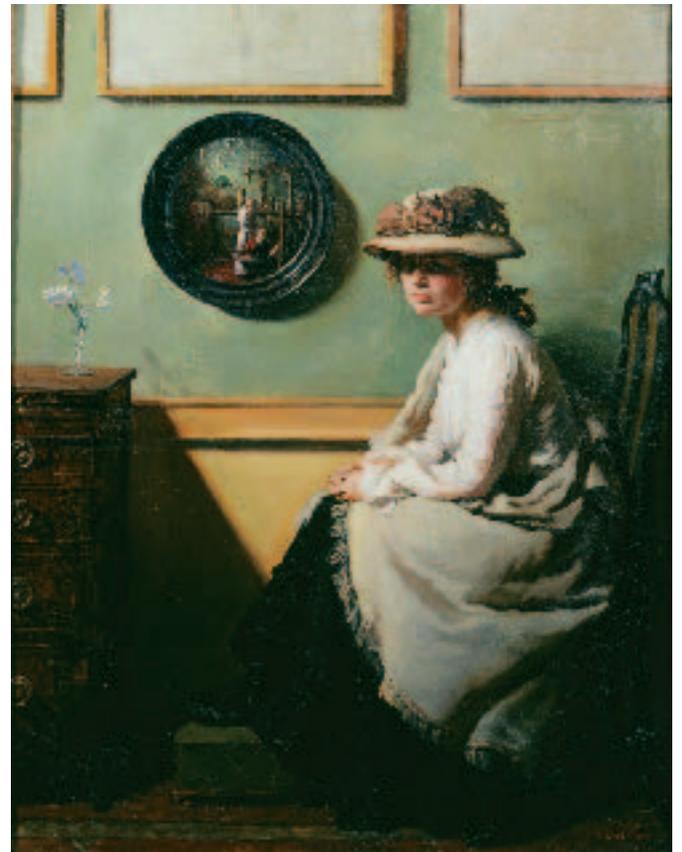


FIG 12 THE MIRROR, by William Orpen, photo © The Tate Gallery, London



FIG 11 Five pound note showing Lady Lavery, © Alamy

fig 31.3). In *The Mirror* (fig 12), he uses the mirror to reflect the artist in the painting, while the use of panelling has clear echoes of Velasquez's painting, *Las Meninas*. He also borrowed the idea of the pose of the figure from Whistler's painting of his mother.

Lottie Stafford

During his time in London William Orpen used his washerwoman, Lottie Stafford, as his model. He described her as having a 'wonderful swan-like neck' and she featured in one his greatest masterpieces, *The Wash House* (fig 13).

During the same period he produced a number of self-portraits and although he always used to joke about his own appearance it seems he was in fact quite attractive. Among his self-portraits is a very accomplished oil sketch made at about age 13.



FIG 13 THE WASH HOUSE, by William Orpen, photo © National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

Plein air painting

Unlike many of his fellow countrymen, Orpen did not study abroad but he did travel extensively in Europe and developed a *plein air* style of his own. Some of his finest painting comes from the summers spent at Howth Head during the time he was teaching in the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin between 1908 and 1912. He painted his wife, Grace, on several occasions and in *A Summer Afternoon* she stands on a hilltop gazing dreamily out to sea as the bright sunlight creates glistening pinks and yellows in the shadows of her white dress.

War artist

At the start of the Great War, Orpen was working in England as a fashionable society portrait painter but left this to become an official war artist. Some very interesting drawings and paintings from that time are found at the Imperial War Museum in London (go to www.iwm.org.uk and search for William Orpen).

He also met and fell in love with a young woman called Yvonne Aubicq during the First World War and made several paintings of her. The first were wartime propaganda works, but a nude painting made after the war of her called *Early Morning*, now in a private collection in Australia is one of his finest pieces.

Nude figures

Throughout his life Orpen painted many beautiful nude figures but he was always conscious of representing the character and feelings of the women he used as models, many of whom were also his mistresses. One of the greatest of these called *Reclining Nude*, hangs in Leeds City Art Gallery and another called *Sunlight*, can be seen in the National Gallery in Dublin. It shows the model pulling on her stockings against a background of dappled sunlight with a painting by Monet on the wall.

Portraits

After the war he rarely returned to Ireland, but the experience of the war had disturbed him badly and heavy drinking was creating a problem in his life. However, throughout the 1920s he earned fantastic money from this work, with the amount rising steadily each year until, in 1929, it reached a staggering £54,800, the equivalent of nearly €3 million today.

