National College of Art and Design

Fine Art Painting

CECILY BRENNAN, THE IRISH LANDSCAPE TRADITION AND THE SUBLIME

by

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis will examine the works and concepts of the contemporary artist, Cecily Brennan. Brennan's work deals with the landscape as a starting point from which she develops her ideas and philosophies. Interviewing Cecily Brennan, she discusses her wish to disassociate herself from the Irish Landscape Tradition, and does not see her work following in the footsteps of preceding Irish landscape painters. I will examine this landscape tradition and discuss Brennan's work in relation to it, referring to her Wicklow Landscapes, Rhododendron Garden Series, and her most recent Icelandic Landscapes.

A discussion of the ideas and philosophies of the Sublime in landscape, follows this. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century Irish art, these traditional aspects of the Sublime are present in the work of George Barret and James Arthur O'Connor. I will examine such traditional ideas of the Sublime which relate to and are developed in Brennan's work, specifically her Wicklow and Iceland Landscapes. In her earlier Wicklow landscapes Brennan was less conscious of the use of Sublime aspects, however, in her Icelandic works she deliberately addresses the theoretical aspects of her work. Here too I will examine Brennan's combination of the experience of landscape with the experience of maternity and childbirth.

CHAPTER 1

Section (a)

> The importance of landscape is probably the single most important element that distinguishes Irish art from the international mainstream.
>
> (45, p.2.)

Whether or not we agree with this exaltation of landscape and the painting of it in Irish art, it is the belief shared by many who consider the Irish Landscape Tradition to be the backbone of Irish art. In this statement Frances Ruane refers to the depiction of landscape as the distinguishing factor between Irish art and the art of Europe, and more specifically, America. Indeed the close affinity of artist with landscape has been apparent throughout Irish art. Over the last two hundred years, since the latter part of the 17th century, this subject has played the greatest role in Irish painting.

From its simple beginnings in the topographical views of the late 17th century, we see the landowners' estates, their social standing and their wealth being precisely and accurately recorded.

While landscape painting has changed and developed, it still has a prominent place in contemporary Irish art. The period in which we see the greatest developments was that of the early and middle years of the twentieth century. This was a time of great change not only in respect of art but also in the country as a whole.

There was much political unrest in the country with the Easter Rising of 1916 marking the beginning of a new era of political independence. The urge for rebellion and the desire for change culminated in the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1921. Ireland was now a Free State and wished to develop its own identity away from that of Britain. It was during this period also that Irish artists began to become aware of the radical developments in art which were occurring in France and Europe with the growth of Modernism. Joan Fowler refers to the development of Modernism in an essay on twentieth century Irish art. In Europe Modernism began with the break from the ideas and principles of the established Academies, who 'upheld the out-moded classical models'. This break culminated in the opening of the Salon des Refuses in 1863, which exhibited those works already refused by the Academy Salon. It was in the Salon des Refuses that Manet exhibited his controversial work Le Dejeuner sur L'herbe, and this according to Fowler denoted the beginnings of Modernism.

The official Academy was no longer the deciding influence on what was accepted as art. Independent exhibitions were held introducing the public to the innovative and exciting works of the avant-garde artists. The whole perception of art was altered, 'the content of art was the process of art itself'.(27p.8) The artists of the Modern Movement developed their own methods and procedures as the popularity of such work grew throughout Europe.

Among those Irish artists who began to become aware of the developments in Europe was Paul Henry (1876-1958). During his early twenties Henry left Ireland for France in search of greater freedom of expression. Having studied at the Academie Julian Henry came in touch with the work of such artists as Francois Millet and James McNeill Whistler. He studied under Whistler in the Academie Carmen and the influence of both these artists would remain with Henry for the rest of his painting career. Henry was unable to adapt to the Modern French style immediately but did however admire greatly the Impressionists and Pointillists, in their approach to both colour and light.

Around 1900 Henry left France for London where he worked as an illustrator. Gradually however he returned to painting by which time the influence of Whistler was apparent especially in his depictions of the Thames, where Henry's use of charcoal and graduation of tone became more sensitive. It was during these years that Henry helped in the establishment of the Allied Artists' Association at whose exhibitions he showed works. In 1910 he returned to Ireland with his wife settling for some time on Achill Island. With his move to the West of Ireland we witness the emergence of the work for which Henry is remembered today. Here we see the legacy of his period in France, the artist living and working among the peasants as the Impressionists had done. The Potato Diggers typifies his work of this period.

1. Paul Henry, The Potato Diggers

In 1919 the Henry's moved to Dublin. It was here that Paul Henry's reputation grew. From his experience in France and contact with the Impressionist style, Henry wished to bring a greater awareness of avant-garde painting to Irish art. He helped to set up the Society of Dublin Painters in 1920 in order to enable other contemporary artists who had similar interests in avant-garde painting, to exhibit their work. Up to this the dominance of the Royal Hibernian Academy was such that non-academic painters found it difficult to exhibit. In the works of this period we see Henry's use of a limited palette using only one or two vibrant colours. At this time the shapes also become more simplified. Gradually he eliminates the human figure, in an effort to stress the peace and tranquility of the landscape. Here again we see the influence of Whistler. Henry continued in this mode, further simplifying shape, creating a flat quality and thus his compositions became more abstract. Lakeside Cottages (1923-27) is a typical work, with the white-washed cottages and turf stacks set against the mountain backdrop. These years of newfound political independence perceived the West of Ireland, with its wild untamed scenery and the simple yet hardworking existence of its people, as the true essence of Irishness. In a sense the legacy of the English which was apparent in the East was less obvious in the West, thus the West was portrayed as the true Ireland. In Henry's works of this period we get a taste of what was to become the essential image of Irishness which was promoted by the Government abroad. Ironically it was during this time,

while Henry was at the height of his career, that the quality of his work began to deteriorate, his subject matter and style of painting became repetitive and over-used.

In his discussion on Modernism in Irish art S.B. Kennedy asserts that although the concept of Modernism was slower in evolving in Ireland, in contrast to the developments which were taking place in Europe, there was, he believes, evidence of the existence of the Modern Movement alive in the works of Irish artists during the first few decades of the twentieth century. Such artists included the aforementioned Paul Henry. Referring to him Kennedy says,

> Henry never became an academic painter and his pictures are always somewhat abstract in spirit. He may be regarded as the father of the school of landscape painting which evolved in Ireland during the interwar years which so greatly contributed to the development of a distinct Irish school of Art.
>
> (36, p.71)

Henry himself was very interested in the Modernist Movement and was eager to bring an awareness of it to other Irish artists of his time. In a sense he was only Modernist in his knowledge and awareness of the new Movement, and in his desire to undermine the dominance of the purely academic outlook in such institutions as the Royal Hibernian Academy. However Henry's interest developed little unlike the Europeans who were moving towards the newer ideas of Expressionism, Cubism and Surrealism. For

him the interest in Modernism seemed to remain with the early teachings of the French schools and the first Impressionists. His depiction of the West of Ireland and its peasant life followed the example of the French and this interest never really progressed or developed further in his work.

His undertanding of Modernism remained static, never moving on to newer, more radical ideas and approaches. His paintings of the West were embroiled with the nationalist images of the time and epitomised Nationalist aspirations regarding Irishness. His images of thatched cottages and the hardworking peasant were repetitive, cliched and stereotyped. While Henry was interested in the approaches and techniques of the Modern Movement he appeared to be unable to develop fully this interest in his actual painting. Indeed the very fact that he exhibited frequently in the R.H.A. exhibitions undermines much of what Kennedy sees as Modernist in his work. In a sense he was more of an academician than a Modernist.

It is not surprising however that the Modernist ideas did not fully take hold in Ireland for this was a period of great political and social upheaval. The people were caught up with the ideas of rebellion and revolution. These ideas also affected the art world, encouraging a more nationalistic approach. This was a great obstacle for the growth and development of the Modernist approach in Irish art. For many, their work was a vehicle for their nationalist beliefs and this aspect dominated the work of this

period, obviating the adoption of international influences. Indeed it could be argued that it was the R.H.A. who encouraged these nationalist works in its regular exhibition of them. Thus we see the R.H.A. in a dominant role with many artists succumbing to its outdated academic ideals.

According to Joan Fowler

> The emergence of European Modernism is a development away from the principles and rules of the Academies of art which essentially upheld out-moded Classical models.
>
> (27, p.8)

Here we see that the strength of the avant-garde in Europe lay in its independence from or rather lack of dependence upon approval from the established institutions. 'In its insularity from institutional if not economic determinants, the modernist position (in Europe) was a position of some strength. In Ireland this kind of independence has never really developed' (27, p.8).

One of Henry's contemporaries and perhaps the only artist of the time who fully embraced the Modern approach in his work was Jack B. Yeats (1871-1957). He became one of the only international artists of the time and one of the most important Irish painters of the 20th century. Although Yeats' style changed throughout his career, his approach to picture-making and the ideas attached to his work and subject matter altered little. His earlier works featured figures painted in a manner which bordered on

caricature. These works are painted in areas of broad flat colour, which were somewhat subdued thus creating strong tonal contrasts. Emphasis on line and composition were also an important part of his early work. The characters in these works included tinkers, travellers, jockeys and Aran fishermen, enjoying fairs, race meetings and circuses. These people and events would remain as subject matter in Yeats' work for the most part of his career.

In S.B. Kennedy's Irish Art and Modernism he discusses Yeats' work between 1918 and the mid 1920's. Here he examines Yeats' recording of the events which shaped the emerging Ireland. With works like Bachelors Walk, On Drumcliffe Strand and Communicating with Prisoners, some critics perceived him as the painter of nationalist Ireland. Yeats himself however saw his work more as a record of such events, rather than an interpretation of personal political views. Although he liked the 'idea' of what Sinn Fein stood for he did not affiliate with any political party.

This was his so-called middle period when the emphasis on line 'gave way to a more malerisch technique' (36, p.27). The actual paint and its texture began to play a greater role in the work. Compositions became simplified and more basic, figures became vertical features against the horizontal emphasis of land, sea and sky. Colour too became more important. Painters who influenced Yeats included Walter Sickert, and in his use of colour we see the influence of Van Gogh and Roualt, with Ensor and Chagall influencing his style of composition.

His work from the late 1920's to the 1940's is that by which Yeats is best known today. Here we see the work taking on an expressionistic manner. Forms which are hinted at rather than clearly stated, swim in torrents of colour, unifying the figures with the landscape. Hot vivid reds and yellows hit against ice cold blues and greens. Subject matter becomes less important with images and events being recreated from memory and imagination. These works can be read as narratives, the tale or message not always immediately apparent. His interest in light and colour was fuelled by his friendship with a physics professor in U.C.D.(36,p28) who influenced his knowledge and use of primary and secondary colours and the way in which he juxtaposes complimentaries. In A Room (1935) we see evidence of this with his use of violets and yellows. In expressionistic works like A Race in Hy-Brazil, we see colour and form merge in thickly applied juicy paint, with bold brushwork and clear use of the palette knife, often squeezing the paint directly onto the canvas and moulding it with his thumbs.

In Yeats' work we see his use of imagery relating to the 'human condition'. He observed and recorded events rather than commenting or imposing ideas on them.

> His distinctiveness of concept and technique characterize his individuality and make him not easily classified with his contemporaries. (36, p.26).

2. Jack B. Yeats, <u>A Race in Hy-Brazil</u>

In retrospect Yeats was and still is, to some extent, regarded as one of the few real Modernists of twentieth century Irish art. Unlike Henry, Yeats depended less on the imagery and landscape of the West. In some of his later landscapes he creates what are often referred to as fantasy landscapes, dealing with images and experiences which were often used from memory. Yet as before Yeats remains detached from the scene in a voyeuristic manner, again working very much from an observational standpoint and avoiding personal comment on the situation depicted. Yeats was a private man who concerned himself primarily with his work and avoided the nationalist influences which were prevalent at the time. Although a private person he was nonetheless open to the influences of such international artists as Sickert, Van Gogh and Roualt, Oskar Kokoschka (whom he met in Dublin during the 1940's) and others. As a result of this contact Yeats' own interest in Modernism was strengthened and led to the changing style of his work culminating in his later more Expressionistic paintings. Unfortunately, although Yeats himself produced some of the most innovative and modern works of this period he had little influence on his contemporaries.

In discussing Modernism in Ireland, it is essential to look at the work of Mainie Jellett who strove to bring an awareness of the Modern approach to Irish art during the first half of the twentieth century. In her early years Jellett studied under Orpen and Sickert, but later she travelled with Evie Hone to France where she studied

under Adre l'Hote and Albert Gleizes. It was here that Jellett was introduced to and developed the philosophies of Cubism which would become her hallmark.

This development continued after her return to Ireland, with Jellett exhibiting regularly with the Dublin Painters' Society and the White Stag Group. Jellett was frequently misunderstood throughout her career, and her work was often ridiculed by the critics. However she continued to lecture on Modernism and on Cubism in particular and was also a founder member of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art. Her Cubist works were concerned with creating a feeling of rhythm and movement and dealt with the use of colour and form in a harmonious union. Jellett's ideas and philosophies on art were indeed Modernist in outlook. She died relatively young in 1944 and although she was dedicated to bringing an awareness of Cubism and the Modernist approach to Irish art her work was generally misunderstood and her influence remained limited.

