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National College of Art & Design

Fine Art Print

A study of the life's work of Charles Brady 1926 - 1997

**Establishing links and connections
between painters of still life.**

by

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Candidacy for the Degree of BA in Fine Art , 1998

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I would like to thank the following people for their assistance in my research

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Mr. Trevor Scott

Mr. George Potter

Mr. Eddie Murphy, Head Librarian National College of Art & Design

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Introduction

Charlie Brady was born in Manhattan, New York in 1926. The area he grew up in, Washington Heights in Upper Manhattan, was a mixture of ethnic minorities with a large Jewish population, swollen during the 'thirties by the inflow of refugees from Hitler Germany. He was a child of the Depression.

After studying at the Art Students League in New York (1948-1951) and starting his painting career under the influence of the group that eventually became known as the Abstract Expressionists, he moved to Ireland and began working here in 1956. Here he enjoyed a well established reputation as a painter of quiet distinction. He became a member of Aosdána in 1981 and has won several awards. From 1976 to 1983 he lectured in Painting at the National College of Art & Design in Dublin. He was elected an Honorary Academician of the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1994.

Brady was prolific, becoming more well known for his small still lifes which usually consisted of one isolated mundane object. I came across his work at a group show at the RHA Gallagher Gallery in 1992 and found it to be simple and clear. The access it gave the viewer was reassuring, the beautiful painterly qualities impressive, the mystique and sense of mischievous humour behind these images made them very appealing. I was interested in how he had achieved this combination in such a quiet and subtle way. Now as a practising artist working with a similar theme, I intend to investigate the background and experiences which might have influenced him in this particular direction as a contemporary painter.

I will take a look at the work in the context of the American tradition of still life painting, beginning with the period when he began his studies at the Art Students League. As an American, Brady would have been aware of the American tradition of object painting, throughout the 19th century. So many American painters specialised in still lifes, despite the fact that it was looked upon by contemporary critics as a less worthy genre than landscape, portraiture or history painting. It is worth examining Brady's work against this background, particularly Sheeler and the Precisionists. Brady felt he was part of this tradition. It will also be interesting to look at him alongside some of his American Contemporaries who worked with a similar theme, such as Wayne Thiebaud and Claes Oldenberg. I will examine similarities and links which may exist between Brady and the early Abstract Expressionist influenced work of Thiebaud, who is sometimes grouped with the Pop artists.

In 1956 when he first came to Ireland Brady was much influenced by the creative attitudes of the New York abstract expressionists with whom he had a lot of contact and interaction during the period when their style was evolving. It was a time when this New York-based movement in painting which was to have such worldwide effects came into prominence. Ironically, Brady left New York and came to Ireland where he must have met with extreme cultural differences. It is vital to examine his work in the context of Abstract Expressionism and to consider its role in

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I will take a look at the work in the context of the American tradition of still life painting, beginning with the period when he began his studies at the Art Students League. An American Brady would have been aware of the American tradition of object painting throughout the 20th century. So many American painters specialised in still life, despite the fact that it was looked upon by contemporary critics as a less worthy genre than landscape, portraiture or history painting. It is worth examining Brady's work against this background, particularly Spender and the First New York School. He was part of this tradition. It will also be interesting to look at him alongside some of his American Contemporaries who worked with a similar theme, such as Wayne Thiebaud and Claes Oldenburg. I will examine similarities and links which may exist between Brady and the early Abstract Expressionist influenced work of Thiebaud, who is sometimes grouped with the Pop artists.

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the formation of his mature painterly expression.

The term still life comes from the Dutch and it literally means motionless aspects of nature, a concept not far removed from the French phrase "nature morte" which came into common usage some decades later. Although the genre of still life is as obvious a piece of our basic cultural furniture as history painting or landscape, its inevitability and indispensability have not helped it generate much heat in critical discussion. The still life object is at the most basic level of material existence, it is inescapable. In Chapter Two I want to highlight those artists throughout history whose interest was focused on the humble domestic object. Still life was always at the bottom of the hierarchy, unworthy; nevertheless many great painters such as Vermeer, Chardin, Caravaggio, Cezanne and Morandi were motivated by the ordinary household object for various reasons. These motives are what I want to consider in my attempt to understand why Brady consistently and prolifically painted intimate images of daily life, reaching such success in this field.

It is interesting to consider the impact the move to Ireland had on him, how he adapted and developed as a painter and what Ireland had to offer him. I will try to understand the balance that Brady struck between the two cultures and the relevant contributions of each environment to his work. He had an extraordinary sensitivity to light and could capture in a painting a great sense of air and space. Despite their reduced scale, his paintings have a great breadth and sense of location. These qualities, I feel, were developed in Ireland where he did not have many competitors. Contemporaries whom I feel might be worth discussing in relation to him are Camille Souter and Neil Shawcross. There are parallels to be drawn between Brady and these two artists. It would be interesting to consider the elements and means used to achieve these little paintings of quality.

The research I undertook in order to discuss these points in relation to Brady's work involved gathering newspaper interviews, reviews and articles. There has been one small book published on Charles Brady by Gandon Editions with an introduction by Desmond McAvoek. It traced his early beginnings in New York at the Art Students League which provided the foundation for his life as a painter. It highlighted his habit of intensely focussing on a subject and how he would paint the same thing over and over again. It also pointed out how the excitement of New York in the 1950's enthused but intimidated him. There has also been a T.V. documentary film made about him by Sean O'Mordha. I spoke with his dealer who runs the Taylor Galleries, where most of his exhibitions took place. Here I located some of the work and studied it first hand. I also interviewed two of his contemporaries who got to know him well over many years. I have read generally on still life painting throughout history and am interested in connecting Brady to this tradition and the artists mentioned above.

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Chapter I

The Art Students League where Charles Brady studied was a rich and stimulating environment. Its teachers included distinguished emigre Hans Hoffmann who exercised great influence through his teaching. He was probably the real father figure of the New York School of Painting during the post-war years. Hoffmann was typical of the things which go to make up the American mix. He had lived in Paris from 1904 to 1914 and had been in contact with Matisse, Braque, Picasso and Gris. He was preparing the ground through his teaching for the change that was to come. His late style shows how interested he was in what the younger members of the Abstract Expressionist movement were doing.