Famous personalities

Some of his best work was exhibited at the Royal Academy London and although it often featured personalities from chic London society of the time, these portraits also showed considerable psychological insight into the character of some world-renowned sitters. One of his most extraordinary accomplishments was the huge painting that included numerous portraits of world leaders in the Signing of Peace in 1919 after the Great War in the Hall of Mirrors, Versailles, but he also painted Edward, Prince of Wales, Winston Churchill and the famous Irish singer John McCormack, whose spell-binding voice made him famous in his own time but is even today regarded as one of the world's finest lyric tenors.

Portrait of John McCormack

This painting, bought by the National Gallery of Ireland in 2009, shows the singer in a crumpled white suit and open shirt collar set against a plain monochrome (one colour) background, a format Orpen used for many of his portraits of single sitters (fig 14). By all accounts artist and sitter had tried out several different modes of dress, including formal evening dress, but all proved unsatisfactory until one afternoon in the summer of 1923, John came in from the tennis court, picked up a piece of music and went to the piano. Orpen decided then and there to paint him in tennis togs with the music in his hand.

In spite of this informality the portrait reflects John McCormack's huge international reputation as he sits with his thumb tucked into the belt of his trousers and



FIG 14 PORTRAIT OF COUNT JOHN McCORMACK, by William Orpen, photo © National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

the red badge on his lapel indicating the recent award of the *Legion d'Honneur*. He looks relaxed and comfortable with the painter with whom he apparently enjoyed discussing politics.

Last works

During the last 10 years of his life William Orpen published a memoir of the First World War that had such a profound effect on him, called *Onlookers in France*. He died in 1931 and despite his declining health he remained a true professional. The standard of his work did not falter and his last portraits are as fine as any of his work.

Paul Henry (1876–1958)

Landscape painting was a particular feature of Irish painting in the late 19th century and right through the 20th century up to the 1950s. The west of Ireland, with its spectacular scenery, was very popular with artists and although their style and approach varied considerably,

most were influenced by the work of Paul Henry to some extent, so much so that this artist could be called the founder of modern Irish landscape painting.

Paul Henry was born in Belfast in 1876. He studied in Paris and worked in England, but he was most influenced by his years spent on Achill Island. In 1910 he went to Achill for a two-week holiday with his wife, Grace, also an artist, but ended up remaining there for nine years.

The landscape of the west was to dominate the subject matter of his painting for the rest of his career. Its success was due to the simplicity with which he depicted its rugged beauty using a very limited colour range (fig 15).

He developed a unique style using dramatic contrasts to hold the viewer's attention. Henry managed to convey the light of this part of Ireland in a way that no other artist has managed before or since. Brooding cloud formations rolling in from the Atlantic held a fascination for him and his skill in capturing them at great speed before they were swept from sight showed his skill.

William Leech (1881–1968)

William John Leech always considered himself an Irish painter, although his parents' move to London meant he had less connection with and probably rarely visited Ireland in his mature years. He was born in Dublin as a member of an established Anglo-Irish family who supported his ambition to be a painter. He studied at the Royal Hibernian Academy School where Walter Osborne was a visiting teacher, who, according to Leech, 'had enthusiasm and could teach'. He studied in Paris but said himself that all he had to do was continue what Osborne had taught him.

Brittany

In 1903 he moved to Brittany, which was to have an important effect on his career. The old walled town of Concarneau, with its harbour and fishing boats, completely absorbed him and the colourful markets and local costumes prompted much of his work.



FIG 15a–c Three landscapes by Paul Henry (from top to bottom) KILLARY BAY, CONNEMARA, © The Artist, photo © Bonhams, London, UK, The Bridgeman Art Library PEAT STACKS, Paul Henry, © The Artist, photo © Bonhams, London, UK, The Bridgeman Art Library IN CONNEMARA, © The Artist, photo © The Fine Art Society, London, UK, The Bridgeman Art Library



FIG 16 A CONVENT GARDEN, BRITTANY, by William Leech, photo © National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

His wife as his model

In Brittany he met and married Elizabeth Saurin Kerlin, a young American-born artist with a similar style of painting to his own. She was the model for one of his best-known works, *A Convent Garden, Brittany* (fig 16), which depicts a young nun in the traditional Breton wedding costume walking in a sunlit garden. The variety of colour in both the white costume and the tall lilies that contrast so dramatically with the green and yellow foliage are a particular feature of this work.