As we have seen Modernism did exist in Ireland during the first half of the twentieth century if only to a certain extent. The ideas associated with the Modernist Movement were confined to only a small number of artists whose works were often misunderstood and rejected by both critics and the public. For artists like Paul Henry the interest in Modernism remained with the techniques and ideas of the early Impressionists, and although he wished to bring an awareness of Modernism to Irish art, his own work lacked real innovation. In relation to European developments his

work was more academic than Modern. Artists like Yeats and Jellett were indeed more radical and forward thinking in their philosophies and their work. Jellett was the only real Irish Cubist while Yeats is remembered for his later more Expressionistic works. Yet while such artists were Modernist in approach their influence on other Irish artists was minimal and limited. Modernism as it had developed in Europe would only begin to appear much later in Irish art after the 1940's and 1950's.

Section (b)

It wasn't until the 1940's that Irish art began to move away from the rules and criteria of the accepted establishments, in particular the Royal Hibernian Academy. Conflict grew between the more avant-garde groups and the R.H.A., who in its determination to retain its outmoded academic principles continued to reject works that made any attempt towards a more avant-garde approach. As a result in 1943, what may be looked upon as a variation of a Salon des Refuses was established. The first Irish Exhibition of Living Art was set up in order to provide a place, where the contemporary artists involved with the avant-garde, could exhibit their work. The aim of the exhibition was to introduce a greater sense of awareness of the avant-garde, which was apparent in the work of artists both in Ireland and abroad, and consequently hoped 'to inject some life into Irish art' (36, p.15).

With the establishment of the I.E.L.A. came the introduction of previously unknown Irish artists whose work leaned more towards Modernists ideas. It brought recognition for artists like Colin Middleton and others, who were concerned not only with their image but also with their materials and how best they reflected their own personal concerns and feelings. Such artists steered away from the now stereotyped views of the West, and instead looked at the landscape with fresher eyes and depicted it in a more abstract way. The most successful period for

the I.E.L.A. was that between the mid-1940's and the early 1950's. Perhaps the most important achievement of the exhibitions was the amount of new names that it brought to prominence.

Yet if we look at those artists who featured in these exhibitions, we realize that they were only Modernist in so far as they were non-academic. Gradually in the ensuing years the success and the novelty which the original exhibitions enjoyed, began to wane as the work exhibited became monotonous. For the most part, the more notable artists of these exhibitions, also exhibited their work in the R.H.A., thus revealing their lack of innovation. Indeed in the later years of the I.E.L.A. the exhibitions became virtually indistinguishable from those of the R.H.A.

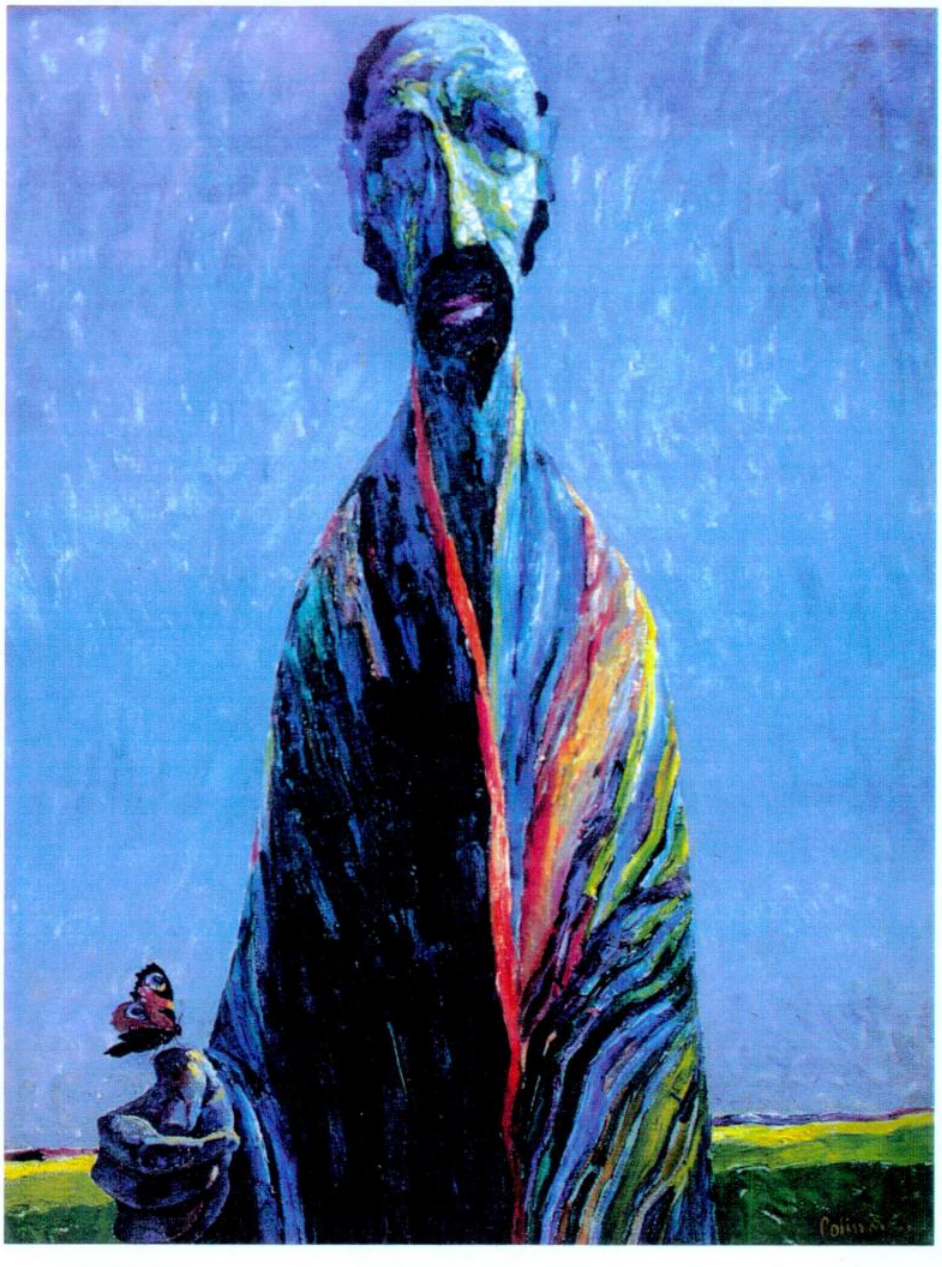
Among these was the aforementioned Northern artist, Colin Middleton (1910-1983). In his early years Middleton trained, as his father had, as a linen damask designer, accounting perhaps for his concern with materials and technique. His first great influence in art was seeing a Van Gogh in a London gallery in 1928. During his early twenties he was influenced mainly by Cubism and painted in this manner. His works following this consisted of various styles including German Expressionism, Pointillism, Cubism and perhaps most importantly, Surrealism. Surrealism he felt was 'a worldwide movement with a sense of humour'(40)

Throughout his career Middleton's work fluctuated mainly between Expressionist and Surrealist styles. It was

during the late 1930's that his first real Expressionist works appeared, with the depictions of his native Belfast streets. These works were influenced greatly by the threat of impending war in Europe. In the late 1940's and early 1950's, Middleton's Expressionistic works are composed of 'bold brushwork and emotionally evocative colour'(36,p.7). Jacob Wrestling with the Angel was a typical work of this period. Here we see Middleton's new-found interest in the Bible, with many of his works of this period containing biblical titles. But he was never a religious man in the conventional sense despite his interest in matters both religious and philosophical. He identifies in his work

> the outer environment which can sometimes produce straight forward expressionist landscapes or imaginative variations of them, and the inner domain of his own mind (40).

This Expressionist phase lasted in Middleton's work throughout the 1950's and 60's, as he uses thickly applied paint and strong primary colours. In these works there is a likeness to the later works of Yeats. For Middleton during this period, and indeed for the remainder of his career, the landscape provided the strongest source of inspiration. 'Place is everything, Place is terribly important. Places, places, places!'(29) His initial response to a particular place is instinctive and then the materials and the paint take over 'imposing its own patterns'.



3. Colin Middleton, Jacob Wrestling The Angel

> There's got to be some sort of place, particular places, holy places. Once you get there you know you're kith and kin. The stones start to talk.(45, p.2).

Middleton's Surrealist works began during the early 1930's. Here he experimented with Surrealist images which were greatly affected by the death of his first wife,

> his emotion finding its expression in a series of paintings in a somewhat surrealist manner, which achieved a movingly sombre monumentality (30).

During the early 1940's we see works which are clearly influenced by Salvador Dali on the one hand and Picasso and Miro on the other. His strongest surreal works of this period include Our Lady of Bikini (1946) and Visitation (1948).

It was during the 1970's that Middleton again returned to Surrealism in his work. While visiting his daughter in Barcelona in 1973 he produced some of his most accomplished Surrealist images consisting of 'colourful puppets and poetic symbolism'. In 1978 he visited another daughter in Australia and such was the influence and inspiration of the place, that Middleton produced thirty watercolours that are alive with the excitement of a new place. In some of his later works like Swan River Sunset we are given again the sensation of the brilliant light and colour which is reminiscent of his experience of Australia. Some of the later works include the emergence of a transparent abstract grid which aids in binding together the images and

4. Colin Middleton, Our Lady of Bikini

features of the landscape depicted. Such works include Rain in Leitrim and June: Ballinderry! In the latter Middleton creates a great sense of the flatness of the landscape, with its dominating horizon line. His use of colour to depict the summertime light and growth, helps to create a sense of pattern.

Throughout his career Middleton's inspiration came from many sources and was influenced by many artists both from Europe and Ireland and England. The European influences included Dali, Klee, Mondrian, Picasso and Miro, while the Irish and English influences were Yeats, Moore, Nicholson and Pasmore.

> Yet Middleton in spite of being so impressionable was not ultimately a derivative painter. He kept a stubborn core of individuality and his pictures are recognisable as his own no matter what manner currently obsessed him (25).

Middleton's work between the 1930's and the 1960's was typical of the work which was brought to prominence by the Irish Exhibition of Living Art. It reflected the changes which occurred in Irish art during the 1940's and 1950's, with artists, somewhat belatedly, exploring the ideas of Expressionism, Cubism and Surrealism.

Section (c)

According to Brian O'Doherty, referring to Irish painting from the late 1950's onward

> the war proved fortunate in the most unexpected way. Before the war cut off the trickle of ideas a few important ones were introduced. The ensuing isolation allowed them to be examined, related to local temperaments and developed within the context of local needs (40, p.10).

This period of isolation also gave rise to an increasing awareness in the buying public resulting in the growth of and demand for Irish artworks. O'Doherty refers to something 'local' which was given the chance to develop in Irish art during and after the war years. The artist Barrie Cooke also refers to this idea of regional painting seeing it as a positive thing. The work of an Irish artist can be wholly understood and appreciated in Ireland, but as the work goes abroad it becomes less understood. To Cooke the fact that the work does not register abroad is not important, since it reveals something about 'our world in Ireland. And that's the most important world'(39,p.22). There is a great value in painting that is 'untravelable'.

In addition the idea and image of what it was to be Irish had now changed. Perhaps this was due to the fact that no longer was the Government trying to promote an Irish image for the foreign countries abroad. Now the audience and the buyers were Irish, and demanded a truer picture of what it was to be Irish.

The prominent artists of these years became more involved with the atmosphere of the Irish landscape, with its changeable weathers and soft light. A sense of place plays a major role in the work, with many of the artists dealing with the strong feeling of having close ties with, or belonging to a particular locale. The work becomes more abstract and the involvement of the artist with his materials is an important part of the work. Frances Ruane refers to Irish art as being 'softer with abstractly poetic interpretations of nature', while O'Doherty insists that 'this atmosphere became the dominant force in the "look" of Irish painting well into the sixties' (40, p.11).

Both Ruane and O'Doherty also refer to the allusive quality of Irish painting during this period. This quality is found in the hinting at ideas and meanings rather than clear statement, 'a reluctance to disclose anything about what is painted'. Cooke too believes that it is this use of allusion which is a common link in the work of Irish landscape artists, 'the common thing that good Irish painting has had is using allusion and there is very little interest in illusion'(39,p22). Another influence on the work of some of these artists was the ideas associated with American Abstract Expressionism. This resulted in artists becoming more involved with the personal feelings and emotions which are evoked by certain landscapes. The work becomes more abstract in the attempt to depict the actual emotions evoked. Two artists who combine these ideas of American Abstract Expressionism with the so-called poetic

response to landscape are Barrie Cooke and Sean McSweeney.