Here Brady studied more or less continuously for a few years taking all kinds of classes where he could set up an easel. He studied under the abstract painter Morris Kantor and attended drawing classes taught by famous war artists John Groth. He learned by just watching and listening to the older students. Talking to Patrick Gallagher (Sunday Independent 13.1.91) he said,

"There was humour and seriousness everyday from nine to nine and plenty of playmates". He felt "it was experience, it was the right soil to grow in, you don't find yourself, other people find you, they recognise whatever you have got,"

By this I think he meant that as a student without much experience it was difficult for him to recognise his artistic strengths. As a youth he had not attended a school where art was taught and had no way of telling whether it was worth his while pursuing painting as a career. Brady explains how on the first day of the classes he took in the Art Students League his teacher John Groth looked at his drawings and Brady said,

"Look sir would you please tell me is it worth my while staying here. Am I just fooling myself and my family and everybody else?" - "Yea Kid" he said "I'll tell you, the drawings aren't very good, but if you work at it, the drawings have to improve. Kid I'll tell you, you have mood and I can't teach mood and that power". (Brady, 1993, P.12)

With this aspect of his abilities identified, Brady felt encouraged to go on. Studying in New York meant that Brady had access to major collections in the Metropolitan, the Museum of Modern Art, the Frick Collection and many commercial galleries to look into.

There is a whole tradition in America of object painting. Brady talking to Kate Robinson (Sunday Independent 7.6.87) said "I fell into this and then realised that I'm part of a whole tradition that goes back a hundred years in the work of artists like Peyton, Charles Sheeler, Preston Dickinson and William Harnett". In the nineteenth century, such artists as Raphaelle Peale conveyed the extreme delicacy and beauty of a small bit of cake or of apples resting in a dish through deftness of touch, rich paint

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Figure 1
Still Life
Stuart Davis



quality and carefully controlled atmosphere and light. Later, Pop artists evoked American life through the props of everyday existence, enormous enlargement, use of commercial colours and detached processes.

One of the major American artists who had a fondness for still life was Charles Sheeler (1883-1965). He, along with Stuart Davis (1892-1964), was attempting to create a native variety of Cubism. Occasionally Davis used still life objects to form abstract patterns, with particular success in his 'eggbeater' series of the 1920s. In these paintings, ordinary household objects have been flattened, simplified, fragmented, then recreated as dynamic composition (see fig.1). This branch of American painting that Brady describes himself as falling into was communicating reality through the unromanticised analytical rendering of everyday domestic objects. They were in pursuit of a clarity and simplification of things. This could be described as a drive for honesty. This was an aspect of their work that I feel is apparent in Brady's paintings, but while his predecessors remained detached from the image, Brady fills his with a warmth and atmosphere which are the essence of his work. Brady used the subject of the Precisionists but adapted it to his own personal style. When Sheeler worked in Paris his contemporaries there advised him to seek 'a result outside time, space and momentary considerations' (Hirsheler, 1987, P.4). This is achieved by Brady's everyday objects through an unconscious attempt to paint the air around the objects. He gives them an atmosphere, a presence that in general provides for an intimate image of a slice of life that could be anywhere, anytime.

As Margit Rowell points out in the catalogue for the exhibition Objects of Desire that was held in London the Hayward Gallery last year:

To a greater or lesser degree, all artists tend to look to the past in order to prepare for the future. Sifting through their visual heritage, they decide what to preserve, what to discard and from what to generate new life. (Rowell, 1997, P.104.)

Working within the realist tradition, Sheeler instilled in his work a type of Cubism with a three dimensional aspect to it that became the hallmark of the Precisionists. Rather than fragment objects within the composition, the Precisionists simplified and ordered their objects using clear crisp lines and clear planes. Sheeler steeped himself in he lessons of Cezanne, using many of the techniques developed by Braque and Picasso to analyse an object and to reconcile the conflict between the flat picture plane and the illusion of depth to which traditional painting aspired (see fig.2).

One of the most interesting artists of the Precisionist movement who concerned himself with still life and who Brady admired was Preston Dickenson (1891-1930), who worked at the Art Students League around 1910 before he left for Paris. Like so many artists of his generation he was greatly influenced by Cezanne. He was concerned with colour and light and while his still life objects convey volume they are less solid and opaque than those of Sheeler and the others. Dickenson's interest in light and its relationship with the object was a preoccupation that Brady shared

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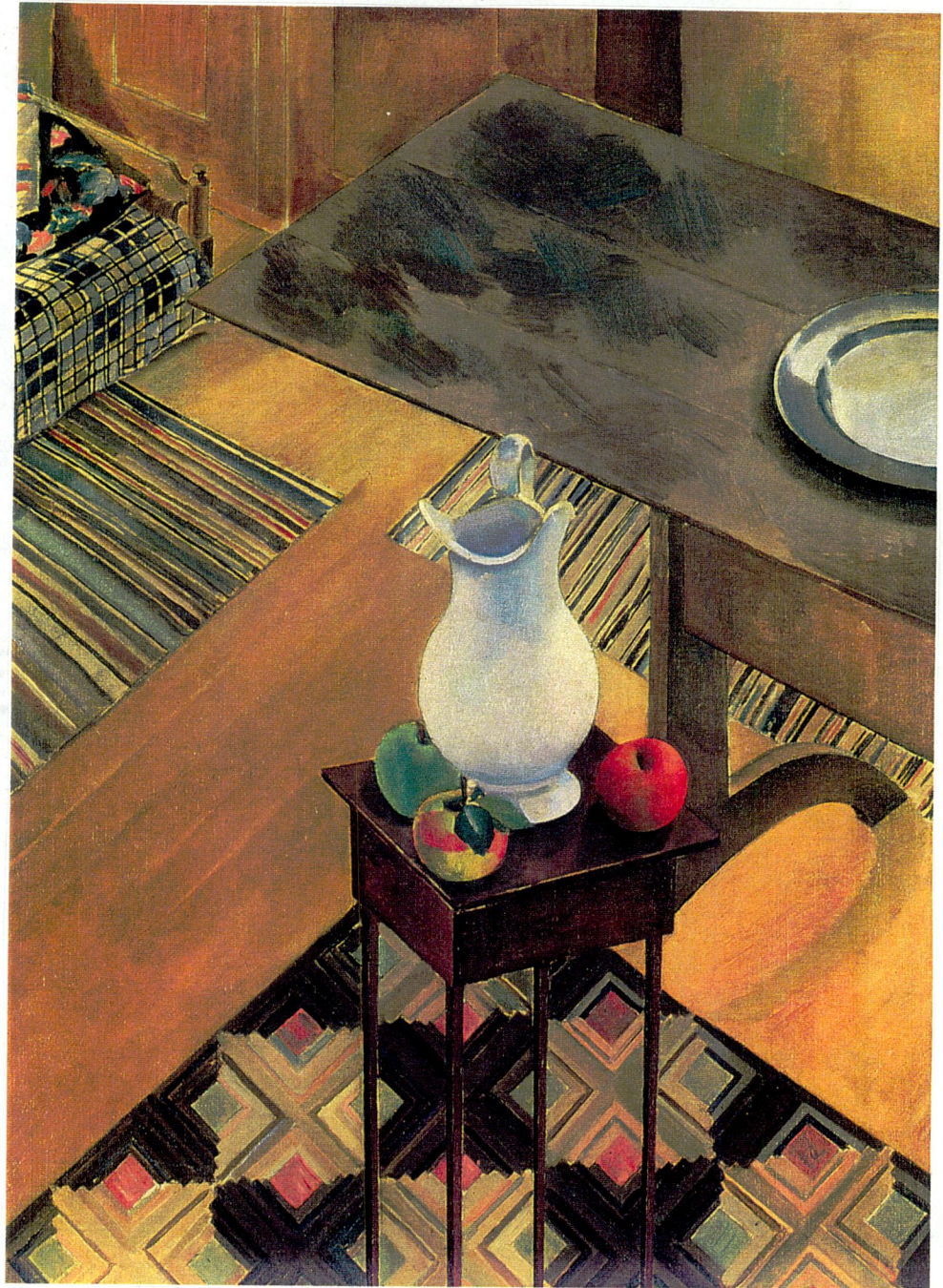