His wife is also the model in another of his fine paintings, *The Sunshade* (fig 17), but the couple separated after two years of marriage.

The war years

In 1917 Leech went to the south of France with a friend, where he painted a number of cactus plants and aloes. He was drafted in 1918 and spent the last months of the war in a detention camp. After the war he returned to his



FIG 17 THE SUNSHADE, by William Leech, photo © National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin



FIG 18 AU CINQUIME, PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST'S WIFE, by William Leech, photo © National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

parents' home in London, depressed and penniless, but turned to portraiture to get himself painting again. Through this he met May Bottrell, with whom he began a lasting relationship, painting her many times. In 1940 he painted her posing against the window of their flat in London and described it as 'one of my best things' (fig 18).

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)

Jack B. Yeats, Ireland's foremost painter of the 20th century, came from an artistic background. His father, John Butler Yeats, was a portrait painter and his brother, William Butler Yeats, became one of Ireland's best-known and loved poets. Jack Yeats always distinctively signed his name Jack B. Yeats to avoid confusion with his father, but to this day one is still mistaken for the other.

Childhood in Sligo

The youngest of the six Yeats children, only four of whom survived childhood, Jack spent most of his childhood apart from his parents, brother and sisters with his grandparents at his mother's home in Sligo. This gave him independence and he enjoyed the company of his practical Pollexfen relations, who were respected businessmen in town. The atmosphere of the west, with its rugged coastline, mist, rain, constantly changing weather conditions, space and colour, were to enrich and inspire his work. He said, 'A true painter must be part of the land and the life he paints.'

Work as an illustrator

Like the other members of his family, he drew constantly from a young age and when he rejoined the family in London his talent for comic humour greatly amused them. He attended various art schools but none were as valuable an experience as working as a magazine illustrator, from which he earned his own living from the age of 17.

Fairs, circuses and streets

European art developments were of little or no influence on him. Travelling around Ireland he observed horse races, country fairs, travelling circuses and the streets of Dublin. This satisfied him and was reflected in a style of art that was deeply personal and not easily defined. For a while he came close to Expressionism, but this was to later develop into the strong and dramatic painting for which he has become famous.

Worked from memory and sketches of his youth

He drew heavily from memories and sketches of his youth and the smallest incident could result in dramatic possibilities. He was essentially a painter of inner vision and poetry, capturing a world of landscape and memory that was half-imaginary, half-fact, caught between reality and fantasy.

The Liffey Swim (see Chapter 1, fig 1.6) captures the intensity and excitement of this annual event in Dublin with long, fluid brushstrokes that follow the flow of the river and create a feeling of speed. The crowd leans forward, one over the other, each one straining to see the action, with the passengers from the top of the tram adding a final tier to the crowd. The direction of the surging crowd points our attention to the powerful motion of the swimmer, involving us as viewers in the spectacle.

Dramatic changes in style

Sporting events were always of interest to him, but Jack B. Yeats's painting was to erupt in a dramatic manner. His work changed around 1916 and his mature work shows a deeper understanding of light and colour and a gradual loosening of the brushwork. Emotion was now the dominant feature of his work, but he did not discuss its meaning and was often amused at the various interpretations by critics. He felt that the paintings could speak for themselves. He said, 'It doesn't matter who I am or what I am. People may think what they will of my

pictures.’ From about 1940 he painted incessantly until 1955, when he was 84.

Prolific output

The 1940s, his most prolific period, produced up to 100 paintings a year. These were larger in scale and more expressive than before with a deeply personal significance as he relied more and more on memory.



FIG 19 MANY FERRIES, by Jack B. Yeats, photo © National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

Many Ferries (fig 19) is based on an incident from 1905 when Yeats and his friend, the writer J.B. Synge, were in Connemara. This narrative painting is based on a minor event about which Synge later wrote when they visited Dinnish Island. This could only be reached by boat and the boatman showed them a fine view of all the islands as he told his sad story of the death of his young wife, leaving him with a large family to rear. The picture is painted in deep blues and greens that contrast with the yellows of the westward view fading into the gleam of the distant horizon.