Barrie Cooke was born in England but settled in Ireland in 1954. Before this he was educated in America and studied under Oskar Kokoschka. It was here that he first came in contact with Abstract Expressionism. Both of these influences would remain with Cooke throughout his career. Cooke's content and style of painting link him with the so-called Irish approach. According to Cooke it is the 'colour and texture of the landscape', which 'creates a national type of painting'(39,p23). In his work he depicts what are in a sense natural shapes studying, plants, bones and rock formations.

His interest in landscape lies specifically in the process of growth, decay and rejuvenation, 'of what is growing, dying, being killed and beginning itself again'(39,p23). In a sense the work is more about the undergrowth. The forms he depicts are primarily organic and their abstract quality ties in with Cooke's abstract approach to painting. There is a strong sense of fluidity in his work created by the texture and density of the paint. In his work which includes both paintings and installations, we see the recurrrent interest in natural materials. The whole process of changes and alteration interests him greatly.

During his career Cooke spent time in Borneo where he lived and travelled for about four months. Here he painted the forest which encapsualted the very ideas and concepts which interested him.

> The marvellous, organic density of his work corresponds to a density of thought, feelings and ideas that goes into it (19, p.51)

In this forest things are continually growing, developing and altering. There is a fuzzy line between life and death, between living and dying. The undergrowth in the Borneo forest seems to be a mass of death and decay, yet at closer inspection we see rebirth and growth, pushing up through the surface. 'Cooke paints up the process of change and resurrects what we have dismissed as lost, dead, inert' (16,p.49). Cooke succeeds in depicting the feeling of humid, rain-drenched foliage. Thick dense foliage is illuminated by shafts of light which manage to filter through the dark vegetated landscape. In the works we get

> a sense of wonder and awe arising from direct confrontation with nature. The landscape is lush, liquid, immense. Cooke's poetic response colours the experience. (45, p. 21).

These works especially have a great sense of fluidity and give a feeling of immediacy. The work appears loose and effortless, hiding the slow, careful preliminary work.

Sean McSweeney was born in Dublin, lived in Wicklow where he studied the landscape before moving to Sligo where he still works today. His work of the Wicklow landscape has been described as Yeatsian modified by the

influence of Abstract Expressionism. In these works he uses a palette of primary colours which often seem to clash yet which add great energy to the work. His painterly style is evident in his choice of colour, the vibrant greens of dense foliage, the cool blues of mountain pools. However there is a lack of clarity and sureness in these earlier panoramic views of the landscape. He tended to leave the work in a somewhat molten state without pushing his imagery to the full.

While on a visit to Spain McSweeney did a series of watercolours and oils of Venta de Contreras. Unlike his previous work in oils, the watercolours are characterised by a more naturalistic approach and have a likeness to Cezanne in their solidity and loosely painted manner. His oil paintings of this scene are painted on a larger scale with the use of more vibrant colour as seen in works like The Hill, with the scorching yellows recreating the sense of burning heat.

McSweeney moved to Sligo, the birthplace of his mother in search of new stimulus and a fresher land source. His initial view of the Sligo landscape is a romantic one with no formal insight into the particular land itself. It was probably the changes in light which most affected McSweeney's work in the beginning and he began to deal with this 'Atlantic' light in a fresh but bold way.

The light McSweeney uses in his landscapes is a kind of watery light, pouring down onto the landscape, drenching

it in thick fluid colour. There is great energy in these works with the texture and the actual painting taking precedence over the literal transcription of the scene. The energy in his landscapes comes about through the immersing of himself into his work, both mentally and physically. He moulds the paint with his fingers and hands. In his landscapes he paints the basic elements which compromise them sky, sea and land. These three elements constantly overlap and embrace each other: watery bog pools reflecting the mood of the overhead skies soak into marshy land while seas lash against rocky shores, claiming some of it as its own. Sligo Landscape is typical of his style and approach.

McSweeney allows himself to become totally absorbed by the landscape which inspires him. He is compared sometimes to Yeats in his depiction of a romantic landscape. Yet where Yeats had a concern for the figures who peopled his landscapes, McSweeney's works are, in a somewhat theatrical way, totally devoid of figures, preferring to deal with the actual features of the land itself. And unlike Yeats who inclined

> towards allegories and narratives, McSweeney is spartan, concentrated, focussed. He treats basic pictorial vocabulary, an almost abstract series of elements, not in terms of vague generalities, but with unvarying precision and clarity (18).

An examination of the works of Barrie Cooke and Sean McSweeney, reveals a common thread which ran through Irish

landscape painting during the 1960's and 1970's. Initially they react to their subject in a manner akin to that of the American Abstract Expressionists, attempting to depict the personal emotion and feelings experienced in and evoked by a certain landscape. Their approach is one of poetic abstraction, depicting the romantic atmosphere of the Irish landscape. Their use of materials plays an important role in the work, each developing his own individual style and method of painting. Both Cooke and McSweeney continue to work in this manner, providing a major influence for younger contemporary Irish artists who deal with the landscape as a source for their work.

5. Barrie Cooke, Big Forest, Borneo

6. Sean McSweeney, Sligo Landscape

CHAPTER 2

In this discussion of Cecily Brennan's work, it could be argued that the previous brief survey of aspects of the twentieth century landscape tradition is necessary despite Brennan's assertion that she herself does not belong to this Irish landscape tradition (7). By looking at the traditional aspects that Brennan disassociates from, perhaps we may gain a clearer understanding of what her work involves and incorporates. Notwithstanding the above Brennan's work has frequently been linked with various artists who have preceded her. Interviewing Cecily Brennan she states her strong opposition to the categorization of herself and her work. She does not ally herself with any previous artists or traditions and sees herself primarily as an artist who deals with her own personal politics through depictions of various landscapes. Brennan considers her work to be less concerned with direct evocations of the landscape and instead she uses the landscape as a 'springboard' for her own ideas. However although Brennan is intent on separating herself from any sort of 'pigeon holing', this is never completely possible. What the artist intends does not necessarily correspond to what the spectator sees.

If art involves both the artist and the spectator then we cannot simply dismiss what the spectator sees or understands of the work. Thus the view of the critics and the public becomes equally as valid as the view of the

artist. We must, therefore, address not only Brennan's disassociation with previous Irish landscapists, but also the fact that the viewer may see elements of such influences in her work. Brennan moved to Wicklow where she lived and worked for about a year. Here her work consisted of, for the most part, large scale drawings of graphite and charcoal on paper. These works depict views of the landscape which seem to have been done from a distance either on the same or a higher level than the actual landscape, in a sense taking a bird's eye view of the scene. In these works there is a great feeling of depth and distance, as if one was standing on the side of one mountain looking across at another.

Here Brennan is concerned with the idea of the effects of man's imposition of order on nature:

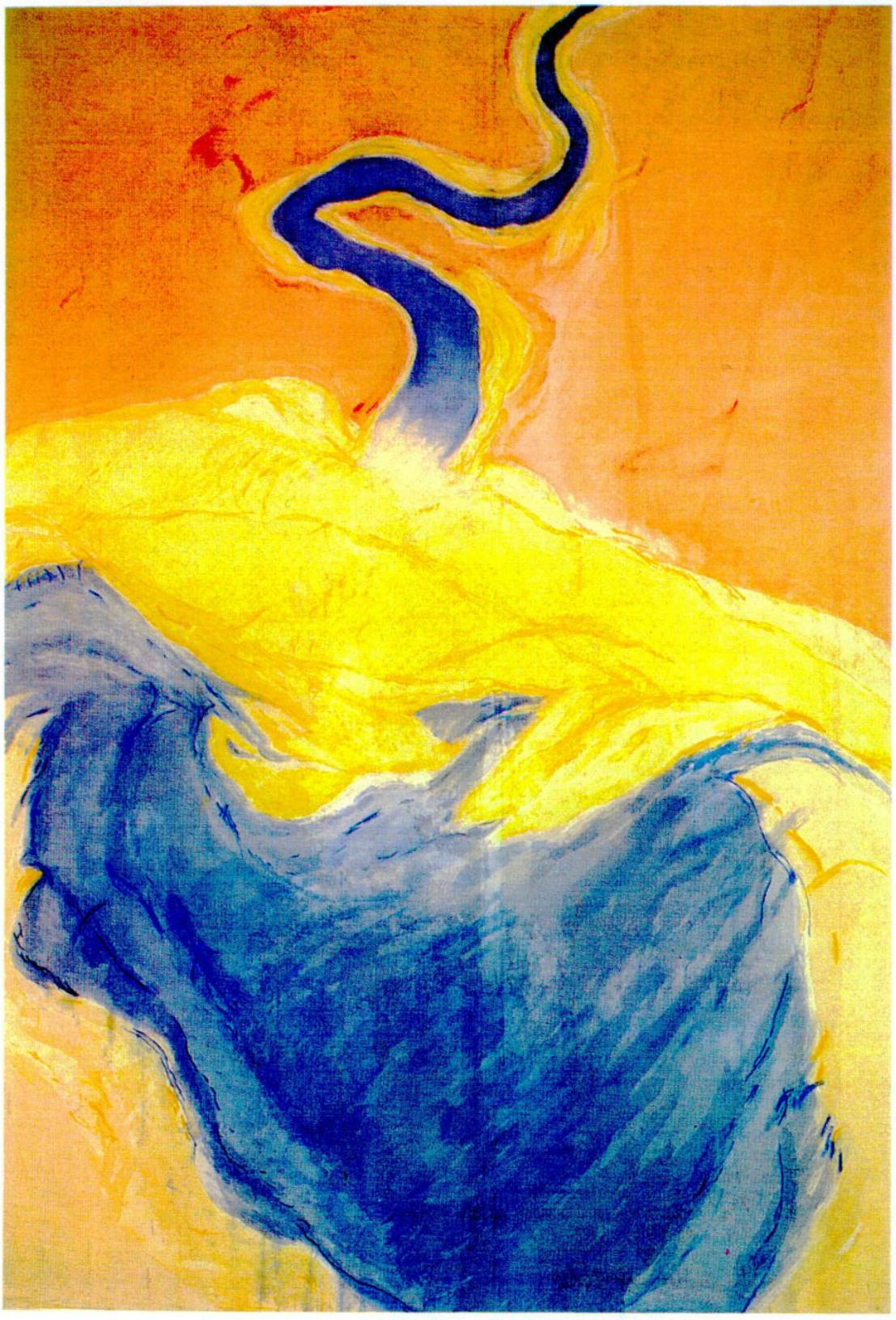
> I'm interested in the way virgin landscape is altered by man ..... you'll find turf bags and fire breaks in my landscapes, and the patterning of trees that have been planted by the Forestry Commission (22).

These works of Brennan's have been compared by John Hutchinson to the topograhpical views of the late seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century. The similarity is found both in the raised viewpoint of the landscape and also in the idea of recording the changes that man has made on the landscape, much as in the eighteenth century topographical views the landowners had the alteration and improvements of the land or estates, recorded in paintings. John Hutchinson refers to this work as

being

> oddly reminiscent of those early eighteenth century landscapes whose topographical clarity and 'God's-eye' perspective reflected the landowners ownership and control of the terrain (31, p.41).

In these Wicklow works Brennan uses graphite charcoal and washes of acrylic paint. Her use of such materials, in particular the graphite, is analogous to the kind of marks made by man on the land. The cuts of bogs, the tracks left by large machinery, the digging up and scraping away of the land before planting it, 'It's the same gouging' (39, p.45) In this series which includes such works as Lough Tay, Forest and Firebreak, Path and Forest, we get a sense of the artist attempting to capture or recreate the feeling of wildness, of being surrounded on all sides by the landscape, 'The atmosphere there was strong and evoked so much feeling - it helped me capture something bigger than myself' (34, p. 42). This poetic reaction to the atmosphere of the Irish landscape is not a novel concept as previously discussed with reference to such artists as Middleton, Cooke and McSweeney. Frances Ruane recognises the influence of the atmosphere on Brennan in these Wicklow works and compares her to artists of the 1950's and 1960's, who approached their subject of landscape in an abstractly poetic vein, depicting the rural subject matter and the ever-changing weather conditions. She compares Brennan's work to artists like Colin Middleton, who merged an early twentieth century abstract approach with a Romantic attachment



7. Cecily Brennan, Lough Tay

to nature .

Some years later after her return to Dublin we see a change in Brennan's work both in its subject matter and the approach to it. Here she chooses a more intimate landscape, the Rhododendron Gardens of Howth. In this series of work Brennan moves away from her use of graphite and acrylic paint of the Wicklow series, to the use of luscious well-handled oil paint. The wide open spaces of Wicklow are exchanged for the enclosed intimacy of the Gardens, in a sense her subject matter becomes more introverted.

In contrast to the earlier work there is a greater sense of personal involvement or belonging to the place. In this series the work is more concerned with the feelings and emotions evoked by the landscape, a personal reaction to a locale. Again we can trace this idea back to earlier artists, more specifically to Barrie Cooke and Sean McSweeney. Here Cooke, McSweeney and Brennan are involved with the legacy of Abstract Expressionism, that is the importance of personal involvement in and reaction to a particular place, the work comes from within, and 'you work towards freeing the thing' (22).