Figure 2
Still Life
Charles Sheeler





Figure 3
Nocturnal Splendour
 Hans Hofman, 1963



Figure 4
Untitled
 Charles Brady, 1964

Nocturnal splendour, Hoffmann

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with him. Dickenson gave his subject more humanism and atmosphere than Sheeler which would link him more closely to Brady as an influence.

The first generation of New York Painters such as Kline, De Kooning and Rothko were dedicated to freedom and individuality, aiming to do away with the distance between art and life and to involve the spectator more directly with the work of art. This they accomplished through the spontaneity of the painting, its movement and energy, through the making of images related to ordinary things of everyday life. They drew from the ordinary, the extraordinary; from the mundane, the mystery as they moved from actuality to abstraction. With the development of abstraction in American art in the 1940s and 1950s the subject became less important. Nevertheless, a few of the leading painters continued to use still life as a means of developing their art, gradually getting more abstracted. Hans Hoffmann (1880-1966), who had taught at the Art Students League, was concerned with still life. Reality and humanism form the basis of his art. Hoffman's work showed a sensuous enjoyment of colour and pigment as does Brady's (see fig's 3 & 4). However, Brady's colour is generally muted, the painting activated by small areas of pure complimentary colour. In Brady's painting titled Bread Slices ^(fig 5) the colour is richer and the manner in which it is painted expressive. Hovering on the brink of abstraction the white lines of the slices of bread pull the image back to a representation of an extremely everyday basic substance. There is a sensuousness in the fluid white lines of the bread and in the ambiguously described plate or board on which the bread is resting. There is something whimsical evoked by the image of the isolated but carefully stacked slices (see fig.5). This quality in Brady's work is in contrast to the more earnest motives of some of the other artists mentioned. Brady's approach was low-key and appeared casual. He painted on small pieces of linen tacked to a backboard on a small table easel which he later stretched on to a frame, sometimes cutting the painting down to size when it was finished.

When Clement Greenberg identified flatness as painting's main characteristic and as the goal to pursue, American artists accepted and used this. Charles Brady is of the same background and generation of many of those painters. As Aidan Dunne points out in his review (Sunday Tribune July '91):

His work is in part a tongue in cheek dialogue on notions of flatness and other painterly traits, it is a continuation of this good humoured sparring with the shade of Greenberg, hence we are treated to edge on views of artists palette cheekily cutting a 90 swathe through cherished notions of flatness, yet flat all the same. Pears (several varieties) are depicted in the round, but flatly, with only cursory gestures towards modelling and sliced to reveal relatively intact planes. Brady repeatedly points to the necessary flatness of painting even when dealing with spherical fruit.

The way in which his objects are silhouetted on an horizon edge has been described by Brian Fallon (IT 12.7.89) 'as being close to mainstream modernism or post modernism' (see fig 6). The almost theatrical setting given to a cardboard box or two half cookers (see fig's 7 & 8) reminds me of the minimalist conceptual art that

with him. Dickinson gave his subject more humanism and atmosphere than Sheeler which would link him more closely to Strady as an influence.

The first generation of New York Painters such as Kline, De Kooning and Rothko were dedicated to freedom and individuality, aiming to do away with the distance between art and life and to involve the spectator more directly with the work of art. This they accomplished through the spontaneity of the painting, its movement and energy, through the making of images related to ordinary things of everyday life. They drew from the ordinary, the extraordinary; from the mundane, the only way as they moved from reality to abstraction. With the development of abstraction in America and in the 1940s and 1950s the subject became less important. Nevertheless a few of the leading painters continued to use still life as a means of developing their art, gradually getting more abstract. Hans Holbein (1890-1966) who had begun at the Art Students League, was concerned with still life. Realistic and humanistic from the basis of his art, Holbein's work showed a constant enjoyment of colour and pigment as does Brady's (see figs 2 & 4). However Brady's colour is generally muted, the painting activated by small areas of pure complementary colour. In Brady's painting titled *Brady's Still Life*, the colour is richer and the manner in which it is painted expressive. However on the back of abstraction the white line of the slices of bread and the range back to a representation of an extremely visible plastic substance. There is a sense of the form with the line of the bread and in the ambiguity described above or bread as when the bread is red (fig. 1) there is something whimsical evoked by the image of the isolated but carefully stacked slices (see fig. 2). This quality in Brady's work is in contrast to the more earnest manner of some of the other artists mentioned. Brady's approach was far less and appeared casual. He painted on small pieces of paper, looked at a landscape on a small table which he later stretched on to a canvas, something during the painting began to show when it was finished.

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His work is in part a tongue-in-cheek dialogue on notions of flowers and other painterly truths. It is a continuation of this good humoured approach with the shade of Chardin, hence we are treated to edge-on views of artist painted cherries (red & white) through circular notions of flowers, yet for all the same, flowers (several varieties) are depicted in the round, but fairly, with only cursory gestures towards modelling and shading to reveal relatively intact planes. Brady especially points to the necessary dangers of painting even when dealing with spherical fruit.