Love of horses

Yeats was never a horseman himself, but he had a great affection for them and they feature prominently in his work. *For the Road* (see Chapter 1, fig 1.8) expresses the understanding between horse and rider and the light of hope and optimism at the end of the tunnel. At the call, the horse runs through a tunnel of trees towards the

distant rider who stands in a pool of yellow light at the end of the wood. Painted in slabs of white and green, the horse has a transparent, dreamlike appearance.

Death of his wife

In 1947, after 53 years of happy marriage, his wife, Cottie, a fellow art student of his youth, died. The couple never had any children but Cottie had been his most loyal supporter, always convinced that her husband was a man of genius.

Expression of emotion

For some time Yeats was unable to paint, but he gradually came to terms with his loss and worked his emotion into his art. Having lived through two wars and one of Ireland’s most troubled periods in history, he painted one of his most moving pictures. *Grief* (see Chapter 1, fig 1.7) is one of Yeats’s most passionate paintings and a work of profound emotion. With simple but powerful imagery, it conveys the artist’s detestation and total rejection of war. Nothing in the painting is clearly defined, but a figure on horseback with a masklike face brandishing a weapon emerges from between two rows of houses preceded by what appears to be an angry crowd of fighting men. This large work is painted in strong blues and blood red, broken by a fiery yellow and oranges. In the foreground are the figures of an old man and a woman with a child, the victims of war swept up in the clamour and aggression of it all.

Jack B. Yeats died in March 1957 and has gained widespread international recognition.

Stained glass

Sarah Purser was a painter, but she is probably best remembered in Ireland for her associations with the stained glass movement. She and others established An Túr Gloine (‘The Glass Tower’) in 1903. As a result of her efforts, leading stained glass artists were employed to produce the most splendid stained glass in Irish churches.

Harry Clarke (1890–1931)

Harry Clarke brought a unique creative impulse to Irish stained glass and is now recognised as a genius of his time. He died of tuberculosis at 41 but worked with frenetic intensity during his short life. He was an avid reader and his work has a distinctly literary quality.

Worked in his father's studio

He learned his craft in his father's studio and then spent some time in London until severe homesickness caused him to return to Dublin in 1906. He continued to work in his father's studio and attended night classes at the School of Art. But his work in the studio demanded his full attention, particularly because it was in competition with An Túr Gloine. In 1910 he was awarded a scholarship to go to the School of Art to study stained glass, which gave him an opportunity to take part in exhibitions and competitions open only to day students. In 1912 he submitted six pieces for the national competition in south Kensington and won the only gold medal awarded to Ireland. In the following years he won further gold medals in England and many awards in Ireland.

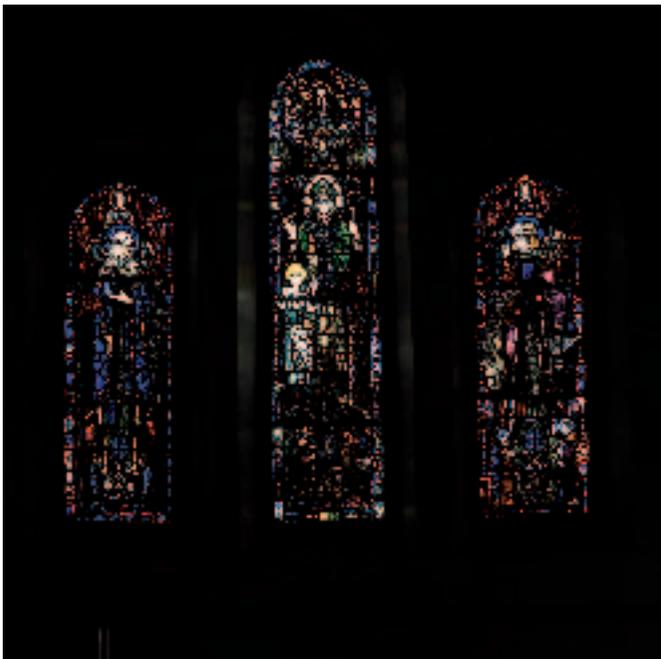


FIG 20 ST BRIGID, window by Harry Clarke, Honan Chapel, University College Cork, courtesy of the Honan Trust

At the time, most religious imagery in the glass tended to be rather vulgar and tasteless, but Clarke's work was extremely sophisticated and he was much sought after. Considering his short life, the volume of work produced under his direction was amazing.