In these paintings we recognise that a sense of place plays an important part in the work. As in the work of Middleton and McSweeney, we get a sense of Brennan being bonded with the Garden. Unlike the Wicklow series here the image is more abstract. Where the images of the Wicklow

landscape were recognisable here the subject or motif is less identifiable. The very subject matter of the Garden, with its organic structures and forms, adds to the abstract quality of the painting. Again we can associate this use of organic materials with their abstract shapes with the work of Cooke.

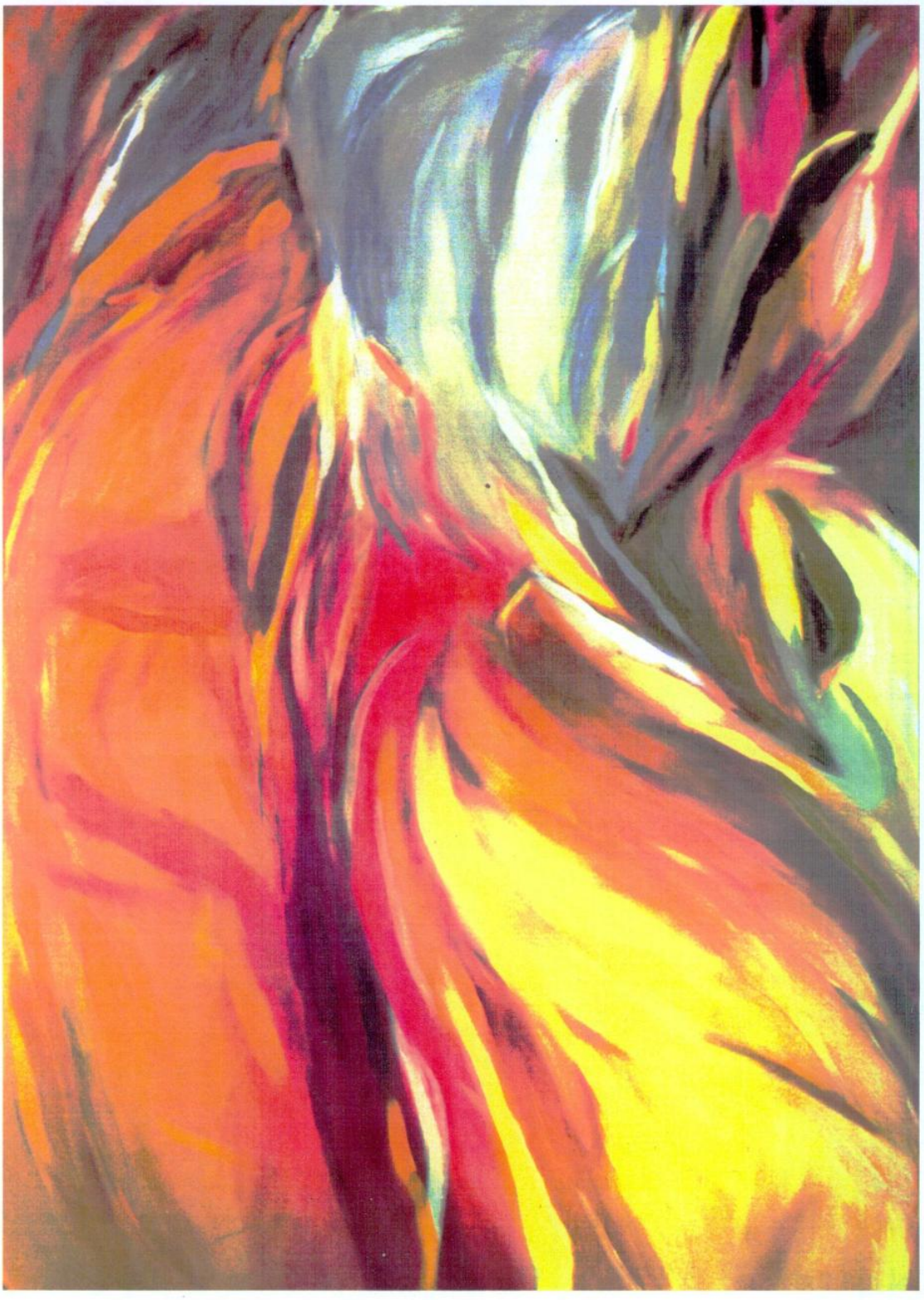
John Hutchinson discusses the many forms which contemporary Irish landscape art takes. He refers to such artists as Cooke and McSweeney as being 'the established practitioners of the "Romantic" school of poetic abstraction'. He talks of younger artists such as Cecily Brennan, pushing the same idiom in new directions yet 'their inspiration remains traditional' (35, p.41). Throughout her career Brennan's work has been linked with the Irish landscape tradition, 'Through sensibility if not through style, she may yet find herself continuing a broken tradition that has its closest forbears in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' (22). Although Cecily Brennan herself denies any link with this tradition, there are many aspects of her works as we have seen which tie her to it and to earlier Irish artists.

Perhaps we can justify Brennan's statement by looking at the elements present in her work that are absent in the works of earlier artists, by concentrating on her most recent work, the Icelandic Series, which is perhaps her most accomplished. In a sense it has been the whole growth and development of her work over the years which, although to some extent tie her to the tradition, has brought her to the stage now where her work has matured into something

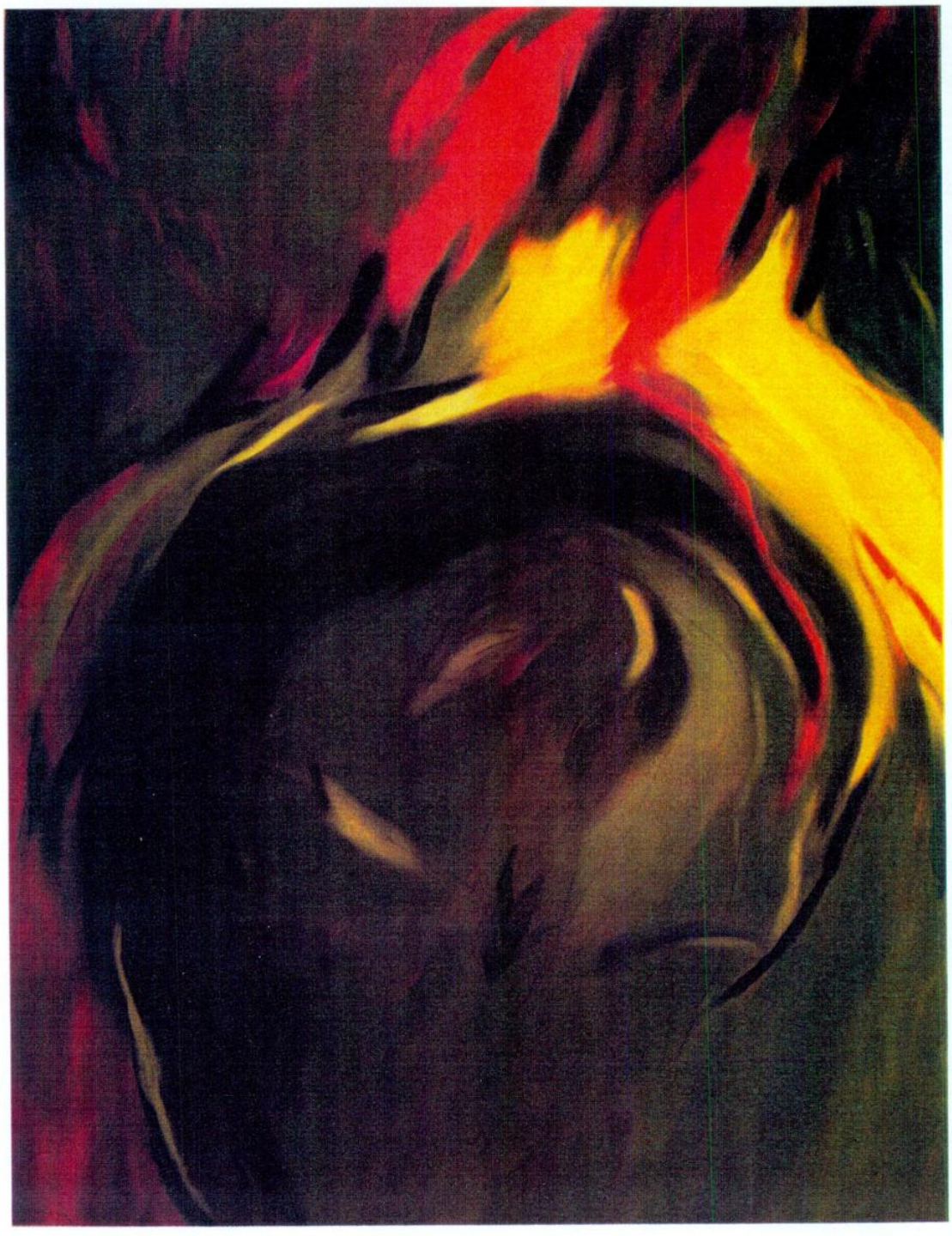
more original and individual, thus breaking the ties with tradition. As a younger artist Brennan at times allied herself with artists like Middleton, Cooke and McSweeney and the ideas and approaches they followed. She too spoke of personal feelings evoked by a landscape: 'they are my personal reaction to a place'. Penelope Curtis refers to these previous works where 'Brennan was concerned to provoke in the viewer the mood in which she sought the landscape' (7).

Yet as a more mature and accomplished artist Cecily Brennan has outgrown these old ideas and has involved herself with newer approaches and concepts. The actual landscape now is a secondary concern, with Brennan using it as a vehicle for her ideas. Whereas in her earlier works 'the choices of different kinds of landscape may previously have been more instinctive than conscious' (13) now Brennan believes that 'no landscape takes me unawares' , (7) . She knows her ideas and depicts them through the images of a chosen landscape.

Unlike the earlier mentioned artists who in their work painted directly from their source, Brennan has never painted directly outside, preferring instead to work from memory, sketches, photographs or film. She still works in this manner. In a sense this method adds to the subjective vision of the image. Another aspect of Brennan's work which liberates her from the tradition is the importance of frontality in the work. Throughout her career this aspect has appeared in the work. In the Rhododendron



8. Cecily Brennan, Garden in Autumn



9. Cecily Brennan, Garden Clearing

10. Cecily Brennan, Garden Path

series the viewer is brought right up against the image on the surface of the canvas, and indeed in some cases appears to be drawn right into the painting. In the recent work this idea of frontality, the nearness of the motif to the spectator, plays a major role.

To Brennan the actual exhibition space is central to the work. In her Wicklow series she created the works to hang like enormous scrolls from the ceiling of the gallery. This emphasised the immensity of the landscape depicted. She worked out how best to utilise the space in order to portray the important aspects of the work. In her Icelandic series the showing space was such an important aspect that Brennan measured exactly the dimensions of the space and worked accordingly. Her work also differs in her denial of conventional aspect, her desire not to control the viewer, and also in her use of scale. These ideas will be discussed in the following chapter.

In the Icelandic series Brennan is concerned with the idea of lack of control and of chaos. These ideas were primary and she went to Iceland where she felt the landscape would be sympathetic to her concerns. In these works Brennan uses her ability in painting to 'present the uncontrolled and leave it uncontrolled' (14). She chooses different features and elements of the Icelandic landscape depicting waterfalls, lava flows, deep pools, ice sheets, water, rock and steam. There is a great feeling of balance throughout the work. This is partly due to her palette of ochres, oranges, blues, blacks and whites. The

colours are clean and pure, in one instance portraying the airy lightness of steam while in another creating the feeling of tangible molten heat as in Lava Flow. The weather too plays a role, exacting the changes which occur in the landscape.

In these works Brennan is concerned with the transience of the landscape. She looks at the 'inner forces' of the land and how what happens beneath the surface of the earth, which is usually unseen, here occurs above the surface at an ever-changing rate. In a sense it is a meeting between the inner forces of the earth in conflict with the outer forces of the weather, creating a landscape out of control. In such works as Where Lava Meets the Sea we see the meeting of such elements, the molten lava flows downwards to the sea where at the meeting point of lava and sea, hot molten rock interacts with ice cold water creating great clouds of steam, which rises instantaneously. Here too we see another aspect of the work, that of the various forces of movement. The images move in all directions, off the edges of the canvas. In all of the works there is a sense of rising, falling and moving outward to the edges. This feeling of a gravitational pull can be seen in works like Waterfall. Here this feeling is created by the approach to the actual painting: the paint is laid on in vertical brush strokes and 'the brush pulling the water down with a thick textured drag' (14)

There is a great sense of continuity in the work as a whole. Motifs and colours run off the edge of one

canvas and are continued in the next. The pre-planning of the showing space and how the work would hang helps to create this continuity. Spontaniety and a sense of immediacy are another important aspect, created by Brennan's use of colour and directness in the application of the paint. The works have a great sense of immediacy, however this has been worked at and is created after much planning and in places a lot of underpainting. These Icelandic works are less abstract than the Rhododendron series, with the motifs of the landscape such as water-falls and lava flows, more clearly recognisable. Indeed this was an aim of Brennan's at the outset. There is an air of confidence and sheer ability throughout the series, with the ideas portrayed in an accomplished, painterly manner.