The way in which his objects are illuminated on an horizon edge has been described by Aidan Dunne (IT 12.7.89) as being close to mainstream modernism or post modernism (see fig. 4). The almost theatrical setting given to a cardboard box or two ball flowers (see figs 2 & 3) reminds me of the minimalist concept in that



Figure 5
Bread Slices
Charles Brady





Figure 6
Artists Palette
 Charles Brady

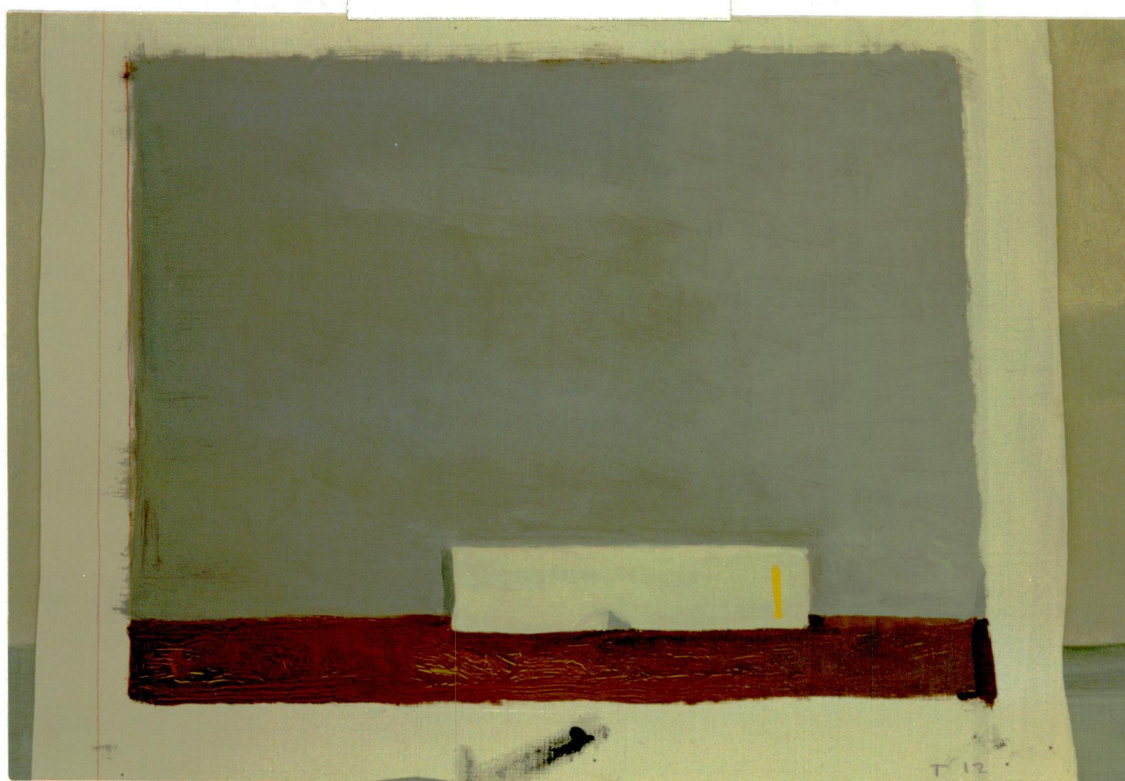


Figure 7
Untitled
 Charles Brady



was dominant in the 'sixties. Modernism brought with it the potential for focusing on a purely aesthetic space. Brady's isolation of the simple object in an empty space does reflect a modernist influence. In painting, modernism was involved with seeking new ways to deal with pictorial problems. One of the characteristics of modernism was the exposure of the means of creating a painting, avoiding illusion and dealing with the actuality of paint on a surface. Brady's paintings emphasise this flatness through his use of a featureless background and simple composition. Ignoring the more traditional compositional techniques and giving the object centre stage treatment or a sense of the object being displayed could be taken as a reflection of a modernist background. Edward L. Smith in his book Movements In Art Since 1945, states how the bold central image became one of the trademarks of the new American Painting - one of the things that differentiated it from European art. (Smith:84 P.42)

E.H. Johnson in her essay 'Modern Art & the Object' has identified certain qualities specific to the American tradition:

A quality of concentration and clarity, giving no harbour to the irrelevant distinguishes the American tradition in Art. A matter of fact attitude which uncovers the unknown in the familiar and a need on the part of the artist to wrest the image from his own personal experience. By isolating and concentrating on single objects from his daily environment (a piece of fruit, a toaster in the kitchen), the artist creates an image which may be an intensification of his experience of the mysterious power of simple things but which he has brought into an entirely different state of being from the source object. (Johnson, 1976, P.125)

I have noted a simplification and a directness throughout my survey of modern American painting. Also something of the poetics of the space and scale run hand in hand with the matter-of-fact in American art. In general American painting was large in scale, space was emphasised. The scale of Brady's paintings is small and unobtrusive, despite this they manage to convey a sense of space. The space is important, it is active, not passive. He did not like the obvious prize winning paintings but preferred the subtle. He was interested in how the image could capture the curiosity of the viewer with its sometimes hazy simplicity and almost bland ordinariness. For Brady, less was more. It is somewhere in the muted space around these objects where meaning seems to lie. this focus on tiny details of the material world, painted with the soft ephemeral quality that distinguishes a Brady from the rest, could be described as his own personal poetry.

Another American contemporary of Brady's with whom he shares common ground is Wayne Thiebaud (born 1920). He arrived in New York the year Brady left (1956) when Abstract Expressionism was at its height. Like many artists who flocked to New York in the 1950s, Thiebaud attended discussions and parties at the Cedar Bar. Thiebaud was most drawn to De Kooning who emphasised painting as an unpremeditated risk-taking voyage into abstraction. Thiebaud became interested in the glittering wares of American Dime Stores and shop window displays that

was dominant in the 19th century. Modernism brought with it the potential for focusing on a purely aesthetic space. Brady's isolation of the simple object in an empty space does reflect a modernist influence. In painting, modernism was involved with seeking new ways to deal with pictorial problems. One of the characteristics of modernism is the exposure of the means of creating a painting, avoiding illusion and dealing with the actuality of paint on a surface. Brady's paintings emphasise this through his use of a featureless background and simple composition, ignoring the more traditional compositional techniques and giving the object centre stage treatment or a sense of the object being displayed could be taken as a reflection of a modernist background. Ford and L. Smith in his book *Movements in Art Since 1945* states how the bold central image became one of the trademarks of the new American painting - one of the things that differentiated it from European art (Smith: 1945).