Honan Chapel, University College Cork

Some of his finest work is found in the windows of the Honan Chapel in University College Cork, where seven panels feature the saints of Ireland. Blue was one of his favourite colours and he used this for St Brigid (fig 20), the Virgin Mary window, St Ita and St Gobnait (fig 21).

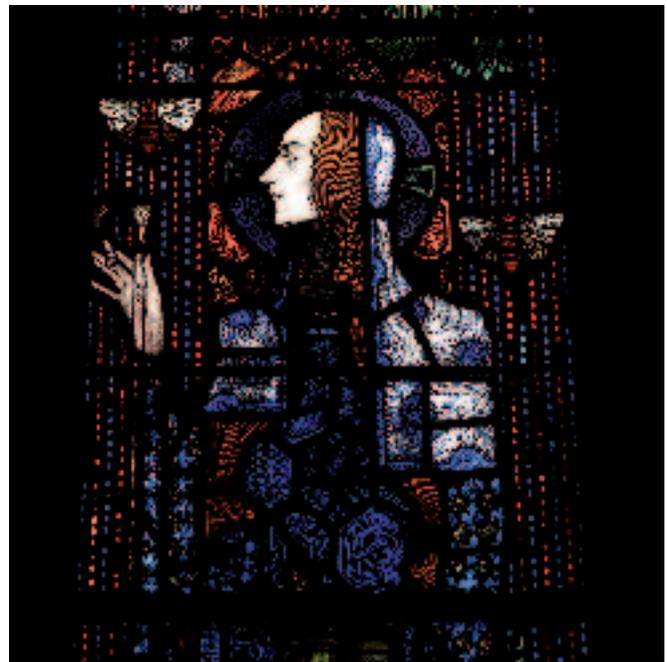


FIG 21 ST GOBNAIT, window by Harry Clarke, Honan Chapel, University College Cork, courtesy of the Honan Trust

Eve of St Agnes

The *Eve of St Agnes* window (fig 22), now in the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin, is subtle and rich in detail, with some of the panels like tiny flashing jewels. The strange elongated figures give the work an almost fairy tale-like appearance.

Commissions

Despite having poor health throughout his short life, Harry Clarke still managed to create some of the finest

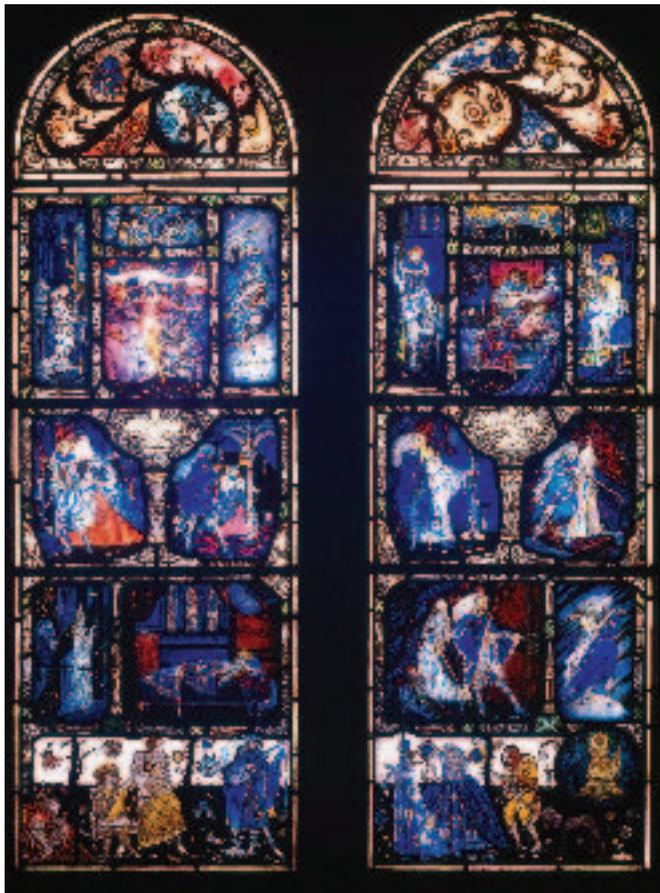


FIG 22 EVE OF ST AGNES, window by Harry Clarke, photo © Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane

work produced in the medium of stained glass in the 20th century. Commissions varied from commercial, religious and private patrons and he also produced illustrations for books that continue to fascinate and delight readers worldwide.