With her most recent work Cecily Brennan has moved into an area of her own, using landscape in a way which is completely individual and which answers her requirements to the full. In retrospect we could say that the younger Cecily Brennan belonged in some way to the Irish tradition of landscape painting, with her work reflecting in places the approaches and ideas common to this tradition. However Brennan detests the labelling or categorising of artists and refuses to be pigeon-holed herself. The older matured Brennan now produces work which cannot simply be slotted into the landscape tradition. Perhaps the work to come will further distance her from this tradition, and leave her as an independent individual Irish landscape painter.

CHAPTER 3

Section (a)

This chapter will be looking at the theories and conventions of the Sublime. First, it will examine the change in sensibility and aesthetics which took place in the eighteenth century mainly through the intervention of Edmund Burke. Burke's theories are reinterpreted by James Twitchell and Luke Gibbons. Twitchell discusses the sublime experience in the English Romantic Tradition, looking at both painting and poetry. He locates the experience of the Sublime, in both physical and psychological terms. He concludes that English romanticism had a greater influence on American landscape painting culminating in the reintroduction of the sublime experience in American Abstract Expressionism.

Luke Gibbons discusses the concept of the sublime in terms of its male, individual connotations. He also examines the relationship between the experience of the wilderness and the religious experience of God. Such insights into the sublime experience provide a greater understanding of landscape painting. Here I will be discussing the concepts and the devices of the Sublime as they relate to the landscapes of Cecily Brennan. I will be comparing the work of artists like George Barret and James Arthur O'Connor to Brennan's landscape, how each interprets the ideas of the Sublime. Fredric Church's paintings can be

posed opposite Brennan's work of Iceland, with the depictions of volcanoes, waterfalls and icebergs in both, we discover how Brennan breaks down and inverts the traditional Sublime.

Here too I will discuss Luke Gibbons reference to the creating of a female sublime and how Brennan equates the experiences of maternity and motherhood with the physical force and upheavals of the Icelandic landscape.

During the early eighteenth century landscape painters were concerned with painting the privately owned estates of the ruling and upper class. In these landscapes the artist was employed to depict the landowners as they strolled through their lands, hunting or perhaps pausing to observe their happy industrious employees as they contentedly and without too much toil went about their business of the day. Here the landowner and labourer were shown to be content with their own rank or station in society, an image of pastoral harmony, with the fruits of nature readily available to all. These landscape paintings were commissioned to convey the wealth and posterity of the owner and to possess such a painting was, for the owner, a symbol of his success and self esteem.

In such paintings the perspective was one of looking out over distances, depicting receding landscapes which

culminated in a far off horizon. One of the major influences on this type of landscape painting was Claude Lorraine. The composition was arranged, placing the horizon higher than the intervening land between it and the spectator, whsoe viewpoint was usually just below the horizon. For such landscapes this viewpoint was utilised to suggest the control of the landowner over the view. With this type of composition, a feeling of distant vision was produced, a movement from foreground to middle ground, to horizon.

In such Claudean compositions we are presented first with the foreground complete with its requisite coulisses, then the eye moves back into the painting, to an area of light, perhaps a pool of reflecting water, which is set below the horizon. Behind this we find the distant mountains and finally at the top 'beyond sight and certainly beyond comprehension, the horizon' (47, p.201). The immediate focal point of these landscapes is usually the illuminated area of light below the horizon. It is to this point that the eye is drawn, across the intervening area of land, which gradually decreases in tone and size. It is only after this process of movement back to the area of light, that the eye returns to survey and examine the objects it has passed over.

This type of landscape painting prevailed throughout the early part of the eighteenth century, however towards the latter part of the century we see a change in attitudes and approaches to landscape painting and aesthetics in general which became 'not only acceptable but a pre-

requisite of poetic vision' (47, p.28). The romantic painter of the late 1700's moved away from merely painting the picturesque,

> away from middle ground prospect, complete with requisite coulisses, deflected vistas, sky dado, secondary vantage points and silhouettes (47, p.36).

Instead we find painters attempting to depict the landscape in a truer, more expressive way. They became increasingly aware of the dramatic effects of nature and the emotions it evoked. Through their landscapes, painters attempted to convey 'the sensual impact and stunning immediacy of freshly observed nature' (47, p.19). What took over from the Claudean landscape was the landscape of the sublime.

One of the major influences on these landscapes was Edmund Burke. During the late eighteenth century he produced one of the most important and influential pieces of writing on aesthetics, his Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful. Here Burke's theories discuss clearly what constitutes taste, and then he proceeds to define and separate the Sublime from the Beautiful.

According to Burke the scenery and landscape of the Sublime was opposite to the mellow delicacy of the Claudean 'Beauty', and consisted of such features as mountains, ravines, valleys, precipices, forests and lakes. In order to make such features sublime various qualities must be attributed. These included vastness, ruggedness, power,

obscurity, infinity, chaos, darkness, silence and solitude. Such qualities were proven to be sublime in their production of a feeling of 'delightful terror', creating a sense of astonishment which according to Burke was 'a state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended with some degree of horror' (19, p.57).

Burke's landscape of the Sublime was always uncultivated and wild, devoid of human existence and dramatically awe-inspiring. The activities of agriculture and the ordering of nature by man had no place here. For Burke, disorder suggested infinity and therefore increased grandeur. In a sense he encouraged a taste for terror and for desolate scenery. This idea of terror was a major part of the Sublime,

> whatever is in any sort terrible
> or is conversant with terrible
> objects or operates in a manner
> analogous to terror is a source
> of the sublime (9, p.39).

Consequently Burke influenced the growing interest both publicly and artistically in wild mountainous scenery. Where once travellers and tourists avoided such threatening and dangerous places, now they were keen to seek and experience the excitement they evoked. Power and pain also play a big part in Burke's theories, pain being the strongest of any other feeling. He discusses pain and power and believes that we are so affected by the ideas of both pain and death, that when we consider whatever has the power to inflict either, we cannot avoid a feeling of great terror. Thus

in landscapes of the Sublime we are presented with some degree of natural threat or danger, which has the ability to inflict pain. However in Burke's theories the actual experiencing of such pain must not occur. The threat of danger or death must be experienced from a safe distance, detaching or insulating the viewer from it.

> When danger or pain press too near
> they are incapable of giving any
> delight and are simply terrible:
> but at certain distances and with
> certain modifications, they may
> be and they are delightful (9, p.40).

Burke himself preferred the Sublime to the Beautiful and felt that it was much more profound. Beauty arouses 'love' while the Sublime arouses 'delight'. The qualities of Beauty include smallness, smoothness, delicacy, lightness and polished surface. Beauty is always opposed to the Sublime. However with regard to painting landscapes and considering the fact that the delight in the Sublime was in the absence of direct physical danger, Burke's theories allowed for these opposites to come together in harmonious union. In many of the eighteenth century landscapes we see great rugged mountains being softened by light lush foliage, the Sublime is reconciled with the Beautiful. They are safely integrated enabling the upperclass to enjoy the thrill of raw untamed countryside, without being threatened by it. We can see this at work in paintings by George Barret who will be discussed later in this chapter.

The ideas and theories of the Sublime initiated by Burke are discussed in James B. Twitchell's Romantic

Horizons, Aspects of the Sublime in English Poetry and Painting 1770-1850. Here Twitchell discusses the Sublime in relation to its source or location, both physically and psychologically. According to him the Sublime is acheived and experienced at 'the edge of the world', the horizon. Twitchell argues that many English Romantic landscapes are less concerned with the actual mountains, ravines and waterfalls and are more involved with focussing on the point where the horizontal line of nature 'meets the super-natural world of the sky' (47,p.9).What was until now perceived as the outer limits of order was instead seen as the beginning of a whole new experience.

The romantic attention is located at the brink where earth meets the sky, here is the source of the Sublime. Unlike the picturesque which may be found between the middle ground and background, the sublime occurs between the background and beyond. No longer, as was the case with earlier eighteenth century landscapes, is the horizon placed far off in the distance, merely hinted at, now the viewer is immediately brought up close to it.

Twitchell also discusses the idea of the Sublime in psychological terms. As the 'eye' is brought to the horizon the 'I' goes to the threshold of consciousness. As the eye goes up and out, we are assured of an inner psychological vision, with the 'I' going down and in. Yet in the same way as Burke's sublime is concerned with delightful terror so long as there is no real threat of danger,

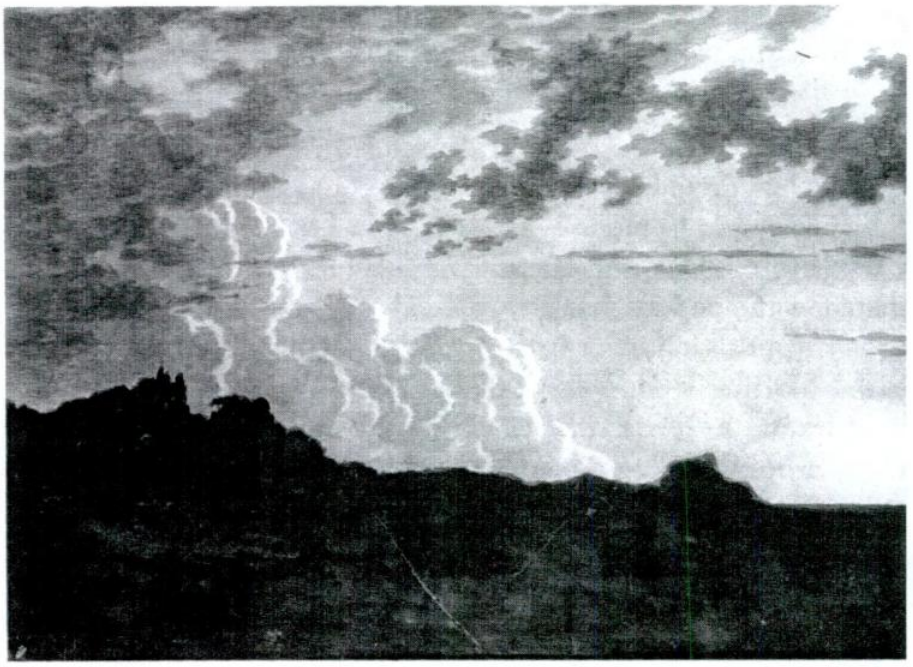
so too in Twitchell's discussion we find that the sublime experience transports us to the edge of a new consciousness, yet here we remain on the boundary, at the brink. This experience does not allow us to cross over the boundary in an attempt to stay permanently in the mystical, 'the sublime mediates between the conscious and the mystical' (47,p.ix). The mind is brought up to the edge where it experiences the sublime, this experience of closeness to what lies beyond, that is the liminal, where for an instant the 'inner self' and the world beyond unite. This moment of moving out of self consciousness causes an alteration in some qualities of the mental functioning, the mind to some degree is changed. 'The sublime takes us to a new order of experience and then returns us to our enlightened selves' (47,p.85).

In Twitchell's examination of Wordsworth's poetry, he discusses the ability to find the sublime not only in Burke's landscapes of rugged mountains, deep ravines and dark forests, but may also be found in less dramatic, more mundane and ordinary landscapes. For Wordsworth the origin of the sublime was in the viewer or perceiver, not in whatever was being perceived. 'The real source of sublimity was not in Nature but in the perceiver' (47, p. 61). Any scene in nature is potentially sublime since every man is his own sublimist. The source of sublime changes not as the view or object changes but as the perceiving mind changes. Therefore sublimity is 'attributed' and not 'deduced', 'the result of that attribution is the change within the perceiver, that changes "reality" outside' (47, p. 69). For the most part the Romantic poets and painters

depicted images of 'dark glades, impenetrable forests, and gloomy ruins'. Such images indicated the depressed melancholic feelings of the poet or artist and reflected the inner struggle of his consciousness.

Among the artists Twitchell examines is landscape painter Alex Cozens, looking specifically at his painting The Cloud. In a sense Cozens was quite forward-thinking in his ideas about and approach to landscape painting. In such works as The Cloud we see the technique that Cozens used, his initial blotting was then added to with careful drawing and painting to create his own landscape. In this painting we see Cozens adhering in a way to the Burkean ideas about the weight, darkness and dullness of the sublime, against the lightness and brightness of the beautiful.

The painting is clearly divided into two parts, the foreground with its heavy dark appearance and the background with its bright and airy appearance. The two areas meet or are separated by the clearly defined horizon, separating the earth from the sky. It is this precise dividing line of horizon, that becomes the focus of the painting. Unlike the earlier Claudean landscapes where the eye, having reached the focus point, the area of light, returns to survey the area already passed over, here in Cozens' painting the eye is immediately drawn to the focus point, the horizon, where it remains. Perhaps this is achieved with the fact that the foreground is devoid of structure or depth. There is no sense of perspective in his 'land'



11. Alex Cozens, The Cloud

scape. In a sense this lack of depth brings us directly up to and enhances the 'imminence of the horizon'(47,p162). In a psychological sense Cozens is concerned with the threshold or dividing line between tracts of space, 'he is concerned with the boundaries that come between earth and ether, and the ability of the imaginative eye to move between them' (47, p.162).