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A quality of concentration and clarity, giving no harbor to the viewer and distinguishing the American tradition in Art. A sense of the image which uncovers the unknown in the familiar and a reach on the part of the artist to wrest the image from his own personal experience. By isolating and concentrating on single objects from his daily environment to reach of that a 'center' in the kitchen, the artist creates an image which may be an understatement of his experience of the mysterious power of simple things but which he has brought into an entirely different state of being from the source object. (Johnson, 1972: 93-94)

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Another American contemporary of Brady's with whom he shares common ground is Wayne Thibault (born 1920). He arrived in New York the year Brady left (1950) when Abstract Expressionism was at its height. Like many artists who flocked to New York in the 1950s, Thibault attended discussions and parties at the Cedar Bar. Thibault was most drawn to the Romantic who emphasised painting as an unrestrained risk-taking voyage into abstraction. Thibault became interested in the glowering works of American Dime Store and shop window displays that

celebrated Post War abundance. Thiebaud explains, 'fish laid out on a plain white surface are very moving, a kind of tragedy actually' (Tsujimoto, 1905, P.27). Club sandwiches, perfectly layered and cut into triangles, these are what Thiebaud has referred to as the 'tattletale signs' of our culture and he is absorbed with documenting them. Here there are interesting parallels to be drawn with the work of Brady. Brady's choice of objects are mundane things like a slice of chocolate cake, a paper bag, a comb, a baseball hat (see fig's 9 & 10). Similarly, they speak of ordinary everyday objects but rather than documenting the range of objects as Thiebaud does, Brady creates an atmosphere, a mood. The space around the objects is given the same attention as the object, pears or tubes of paint float in an ambiguous space (see fig's 11 & 12). Describing the object isn't what motivated Brady but rather trying to capture moments at a level of our experience that is so close to us it becomes clutter in our consciousness. Brady, like so many other painters mentioned here, teased out these pieces of matter and gave them a stage. This is not the crisp, clean, structured painted descriptions of Sheeler and the Precisionists but an airy, soft, gentle, childlike reflection. His compositions, reduced to a few rectangles, usually an equally divided painting surface, provided the minimal setting for his things: objects captured in a brief hazy moment. Brady explained to Brian Lynch (Hibernia 14.2.80):

As a child I remember driving in the countryside and you know, you'd see a piece of farm machinery an eighth of a mile away and you'd say what is it and your father would stop the car. The minute you found out what it was it would lose its interest.

In this his concern differs greatly from that of Thiebaud who was interested in clearly documenting the material world. It is interesting to note the parallel between Brady's interest in capturing a moment of blurred vision and Chardin's experiments with painting peripheral vision, which I will look at in more detail in Chapter Two.

'Each age brings with it its own light' Matisse once stated (Tsujimoto, 1985, P.46) The light that Thiebaud evokes is the harsh supermarket glare of fluorescent lights while Brady preferred the light of Ireland which appears to soften the edges. Talking to Kate Robinson (S.I. 7.6.87) Brady said, 'what I am really doing is painting a big City slice of myself in the light of Ireland'.

When interviewed by Desmond McAvoock Brady mentioned that 'what interest him is the light, how it strikes the edges, reflects from one part to another, defines the shape against the background.' Interestingly, he works mainly by artificial light. The source of his illumination, he explained is always an exterior one even in his interiors. Brady painted what he described as 'mental light' (Brian Lynch. Hibernia 14.2.80).

Another common feature that Brady and Thiebaud shared in the early work was that the artist's hand be visible in a work of art. This is reflected in their admiration for the Abstract Expressionists, particularly De Kooning, for whom the manipulation of

...elaborated *Post War* abundance. Thickband explains, 'fish laid out on a plain white surface are very much a kind of tragedy actually' (Thickband, 1992: p. 27). Club sandwiches, carefully layered and cut into triangles, these are what Thickband has referred to as the 'travelling signs' of our culture and he is absorbed with documenting them. Here there are interesting parallels to be drawn with the work of Brady. Brady's choice of objects are mundane things like a slice of chocolate cake, a paper bag, a comb, a baseball bat (see figs 9 & 10). Similarly, they speak of ordinary everyday objects but rather than documenting the range of objects as Thickband does, Brady creates an atmosphere, a mood. The space around the objects is given the same attention as the object, poses or index of paint that is an ambiguous space (see figs 11 & 12). Describing the object isn't what motivated Brady but rather trying to capture moments at a level of our experience that is so close to us it becomes almost in the consciousness. Brady, like so many other painters mentioned here, turned out these pieces of matter and gave them a stage. This is not the crisp, clean, structured painted descriptions of Sheeler and the Precisionists but so airy, soft, gentle, childlike reflection. His compositions, reduced to a few rectangles, usually an equally divided painting surface, provided the minimal setting for his things: objects captured in a brief busy moment. Brady explained to Brian Lynch (interview 14.2.2012):

As a child I remember driving in the countryside and you know you'd see a piece of farm machinery on either side of a mile away and you'd say what is it and your father would stop the car. The minute you found out what it was it would lose its interest.

In this, his concern differs greatly from that of Thickband who was interested in clearly documenting the material world. It is interesting to note the parallel between Brady's interest in capturing a moment of blurred vision and Thickband's experiments with painting technical vision, which I will look at in more detail in Chapter Two.

Each age hangs with its own light. Maltese once stated (Thickband, 1982: p. 40). The light that Thickband evokes is the harsh supermarket glare of fluorescent lights while Brady preferred the light of Ireland which appears to soften the edges. Talking to Kate Robinson (21.7.08) Brady said, 'what I am really doing is painting a bit of my side of myself in the light of Ireland'.

When interviewed by Desmond McAree Brady mentioned that 'what interest there is the light how it strikes the object, reflects from one part to another, defines the shape against the background'. Interestingly, he works mainly by natural light. The source of the illumination, he explained is always an exterior one: even in his interior. Brady painted what he described as 'natural light' (Brian Lynch, interview 14.2.2012).