Contemporary Irish artists

Jack B. Yeats's painting was personal and did not follow any international style, but it had far-reaching effects nonetheless. The general direction of Irish painting after the Second World War tended towards an individual, semi-abstract, expressive mode, and even up to the 1960s there was a kind of poetic genre.

Semi-abstract styles

A shift was apparent during the 1970s and more Irish artists turned to international modes, with semi-abstract styles replaced by new and more hard-edged abstract

styles. Sculpture received a particular boost due to the building boom and industrialisation. Corporate bodies promoted sculpture with commissions for sculptures in new premises and corporations and county councils commissioned public sculptures for cities and towns around the country that were designed to be an intrinsic part of the building rather than a decorative afterthought.

Rosc exhibition

The Rosc (an Irish word meaning 'poetry of vision') exhibitions held every four years since 1967 brought international names to Dublin, making the public more art conscious and influencing a new generation of art students.

Patrick Collins (1910–94)

Patrick Collins came from Co. Sligo and studied briefly at the National College of Art and Design, Dublin before becoming a professional painter. He lived in France but returned permanently to Ireland in 1977. His paintings have been exhibited widely in Ireland and in Europe and are held in many public and private collections worldwide.

His landscape paintings directly connect to his childhood. Throughout his career, many of his subjects came from boyhood memory and focused on his remembrances of the land.

Worked in France

His work in France also echoed his memories of Ireland and France helped him to more fully understand Ireland. As he explains, 'It became a mental necessity for me to get out of Ireland ... I wanted to go on doing what I was doing, but it was too tight on my mind. I know everyone in Ireland that painted, I knew their opinions, and I wanted to get away and look at things from the outside.'

Using his experiences abroad, his work flourished on his return to Ireland in a perfect balance of colour, light, line



FIG 23 LIFFEY QUAYSIDES, by Patrick Collins, photo © National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

and composition, which allowed an essence of what he described as ‘the Celtic thing’ to fully emerge.

In 1958, he received a first prize of \$1,000 for *Liffey Quaysides* in the Irish category at the Guggenheim International, New York (fig 23).

Field of Old Stones

His paintings often depict simple things, like *Field of Old Stones* (fig 24), that may also have a deeper symbolic meaning. Likewise, *Potato Patch* is based on the



FIG 24 FIELD OF OLD STONES, by Patrick Collins, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin

agricultural landscape, but the crop holds much significance to Ireland.

Louis le Brocquy (1916–)

Louis le Brocquy has been one of the most prominent names in Irish art for over five decades. Born in Dublin in 1916, he worked in his father’s business before leaving in 1938 to become a painter. He took no formal training and instead travelled to Europe to see the work in major galleries. Spanish painting immediately captivated him and was to remain a huge influence in his work over his long career, notably in his use of grey and white, which are strong elements of Spanish painting.

When le Brocquy returned to Ireland in 1940, his work was rejected by the Royal Hibernian Academy. This controversial event spurred him on to become a founding member of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art before moving to London for the next 10 years. After his marriage to Anne Madden, a young Irish painter, in 1958, he spent some time in the south of France.

Radical changes

Over the years, le Brocquy’s art has undergone a series of radical changes. During the 1940s he painted a series of *Tinker* paintings. These small works, mostly in watercolour, pencil and pen, were outstanding in their portrayal of character. Other works from that time include *Girl in White* and *A Picnic*, which clearly shows the influence of Degas’s *Beach Scene* (see Chapter 1, fig 1.17) (go to www.anne-madden.com/LeBPages/firstworks5.html). His Grey Period during the next decade highlighted concerns about human isolation, and *A Family* (see Chapter 1, fig 1.5) relates to human circumstances in the aftermath of the war.

Living in Dublin

Today, Louis le Brocquy lives in Dublin and has had many retrospective exhibitions, both in Ireland and internationally. The first and only living artist ever to be

included in the permanent collection of the National Gallery of Ireland, he has also received many awards over the years, including the title of *Saol* in Aosdána in 1994 and the first Irish Museum of Modern Art/Glen Dimplex award for a sustained contribution to the arts in 1998.

Ancestral heads

Perhaps his best-known work is a series that evolved from work he started in 1960s called *Ancestral Heads* and *Presences*. As part of these he made studies of James Joyce's head, and in 1975, when he was commissioned to make a print from portraits of Nobel Prize winners, he chose W.B. Yeats (go to www.anne-madden.com/LeBPages/individual1.html). The result was a long series of probing images of well-known personalities, including Francis Bacon, Pablo Picasso, Samuel Beckett and, more recently, U2 singer Bono (go to www.anne-madden.com/LeBPages/individual43.html).