Twitchell also discusses Constable's work and examines his skyscapes and cloud studies, of 1820's. Here the sublime is found in the clouds. The viewer is brought high up into the sky and looks down on the world. These cloud studies are not typical of Constable's earlier works with their viewpoint at a much lower level, placing the viewer firmly on the ground level, for example The Hay Wain. Twitchell refers to such works as the painting of 'the anti-sublime world'. In his Study of Clouds at Hampstead (1820), Constable brings us up to the sky and looks down and out over the land below. This was much opposed to his earlier views of up and sideways. In this painting the land just barely appears at the bottom right corner, creating a sense of off balance in the composition. In a sense the land is merely hinted at, there is no attempt at a true and accurate depiction of it. Twitchell refers to the horizon of the painting being created by the tops of the clouds that run across the centre of the composition. He likens them to the rounded summits of snow-topped hills. The clouds are not static, there is a great sense of movement and change, creating a feeling of some looming

12. John Constable, Study of Clouds at Hampstead

impending event, perhaps a storm is coming. Here Constable creates a sense of tension 'of contraction before explosion', he brings us up to the threshold, where once again we experience the sublime.

For Twitchell the great innovator of this romantic tradition in landscape painting, was not Claude or Poussin but rather Casper David Friedrich (1774-1840). Friedrich was virtually unknown during his own time outside his own country. For him the experience of a landscape was bound up with a religious experience, with the artist's feelings of imminent death and the hope for eternal life afterwards. Throughout his work the landscape is interwoven with the experience of his own existence and transience.

Friedrich felt that the painter should not only paint what he perceived before him in the external world but also what he perceived within him. Twitchell talks about the 'eerie sense of imminence at the horizon' in Friedrich's paintings. If we look at Monk by the Sea (1808) we see how the artist forces the viewer to identify with the figure of the monk, this human standpoint is reduced to a minimum, thus emphasizing the overwhelming sense of the vast expanse. The monk is placed at the brink of an abyss, contemplating in melancholic isolation. The horizon is placed very low increasing the imminence of the haunting sky. This painting includes the very essence of the Romantic Tradition, equating the outward melancholy of the landscape with the contemplative inner struggle of the artist's mind.

Twitchell concludes his discussion tracing this tradition of English romantic landscape painting through eighteenth and nineteenth century American landscape painting, with artists like Thomas Cole and Fredric Church, to the painters of the American Abstract Expressionism Movement. Here the internal spectator is exiled and the visible forms are compressed until only colour remains to separate the masses. With painters like Rothko, Pollock and Newman, what is experienced when viewing these works of raw colour bisected by a single line is a 'spiritual expression'.

> In its heroic search for a private myth to embody the sublime power of the supernatural, the art of Still, Rothko, Pollock and Newman should remind us once more that the disturbing heritage of the Romantics has not yet been exhausted (47, pp 35-6).

In his talk on 'displacement of landscape' in Cecily Brennan's work Luke Gibbons refers back to Burke's theories. He discusses the shift in sensibility, in aesthetics which took place on an intellectual basis in Irish culture in the eighteenth century. What we now understand as the natural landscape, as a response to natural beauty, particularly our response to the landscape of wilderness, dates from this theoretical revolution, before which people had no real concept of the wilderness. In a sense what Burke achieved was to shift the terrain from the garden to the wilderness. Up to this any landscape that wasn't in a sense ordered, symmetrical, even pretty, was regarded as not just ugly but as obscene. The ideas about mountains and what Burke considered to be natural, awesome and sublime, were merely perceived as 'redundant'.

Here too Gibbons refers to the idea that the sublime landscape was a male concept. The Beautiful, being pretty small and artificial was equated to femininity, while the Sublime was bound up with maleness, about facing the thrills of terror in nature, something with the power to annihilate aroused great delight. This concept of the Sublime was not only about being male but also about the individual, facing self destruction in violent nature. Here the individual becomes bound up with self-preservation. This whole idea of the sublime experience therefore was viewed as a totally male experience, only a 'real man', a 'hero' was capable of it, the sublime landscape was the landscape of heroism. This idea is also reflected in the poetry of the Romantics, who wrote about their male protagonists Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, Byron's Manfred, and Keats' Endymion, the lone solitary male on his quest or jouney to the sublime experience.

Gibbons also refers to the religious connotations in the heroic landscape of the wilderness. This in a sense relates back to Friedrich. However here Gibbons refers to the wilderness being looked upon as the world left in the state in which God originally created it. The wilderness was the creation of God untouched by man. The experience of life from a mountain top was the closest thing to experiencing God. In its sublime state God spoke through nature. The American painter Thomas Cole adhered to this belief in his landscape paintings.

Since the eighteenth century the Sublime landscape with its conventions and connotations has dominated landscape painting. Through the writings of such critics as Edmund Burke, James Twitchell and Luke Gibbons we are presented with a broader view and understanding of the relationship between the sublime experience and landscape painting, indeed between the sublime experience and society in general. In contemporary painting it is virtually impossible to ignore the devices and ideas of the sublime landscape, whether one chooses to incorporate them or disregard them. In Cecily Brennan's work we shall examine whether and in what way the historical conventions of the Sublime have affected her approach to landscape painting.

Section (b)

Two of the best known Irish landscape painters who incorporated the ideas of the sublime into their work were George Barret and James Arthur O'Connor. Barret was a friend of and was patronised by Edmund Burke. He began his career as an apprentice staymaker, went on to attend the Dublin Society Schools studying under West and Mannin and won a first prize in 1747. During his early years he used a variety of styles in depicting well-known Irish scenes. His acquaintance with Burke began while Burke was studying in Trinity College and it was this influence which had a major effect on Barret's landscapes, encouraging him towards romantic scenery. Burke advised 'go to Nature for further instruction'. Some of Barret's best and most sublime paintings were done during this period. Having met Lord Powerscourt, perhaps through Burke, he worked for some time in the Powerscourt demesne, including views of the waterfall and the Dargle valley.

Barret moved to England in 1762 where he exhibited for some years in the Free Society Exhibition and the Society of Artists Exhibition. His works included views of Wales which had close affinities with the Irish landscape. Barret was also influenced by English painter Richard Wilson. According to Anne Crookeshank Barret's work was no match for Wilson. In his later paintings he tried to compete with Wilson's style, with his landscapes becoming

much more sparse. Barret was popular and well patronised throughout his career but was frequently in financial trouble and produced many 'potboiler' paintings of inferior quality, to support his spendthrift ways. Barret remained an accomplished artist, however, although his later works lack much of the freshness of the early ones, with his attempt to change to the classical style which was more fashionable at the time. With Burke's help, to save him from financial ruin, he was appointed Master Painter to Chelsea Hospital in 1782, two years before his death.

Barret always encouraged his fellow artists 'to paint from nature not forgetting art at the same time - study effects as much or more than mere outlines' (12, p.112). He said of himself that he was 'a landscape painter who wished to exhibit the sublime parts of Nature'. As already stated some of his best and most sublime works were done around 1760 just before his move to England. These works include many views of the Powerscourt Waterfall, where he succeeds in combining the earlier practice of estate portraiture with sublime scenery. Burke's influence can be seen in Barret's Powerscourt Waterfall (1760) where elements of the sublime as well as the Beautiful, are integrated; the waterfall, as a feature of the sublime, is counterbalanced with the Claudean beauty of the golden sky and foreground coulisses. Here too we see that the dangerous element of the waterfall is cut off from the viewer by the intervening trees, thus reinforcing the element of

13. George Barret, Powerscourt Waterfall

detachment for the viewer.

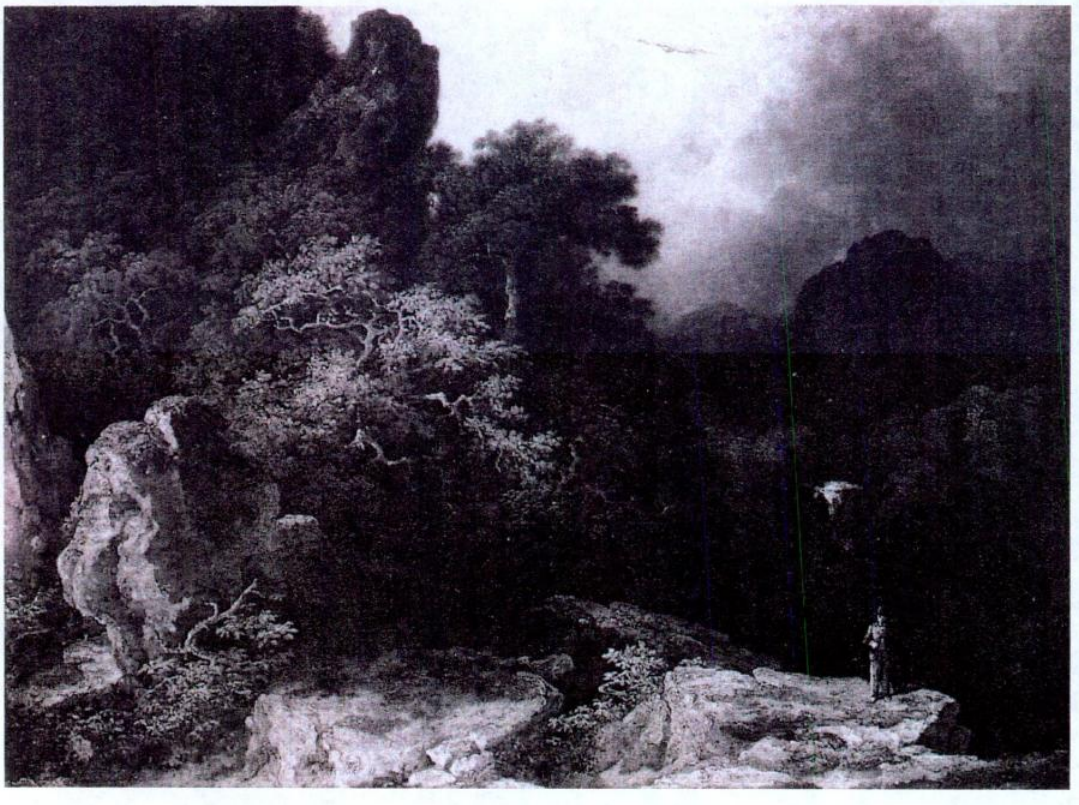
Although for the most part sublime landscape was devoid of human presence, it often allowed for the inclusion of figures for the purpose of emphasizing scale. In Barret's painting the smallness of the figures in the foreground emphasizes the magnitude of the background waterfall. 'To picture the sublime in landscape one must look in and up' (47, p.34). Here the whole composition forces the eye upwards. The view is vertical, it does not recede far off into the distance, but rather rises into the sky. The figures are illuminated and draw the viewer's attention thus placing the viewer at the same vantage point, again a device to distance the viewer from the background threat of the waterfall. Barret's painting and composition, aim to provide enjoyment for the spectator, when beholding the scene. This balancing of the Beautiful with the Sublime, featured throughout most of Barret's career, and though his work was accomplished and competent, this balance often left it unexciting and dull. Perhaps this lack of excitement is best explained by Twitchell when he says that 'when the painter is overly concerned with proportion, order, taste, good sense, and keeping himself at a distance, no sublimity can result' (47, p.19).

The landscape of the Sublime also appears in the first half of the nineteenth century in the paintings of James Arthur O'Connor. O'Connor was one of the few Irish artists who associated himself with the 'Romantic Cause'. During his early years he worked under the guidance of

William Sadler. He went to London in 1813 with companions Francis Danby and George Petrie. However he soon returned to Ireland where he was commissioned by such landowners as Courtney Kenny of Ballinrobe House, and the Marquess of Clanricarde and Sligo. These works were painted around 1819 and were mostly topographical in style. They dealt in a rather literal simplistic way with the improvements of the land making no attempt to depict the emotion evoked by the grandeur of the West of Ireland scenery. In 1822 O'Connor again left for London where he exhibited and made sketching trips of the English countryside.

It was during this period under the influence of Turner and Constable that his style moved away from the literal objective view of the eighteenth century paintings and adopted the more romantic style of landscape painting for which he is best remembered today. He visited Brussels in 1826 and later returned to London after which he again visited Ireland. During this visit his style became overtly romantic and much darker in tone. He visited the Continent during the 1830's where he may have come in contact with the work of Friedrich. Throughout his career O'Connor experienced many influences yet his own style remains distinct and easily recognisable. He is best known for his later works including Eagles Rock Killarney (1831).

Here O'Connor presents the very features of the sublime landscape. A lone figure stands on a ledge while to the



14. James Arthur O'Connor, Eagle's Rock, Killarney

right a ravine falls to the depths. The rock of the ledge extends across the foreground rising again to form a boulder on the left side of the composition. Behind the boulder a huge twisted tree looms as the dark forest rises into the mountain, above are the threatening storm clouds which roll in across a deep blue sky. Here the sublime landscape is untamed and rugged with a dark foreboding sky overhead. O'Connor's use of 'chiaroscuro' enhances the sense of drama with the dark areas of the ravine and the forest contrasting with the light of the sky and the illuminated area around the figure.