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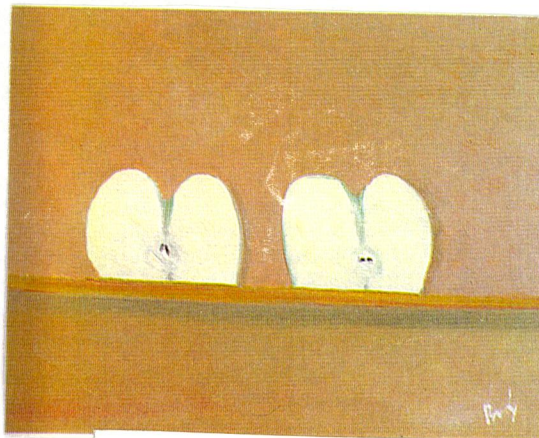


Figure 8
Half Cookers
Charles Brady

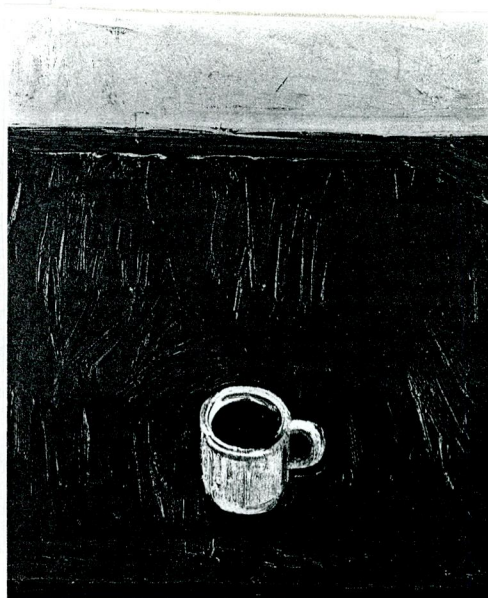


Figure 9
Coffee Cup
Wayne Thiebaud

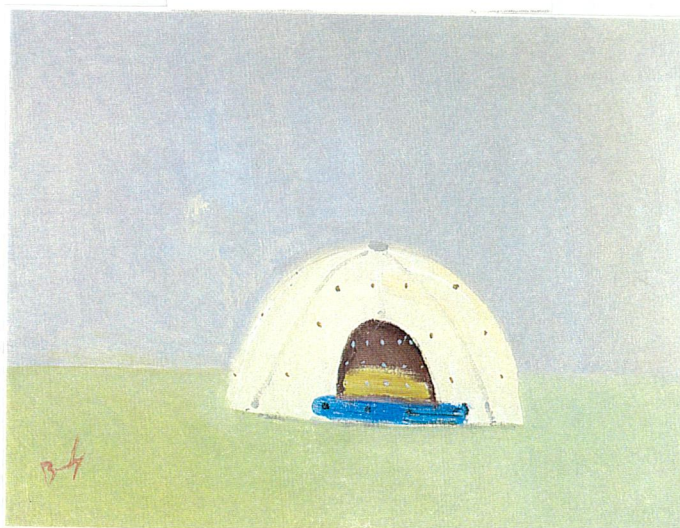


Figure 10
Baseball Hat
Charles Brady

8.

6.

10.

11.

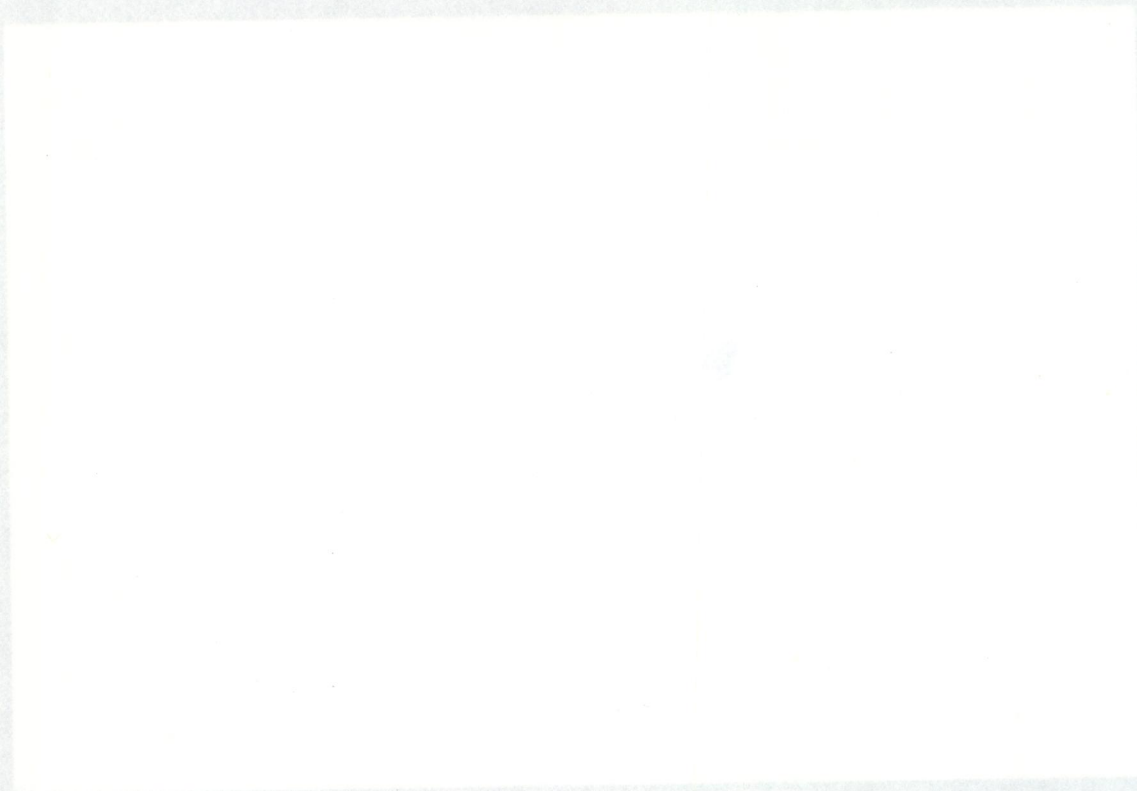
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Figure 11
Two French Pears
 Charles Brady



Figure 12
Untitled
 Charles Brady



paint was key. Thiebaud's painting Ribbon Shop (1957) (see fig.13) is abstract and submerged in painterly strokes that strongly suggest the influence of the Abstract Expressionists. I find a striking similarity between this and the darting brush strokes of Brady's early cottage paintings or the palisades of the Hudson River (see fig.14). The fact that these everyday scenes were taken out of their context and abstracted, painted with such expression in richly textured rectangular patterns connects them visually.

Thiebaud returned to the subject, realising it was a richer and fuller means of expression for him. He produced hundreds of images that focussed on such unremarkable subjects as pies, cakes, club sandwiches. He reworked many of them isolating fewer objects against simple backdrops of colour (see fig.15). He was spurred on by the belief that one should be able to make art out of anything. After his first one man show (1962) critics were concerned with the social implications they perceived in his work. Brian O'Doherty of the New York Times saw Thiebaud as the "wordless poet of the banal". Brady's still life's at first might also appear a little banal, but that is characteristic of their humility - they don't demand a reaction. The muted tones and soft modelling of the edges contribute to the quiet presence they achieve.