In 2006, Louis le Brocquy and Bono gave their permission for the use of this work in adverts as part of a campaign to market Ireland as a prime business location for US multinationals and *The Wall Street Journal* featured the image in a full-page advertisement.

16

Tony O'Malley (1913–2003)

One of Ireland's most loved painters is Tony O'Malley, who came to painting at a relatively late age and never thought of himself as an artist until he was almost middle aged. He painted in an abstract form, but abstraction for its own sake never interested him. His work could be described as more the essence of something that goes beyond appearances to express his mind.

Painting in a sanatorium

Born in Co. Kilkenny, O'Malley worked in the bank for a time after he finished school. He began painting during a long period spent recovering from TB in a sanatorium.

St Ives and Cornwall

In 1955 and 1957 he visited St Ives in Cornwall and spent these holidays working in the studio with Peter Lanyon and other artists. Some of the painters he met in Cornwall probably influenced his work, but his style never became abstract like theirs.

Influence of family and early life on his work

Some of his early work is highly influenced by his family and his father's birthplace of Clare Island, where he enjoyed spending time as a child.

Paintings of his mother

The artist's mother, Margaret O'Malley, was confined to bed for some years before she died at age 84 in 1954. He painted several pictures of her, some after her death, mostly of her sitting up in bed. The eldest of four children, he was deeply attached to his mother and her death left him depressed for some time.

Winter

Winter was often the subject of his painting and several works are entitled *Winter Silence* or *Silent Winter*. The winter of the soul, as well as the season itself, is suggested in the cold blues and greys of these paintings. He chose winter again in a lonely and evocative painting



FIG 25 HAWK AND QUARRY IN WINTER, IN MEMORY OF PETER LANYON, by Tony O'Malley, Crawford Gallery, Cork

dedicated to his friend and fellow artist, Peter Lanyon, who died in a gliding accident in 1964. O'Malley's commemoration of him, entitled *Hawk and Quarry in Winter, In Memory of Peter Lanyon* (fig 25), is a winter picture painted in cold white and dark greys. One day he noticed a hawk swooping into a quarry and it brought to mind the death of his friend. O'Malley chose to paint a place rather than a person for Lanyon, who was an abstract painter but who had a strong sense of place.

Textured painting surfaces

O'Malley developed a particular painting technique, handling materials in an individual way. In his paintings on board he often made cuts and incisions, while on others he used found objects and textured material because he could work into and use its surface, like 'ploughing a field'.

The Bahamas

In 1970 he met Jane Harris, an artist from Montreal working in St Ives, and they married in 1973. Jane's family lived in the Bahamas and they made several visits there, which resulted in a new light and colour in his work (fig 26).

In 1977 he bought a plot of land outside Callan and divided his time between the Bahamas and Ireland. His painting responded not so much to the image of both places, but to the colour and light associated with each. His Cornish and



FIG 26 EARLY MORNING BAHAMAS, by Tony O'Malley, Crawford Gallery, Cork

Irish paintings are low in tone, but his Bahamian pictures are light and airy and have a warmer colour range, often featuring butterflies and a feeling of lightness, rhythm and pattern in their bright, cheerful colours.

Since his death in 2003 at the age of 90, Tony O'Malley's stature as an artist has continued to grow and there have been several retrospective exhibitions of his work. Most of his work remains in private collections, but *Isla de Graciosa – Light Caleta del Sebo* (fig 27) is in the Irish Museum of Modern Art as well as several in the Crawford Gallery in Cork.



FIG 27 ISLA DE GRACIOSA – LIGHT CALETA DEL SEBO, by Tony O'Malley, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin

Irish artists today

The Irish art world today is varied and self-confident. Work by contemporary Irish artists can be seen in exhibitions and collections in the major galleries in the cities, but outlets for high-quality art may also be found in small towns around the country.

There are many successful artists living and working in Ireland. Among the names to feature prominently in recent years in painting, sculpture and stained glass are Robert Ballagh, Maud Cotter, Dorothy Cross, Edward Delaney, Rita Duffy, Felim Egan, Rowan Gillespie, Alice Maher, Michael Quane, Vivienne Roche, James Scanlon and Sean Scully.