This is a powerful image of 'romantic solitude'. The lone figure stands literally on the brink, but is provided with the safehold of the rocks in the foreground. This again provides a footing for the viewer, a safe distance from the threat of danger. O'Connor's lone, relatively small figure is illuminated and dominates the scene, as he stares directly out of the painting at the viewer. This enables the viewer to identify with the figure. Unlike Barret who uses his figures to define scale O'Connor uses his figure as a symbol of himself and portrays through the painting his feelings of isolation and gloom. John Hutchinson suggests that it may have been this'call to identification with the figures in these tense melancholy landscapes' (32, p. 23) which caused the lack of popularity of such works. Again unlike Barret there is nothing of Claude's 'beautiful' here to undermine the effects of the Sublime, thus creating overall a more powerful and

affecting image. What Barret's paintings lacked and what O'Connor's achieved was the ability to take risks, not only to perceive the landscape of the outer world but to depict how he himself perceived it. O'Connor in a sense brought something of himself into the work, he became a participator and not just a spectator.

The traditional devices and conventions of the Sublime initiated by Burke and used in the paintings of Barret and O'Connor, continued to feature throughout the nineteenth century in England, Ireland and America. This thread of the romantic sublime is picked up again during the twentieth century in the work of the Abstract Expressionists. In contemporary Irish landscape painting these traditional conventions reappear and are readdressed in the work of Cecily Brennan. In her earlier works Brennan was aware of certain aspects of the sublime, yet her use of these aspects was less of a conscious decision and was more concerned with a personal response to her own ideas about the landscape (7). In her later Icelandic works however, Brennan possesses a greater understanding of the work and deliberately addresses and utilises these aspects. She maintains that these later works are a combination of 'theoretical views, views of the landscape and the ideas of childbirth' (7). Brennan takes the ideas of the sublime landscape and in a sense inverts them to create her own individual approach to the landscape of the Sublime.

In Brennan's Wicklow series she chooses the sublimity of the Wicklow landscape, a subject preferred by many

Irish landscapists of the past, including as we have seen, George Barret. Here Brennan's approach to the depiction of the sublime feature of mountains, forests and lakes, generates for the viewer the sense of awe and excitement felt by the artist immersed in the landscape (22). However unlike Barret's views here there is nothing conventional in the work. Firstly Brennan dispenses with the traditional approach, where the painting creates a window type view of the landscape. From the outset she makes no attempt to control or guide the viewer, as in the early Claudean landscapes where the devices are utilised to guide the viewer from foreground to middle ground and finally to background.

In these Wicklow landscapes the view is perceived from a great height, the viewer is placed high above the landscape. There is no foothold provided to ground the spectator, as in O'Connor's Eagles Rock Killarney. Where Barret's viewer was placed at the foot of the scene, looking upwards to behold the greatness of the waterfall, Brennan takes the viewer up into the skies giving a birds-eye or even an 'angel's-eye view' of the landscape (47, p. 166). The conventional view of the sublime, of looking upwards and sideways is altered to looking down and out. In a sense this idea is reminiscent of Constable's cloud studies, the vantage point is placed in the skies looking down on the world below, 'their backs are often at the heavens as they look down to earth' (47, p.170). This view taken by Brennan is also reminiscent of the

topographical views of the eighteenth century, where the artist recorded the changes and improvements of agricultural activity on the landowner's estate.

Here however Brennan uses this viewpoint to record the altering and ordering by man of nature. In the landscapes of Barret, the Beautiful controls the Sublime, which is devoid of the agricultural activities of man. In Brennan's Wicklow landscape this activity is present in the ordering and plotting of the mountains and forests. Here man tidies the wilderness of the Wicklow mountains. As Barret's 'Beauty' controls the Sublime, here it is man who controls the Sublime.

Yet this is not the idyllic harmonious agriculture depicted in the early eighteenth century landscapes, where the labourer tidied and cultivated the gardens of the rich landowners. Here the 'virgin landscape' (22) is stripped for plantation, the forests are dug up and rutted, the tractors 'gouge' the land and the fires burn the trees and scorch the earth. The Sublime is cultivated, the wilderness becomes in the Claudean sense ugly and obscene.

Brennan's mountains and forests are not the huge rugged threatening features of O'Connor's landscapes. The distant view reduces the features and renders them harmless, there is no threat of danger. The dark looming forests of O'Connor become the small regular plantations of Brennan. There is nothing threatening about these forests: the polished surface of the graphite alleviates

the dense blackness of the trees, and once more the sublime is softened by the beautiful.

Because of Brennan's high vantage point the landscape takes on, in a sense, a maplike appearance, the features presented in flat, somewhat abstract shapes. The view is distant yet none of the depth or detail is sacrificed. Twitchell's sublime is not sought by Brennan, the horizon is absent from the works. The subjectivity of Brennan's landscapes is aided by the fact that she never works on the spot, her landscapes are produced back in the studio(39,p.25). While the legacy of man is clearly visible there are no figures present. Some of the Wicklow works are done on a very large scale and hang like unravelled scrolls from the ceiling of the gallery. Where Barret's scale was determined or portrayed by the inclusion of small figures at the edge of the scene, here Brennan's scale is worked out in relation to actual size of human figure. The figure which determines the scale is that of the viewer standing directly in front of, at the foot of the work. Overall, if we compare Burke's sublime landscape and Brennan's Wicklow landscapes, we see that where Burke's artist is awestruck and overpowered by the sublime landscape, Brennan as the artist, overpowers the sublimity of the Wicklow landscape.

Cecily Brennan's latest and most recent work is a series of paintings and charcoal drawings based on an exploration of the chaotic transience and transformations of

the Icelandic landscape, which also reflect the transformations of her own self and body during pregnancy and motehrhood. In this series Brennan is aware of the traditional ideas passed down from the romantic sublime. She adopts and reworks some of these ideas to enhance and strengthen her own concepts. Here she is involved with a landscape which is wild and chaotic, and with its immensity and everchanging terrain has the ability to instill terror and awe in the traveller or viewer. Where her Wicklow landscape depicts the tension between order and disorder, here Brennan presents the turbulent, transient chaos of the sublime Icelandic landscape, yet unlike Byron's 'Manfred' who attempted to 'resolve the "chaos of forms" into sense' (47, p.132), she makes no attempt to control it and instead leaves it chaotic. In Wicklow she overpowers the Sublime, here she lowers the Sublimity of Iceland to eye level and in a sense not only part of her world but part of the viewer's world also. The viewer becomes more than the detached voyeristic spectator of the Wicklow landscape and instead becomes a participant in the Icelandic landscape. With her bigger works Brennan creates an actual landscape between the paintings on the wall and the space on the floor of the gallery. Brennan has always taken into account her showing space and incorporates it into the work, enabling the paintings and the space to interact (7). Here the dimensions of the gallery were worked out and the paintings fitted accordingly. This adds to a great sense of overall wholeness. There is a feeling of continuity, with the images in each piece flowing off one

canvas into the next.

Brennan's choice of volcanoes, waterfalls and ice-sheets are reminiscent of the same features which appear in romantic landscape paintings of the past. The landscapes of American painter Fredric Church depict volcanoes and waterfalls of South America and the icebergs of the Arctic. Church's landscapes fit in with Burke's heroic sublime landscapes. The idea that the sublime is experienced by the individual male. His treks to South America and the Arctic, give the impression of the hero in search of the natural dangers and thrills of the wilderness. Franklin Kelly refers to Church's desire to explore the wilderness, to experience 'the powerful beauty of undisturbed, primeval American scenery' (41, p.53).

Here too we see the influence of Church's teacher Thomas Cole, who believed that the sublime wilderness was the closest experience to God. Here man is only one step removed from the Almighty. Twitchell refers to the religious sensation experienced in front of ice flow, volcanoes and waterfalls created by Church (47, p.197). These sublime landscapes excited new feelings in the viewers of the time, they 'caught and conveyed a new feeling of mind', Kelly refers to the observers of Church's work as being transported mentally to a new world. This in a sense is the essence of the sublime experience.

In his landscapes Church employs devices which lead the viewer through the painting. In his depictions of

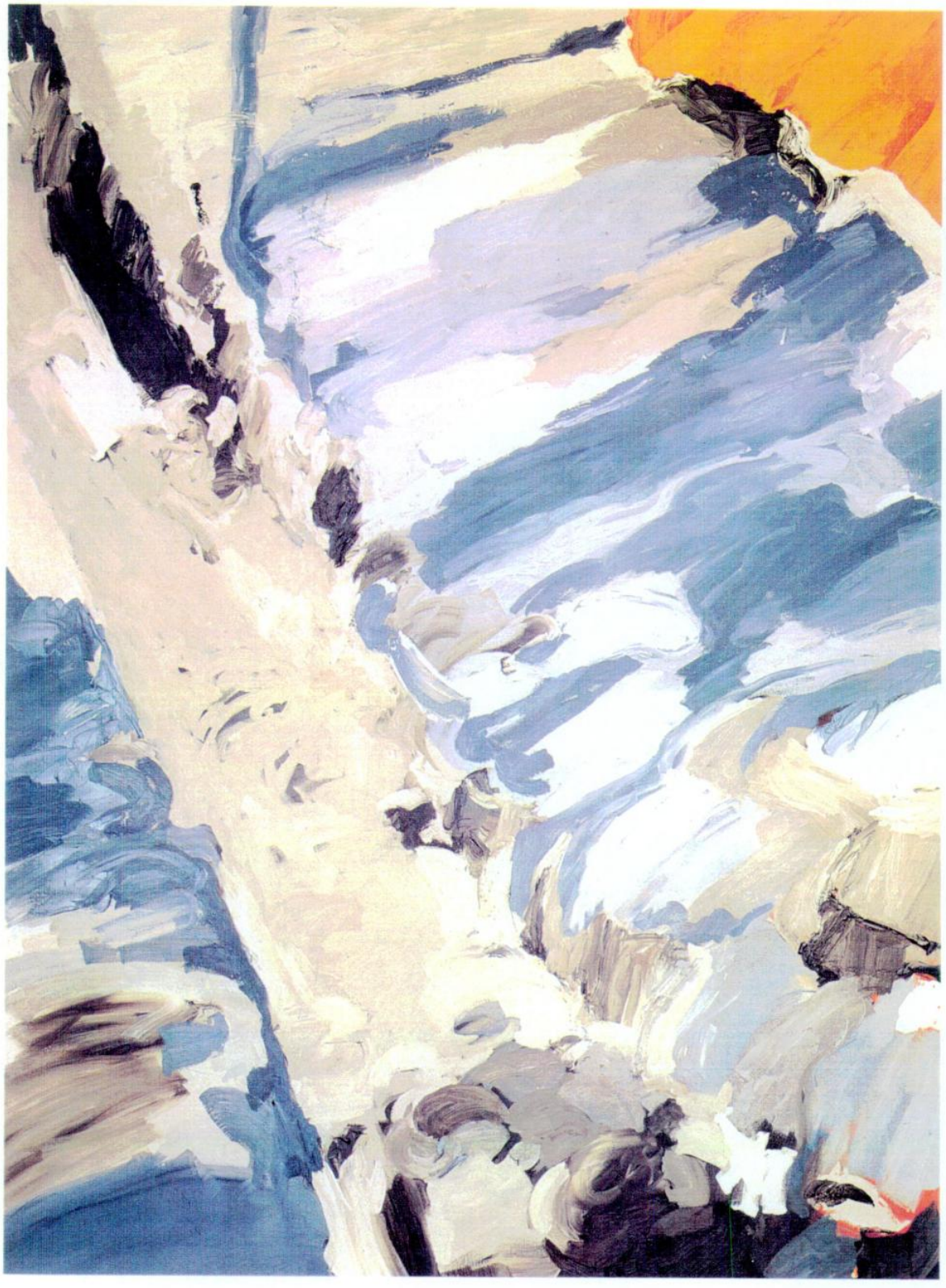
of Cotopaxi he places the danger of the volcano at a distance in the background, in a sense on the horizon, 'he has the horizon literally breaking apart with a volcano erupting in the background' (47,p.200). This combines Burke's and Twitchell's theories, the sublimity of the mountain meets the sublime experience at the horizon. The vast abyss in the mid ground protects the viewer from the threat of the volcano. The waterfall incorporates to a certain degree a Claudean feature as it animates the middle ground. Here Church dispenses with an immediate foreground, thus attempting to present the scene as it would be if the viewer were actually there. Church is concerned with conveying the spiritual grandeur and energy of South America.