Thiebaud painted commercial lighting with commercial colours. It was an American world and his interest lay in describing the material abundance especially the sophisticated foodstuffs on display. In his own way Brady was aware of trying to paint his own world. In his early work in New York it was the pigeons, manhole covers, the palisades of the Hudson river, later the objects he came in contact with in his daily life, paperbacks, envelopes, boxes. These things were not particularly American, as are Thiebauds; they are timeless, not concerned in portraying a specific location.

Because of the new world formed by the artist, the actual things that served as impulses for his/her creativity will never again be for us the same old things they were before they struck his imaginative sensibilities. Claes Oldenberg was another American artist involved with using the mundane object. As Johnson points out,

He chose his subjects and materials because they were at hand. They are his, and in their cheapness and immediacy they are the most fitting subjects for his art, in which he celebrates so eloquently the life of the city, dizzy, cheap, absurd, ephemeral, always on the move, going nowhere.....The emotive content of Oldenberg's work is heightened by the importance which he gives to the feeling of time, of the immediate future in the expectation contained in a letter, or the tempting promise of his pastries. (Johnson, 1976, pp.146-147)

Oldenberg's objects are signs of human life, of simple essential activities. He makes his objects bigger, emphasising, blowing up literally the insignificance of shoes, hot dogs, ice cream cones (see fig.16). This could be described as confrontational while Brady's images are quiet and contemplative. Brady dislikes the obvious. In his

point was key. Thiebaut's painting *Ribbon Shop* (1957) (see fig. 1.3) is abstract and submerged in painterly strokes that strongly suggest the influence of the Abstract Expressionists. I find a striking similarity between this and the dancing brush strokes of Brady's early collage paintings of the palisades of the Hudson River (see fig. 1.4). The fact that these everyday scenes were taken out of their context and abstracted, painted with such expression in highly textured rectangular patterns connects them visually.

Thiebaut returned to the subject, realising it was a richer and fuller means of expression for him. He produced hundreds of images that focused on such remarkable subjects as pies, cakes, club sandwiches. He reworked many of them isolating few objects against simple backdrops of colour (see fig. 1.5). He was spurred on by the belief that one should be able to make an art out of anything. After his first one man show (1962) critics were concerned with the social implications they perceived in his work. Brian O'Donoghue of the *New York Times* saw Thiebaut as the "wordless poet of the family." Brady's still life's at first might also appear a little banal, but that is characteristic of their humility - they don't demand a reaction. The muted tones and soft modelling of the edges contribute to the quiet resonance they achieve.

Thiebaut painted commercial lighting with commercial colours. It was an American need and his interest lay in describing the material abundance especially the sophisticated foodstuffs on display. In his own way Brady was aware of trying to paint his own world. In his early work in New York it was the pigments, materials, the products of the Hudson River, later the objects he came in contact with in his daily life: paperbacks, canvases, boxes. These things were not particularly American, as are Thiebaut's; they are timeless, not connected in any way to a specific location.

Because of the new world formed by the artist, the actual things that served as impulses for his art eventually will never again be for us the same old things they were before they struck his imagination - sensibilities. (Clara Oldenberg was another American artist involved with using the mundane object. As Johnson points out:

He chose his subjects and sometimes because they were at hand. They are his, and in their closeness and immediacy they are the more fitting subjects for his art in which he celebrates so eloquently the life of the city, dinky, cheap, ephemeral, always on the move, going nowhere.... The canny restraint of Oldenberg's work is highlighted by the importance which he gives to the feeling of time, of the immediate future in the expectation contained in a letter or the tempting promise of his pastries (Johnson, 1970, pp. 156-157).

Oldenberg's objects are signs of human life of simple essential activities. The makes his objects bigger, emphasising, blowing up minutely the insignificance of shoes, for example, or even roses (see fig. 1.6). This could be described as confrontational while Brady's images are quiet and contemplative. Brady dislikes the obvious. In his