In Cecily Brennan's sublime landscape of Iceland, her approach to and ideas behind the work in a sense challenge the conventional sublime and turn it on its head. Brennan dispenses with the devices of Church. Where Church's volcanoes and watefalls were out of reach across a vast expanse of land, Brennan's motifs are brought right up against the viewer. There is no safe distance or foothold provided, the pictorial space and the viewers space become one and the spectator is 'plunged into the pictorial field without barriers' (28). Barret's reposeful spectator's area among the trees away from the waterfall becomes Brennan's vulnerable spectator's area in the centre of the gallery floor, without protection from the images. She succeeds in creating a disturbing closeness to the features.

The viewer is simultaneously pushed into and recoils back from the canvas. Brennan creates an actual landscape where the spectator on the floor of the gallery is surrounded by the images as one would be if actually standing in the landscape. Church attempted to recreate this sense of the viewer being present in the landscape, yet achieved more of a voyeristic experience. Burke's delightful feeling of terror, expeienced when the threat of pain is at a safe distance becomes Brennan's unnerving feeling of terror where the actual threat or danger is forced up against the viewer.

In Line Fissure, Sulphur and Rope Lava Brennan includes the traditional abyss of Church, which interrupts the flow of lava from the top right corner. Yet where Church's abyss protects and distances the viewer from danger here the abyss becomes the actual danger. Where the viewer normally experiences a solid foreground at the bottom of the composition here the bottom is opened up. In a sense if the viewer stands too close a feeling is created of falling over the edge of the painting and into the abyss. Thus again the viewer is enticed up to the painting and then through fear is repelled back from the image.

In her depictions of waterfalls the image is flat, up against the surface of the painting, depth and dimensions are disregarded. In Waterfall and Plunge Pool, foreground and background interact and it becomes unclear whether the black rocks are in front of or behind the waterfall. The fluid continuity of the brush strokes in the waterfall



15. Cecily Brennan, Line Fissure, Sulphur and Rope Lava

16. Cecily Brennan, Waterfall (Plunge Pool)

creates a great feeling of weight and gravity. Depth is also disregarded in Waterfall. Here the image flows off the canvas into the viewers space, there is no beginning and no ending. The abstract rock features serve as an interruption for the eye, to prevent it moving too quickly down and off the canvas (14). In his essay Luke Gibbons equates Brennan's role of time and movement with the old traditional role of space and depth.

In Where Lava meets the Sea, Brennan depicts the act of sublimation in its scientific sense, the direct transformation of matter from solid state to gas. The intense heat of the flowing lava turns the solid ice and water to steam on contact. There is a strange feeling of 'timelessness' as the constituents of the landscape interact and simultaneously affect change. A feeling of great weight and yet levity are occurring at the same time, the lava falls and the steam rises. Here too the overpowering underlying energy of the landscape, moves down and out into the gallery space. There is no escape or safe distance from the danger.

In this view Brennan is concerned with how, what normally occurs below the surface of the earth unseen, here in the Icelandic landscape these activities occur both below and above the surface of the earth simultaneously. In the painting Geyser Brennan imposes a sense of calmness and composure on the sublime, with her use of subdued colours surrounding the restful luxuriant blue of the deep pool. The sublime experience of Constable's cloud studies reappears

17. Cecily Brennan, Waterfall

18. Cecily Brennan, Where Lava Meets The Sea

19. Cecily Brennan, Geyser

here. The experience is achieved by the anticipation of an imminent event, something just about to occur. Constable anticipated the oncoming storm, Brennan anticipates the eruption of water. In this series Cecily Brennan uses fresh clean colour and bold, direct brushwork, creating a sense of immediacy and spontaneity. Her response and approach to the depiction of the landscape reflects or echoes her own state of both mind and body.

In his essay on the exhibition Luke Gibbons refers to a 'female sublime'. This is opposed to the traditional male sublime which 'may extend the frontiers of experience through an expansion of the self' (35, p.192). In Linda Kauffman's book Gender and Theory, Dialogues on Feminist Criticism, she includes an essay by Patricia Yaeger on the female sublime. Here Yaeger firstly looks at what is termed sublime in the traditional, outmoded sense, 'concerned with self centred imperialism, with the pursuit of the infinitude of the private self'. Yaeger feels that it is vital that feminists try to retrieve some of the power and energy of the sublime, 'a genre or moment concerned with empowerment transport and the self strong sense of authority' (35, p.192). However it is most important that in her attempt to achieve a female sublime, (a genre which allows for the exploration of various forms of female experiences) that the female does not dominate others or duplicate the claims of the masculine sublime, i.e. the traditional Romantic Sublime.

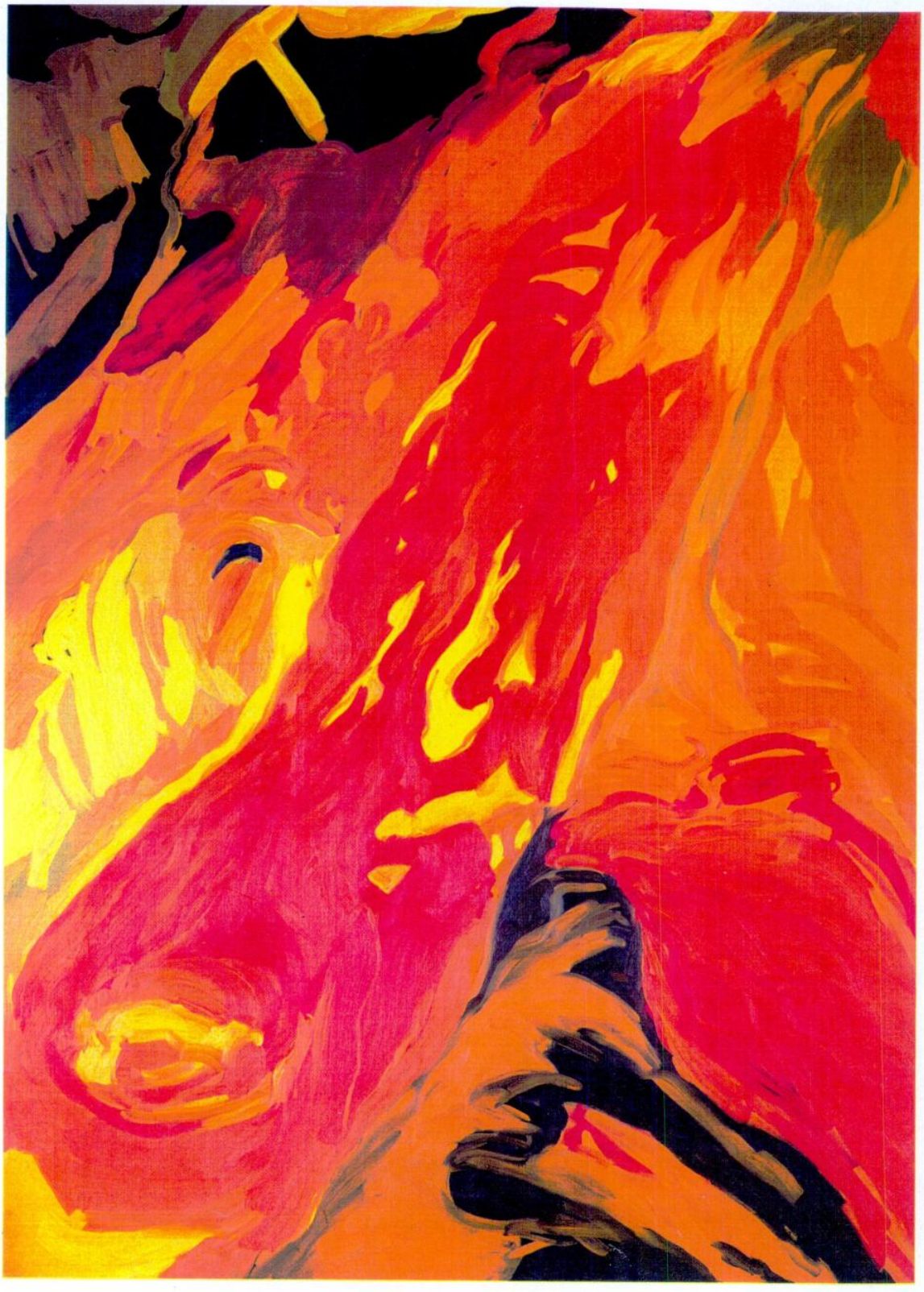
Yaeger identifies three versions of the female sublime. Firstly she discusses 'the failed sublime'. She looks at the writings of Eudora Walty and describes this form of sublime as the momentarily experiencing of 'dazzling' power, which is short-lived, taken away by 'a masculine counter sublime', leaving the female on a lower social level than where she began. The second version is 'the sovereign sublime'. Here the female merely imitates and tries to take over the male sublime. Ironically this results in a more male version than the original one. She locates this type of sublime of 'overwrought mimesis and gorgeous expenditure' (35, p.203) in the poetry of Nikki Giovanni. The third version which she identifies is 'the pre-oedipal sublime'. This version involves fusion with the landscape, depicting a wilderness which involves nearness and closeness. It also incorporates the actual suffering of pain, not merely being one step removed but physically undergoing the pain.

Luke Gibbons version of 'the female sublime' involves the ideas and experiences of maternity and motherhood. Here nothing is dominated as the woman herself experiences the pain. This corresponds in a way to Patricia Yaeger's 'pre-oedipal sublime'. Here Gibbons 'female sublime' is opposed to Burke's 'male sublime'. Where Burke's male hero was concerned with self preservation, here the female, the heroine, risks self destruction. The male can have no part of this form of 'maternal sublime' (28), his relationship to the maternal experience and experience of child-

birth is a voyeristic one, he can only stand aside and observe, he is removed from the experience. Even after childbirth there is an inexplicable closeness between the female body and what is outside it. In his essay he refers to the feminist theory that woman 'is' her own body, here the body is

> not a biological but a social phenomenon, and is known outside in rather than inside out. For the maternal body and its relationship to another emergent life, it is not even clear where the boundaries between inner and outer worlds lie (28).

In Cecily Brennan's work we see the combination of Yaeger's 'pre-oedipal' and Gibbons 'maternal' sublime. Here the artist's experience of pregnancy and childbirth is fused with and reflected in the landscape of Iceland. The landscape trembles and quakes as the maternal body heaves and moves. The depicting of the underlying activities of the landscape on its surface, bring to bear the internal activities of the maternal body. Although the series is presented as a whole, the sequence and events of maternity and birth are reflected like a narrative in the movement from Geyser to Waterfall to Lava Flow and finally to Line Fissure Sulphur and Rope Lava. First we are presented with the quiet placidity of the placenta-like pool in Geyser, this is followed by the rush of the breaking waters in Waterfall. In Lava Flow the pain of childbirth is almost tangible as the fiery ball of lava moves down and out, digging a rent in the surface. This rent in the earth's surface is left empty in the abyss of Line Fissure,



20. Cecily Brennan, Lava Flow

21. Cecily Brennan, Pool and Rope Lava

Sulphur, and Rope Lava and the event is over.

This experience of maternity and childbirth is an important aspect of Cecily Brennan's Icelandic series. The two experiences, of the landscape and of maternity, fuse and interact. Gibbons describes Brennan's work as the 'displacement' of bodily experience onto the landscape. Brennan herself describes the way in which, through her own child, she can become connected with the future (7). We could say that in this sense she creates a form of sublime immortality.

CONCLUSION

As an artist Cecily Brennan disassociates herself from the labels 'female', 'landscape', or 'Irish' artist. She sees the landscape primarily as a starting point or 'springboard' for her ideas about order and disorder, chaos and control. She does not locate herself within the Irish Landscape Tradition, and makes no conscious attempt to follow in the footsteps of such artists as Barrie Cooke or Sean McSweeney. Yet an examination of this tradition reveals aspects which can be linked to Brennan's Wicklow and Rhododendron series. Thereore, it is a valid viewpoint that critics like John Hutchinson and Frances Ruane take in associating Brennan with this landscape tradition. However, her most recent work reflects more clearly, her disassociation from the tradition. Here she has developed a more mature and accomplished understanding of her ideas and techniques, and combines both in an approach which is both individual and personal.

Throughout her work, it is possible to trace certain aspects of the Sublime, which are discussed in the writings of Burke, Twitchell, Gibbons and Yaeger. Brennan was initially less conscious of these aspects which appear in her Wicklow Landscapes, yet in retrospect she identifies with them and thus in her later Icelandic work she deliberately addresses and has a greater theoretic understanding of the ideas of the Sublime. Throughout her career she constantly avoids the imposition of control on

the viewer, and their perception of her work. This allows for greater participation of the viewer in the work. Through her works we can trace the growth and development of Brennan's ideas and approach. In the early Wicklow landscapes she looks at the landscape with a fresh and experimental yet detached view. On her return to Dublin, we see her retreat, as it were, into herself, unsure of what direction her work will take. The garden becomes a secure secret hiding place for the artist. This lack of confidence is obliterated finally in her Icelandic series. Here Brennan approaches her subject in a celebratory manner, with the assurance of ability of herself and her work. Brennan's new identity as a mother provides her with a different perspective on life and helps her to come to terms with her identity as an artist. She sees her child as a link to the future, which she can now face with the confidence and understanding of an accomplished artist.

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