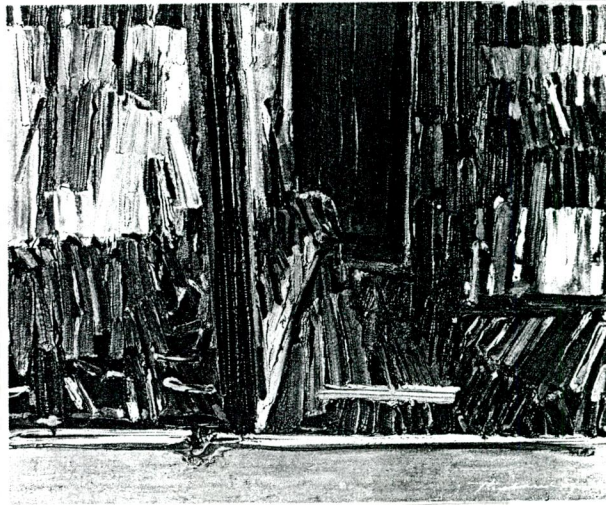


Figure 13
Ribbon Shop
 Wayne Thiebaud, 1957

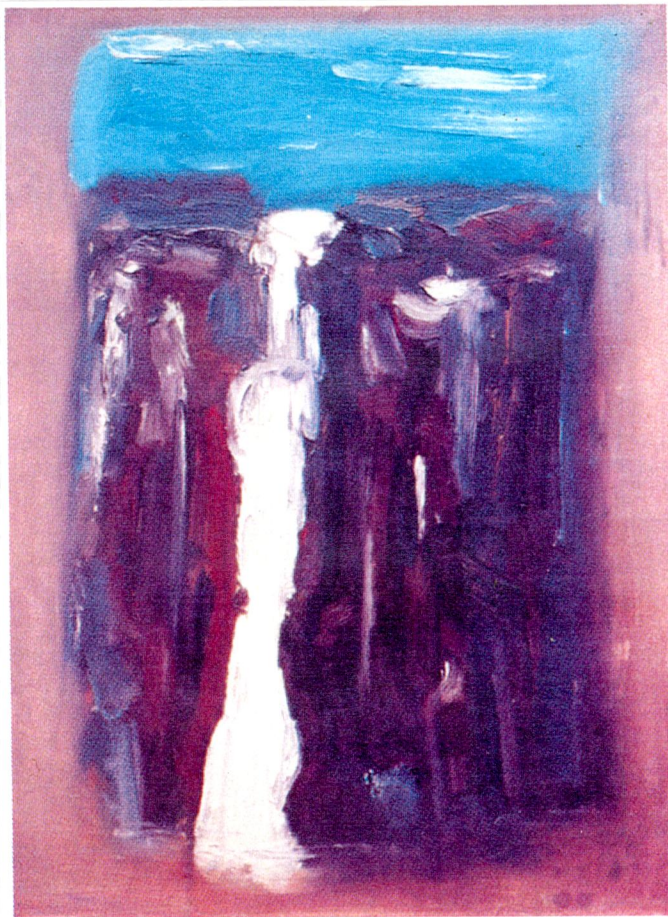


Figure 14
Pallisades, study
 Charles Brady, 1955

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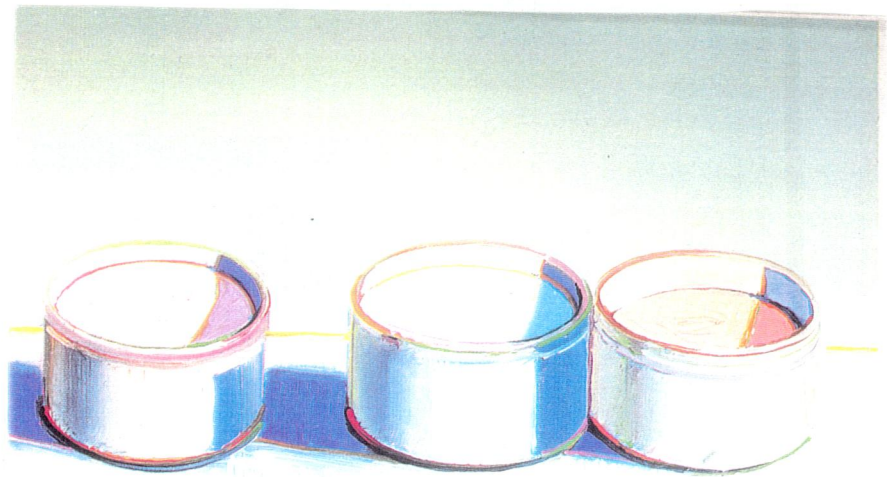


Figure 15
Three Cold Creams
 Wayne Thiebaud



Figure 16
Untitled
 Claes Oldenburg



paintings there is a pull between abstraction and representation. His use of the object should not be considered as a violation of or a defection from abstract expressionism. Abstract Expressionists put great stock in the interior life as source material for both the joys and anxieties of daily life. Over thirty years later it is difficult to conjure up how radical was the sense of ordinariness that the commonplace images of Thiebaud, Oldenberg and many more projected. The common theme linking these artists is their devotion to the expressive power of the ordinary transformed.

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Chapter II

Still life is a category within the historical production of pictures. While history painting is constructed around narratives, still life is the world minus its narratives, or better the world minus its capacity for generating narrative interest. Narrative works hard to explain why any particular story is worth narrating - because the actions in the story are heroic or wonderful or cautionary or instructive. The whole principle of story telling is jeopardised or paralysed by the hearer's objection; 'so what'? But still life loves the 'so what'. At this level of routine existence centred on domesticity, uniqueness of personality becomes an irrelevance. (Bryson, '90, P.10)

Bryson tries to emphasise how still life painting failed to impress its value as a genre in comparison to the depiction of those things which are considered to be great or important, such as the legends and battles of history. Still life painting depicts things which lack importance, the basic material aspect of our lives which is so often overlooked. The still life image excludes the human presence. Its focus is concerned particularly with an area of life minus the human subject.

Still life negates the whole process of constructing and assessing human beings as the primary focus of depiction - it assaults the centrality value and prestige of the human subject (Bryson, '90, P.60)

It is interesting to draw together major artists throughout history who involved themselves in depicting this aspect of life. I was curious about the connection between Vermeer's use of the letter as a subject, and Charlie Brady's many small paintings of envelopes. In the Vermeer Woman in Blue Reading a Letter it is an inward human moment at the heart of the painting that gives it such a lasting impression.

It is the private ultimately inaccessible nature of the experience that Vermeer contemplates, enclosing it in a world out of reach. (Snow, 79, P.6)

To try to explain the situation the woman is in, to attempt to demystify the image with explanations, would be missing the point. It is precisely this gap in the narrative that gives the painting its intense attraction. Here Vermeer succeeded in showing people that to keep one's distance and let things be is as worthwhile as having access to the story behind the image.

The letter, the map, the woman's pregnancy, the empty chair, the open box, the unseen window are all reminders or natural emblems of absence, of the unseen, of other minds, wills, times and places of past and future - in general of a world that extends beyond the frame. (Snow, 79, P.6)

The simple still life image can leave a broad scope for the imagination. McAvock

Still life is a category within the historical production of pictures. While history painting is concerned about narratives, still life is the world minus its narratives, or better the world minus its capacity for generating narrative interest. Narrative works hard to explain why any particular story is worth narrating - because the actions in the story are heroic or wonderful or cautionary or instructive. The whole principle of story telling is jeopardised or paralysed by the realist's objectivity: 'so what?' But still life loves the 'so what'. At this level of routine existence centred on domesticity, uniqueness of personality becomes an irrelevance. (Bryson, 90, p.10)

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It is the private ultimately inaccessible nature of the experience that Vermeer conveys best, enclosing it in a world out of reach. (Snow, 79, p.6)

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The letter, the map, the woman's pregnancy, the empty chair, the open box, the unseen window are all reminders or natural elements of absence, of the unseen, of other minds, with times and places of past and future - in general of a world that extends beyond the frame. (Snow, 79, p.6)

The simple still life image can leave a broad scope for the imagination. (McAuley)

states that Charles Brady is adamant that his use of the letter is never for sentimental or associational reasons: there are no messages in this envelope (see fig.17). He says that he just notices an object that he can 'use'. It is his shape but, as McAvock points out, the titles suggest that there is more than just the purely visual reason for selecting a particular bus ticket or pencil. For Brady the arrival of the post everyday, was important, communication with America never ceased. At times Brady gives the object a character by describing it in the title as belonging to someone in particular. Brady felt that in Ireland words are important. There is humour in his titles, such as Sister Pius's Paintbox. Harvey attempting to read the British Constitution is a simple blue sofa. Wolf Tone's Hat Box could be taken as a send up of the institution. Certainly many of the titles are charged with connotations. British Rail Sandwich implies an impish sense of humour. His slightly dramatic titles give the works another dimension by combining a serious element with the mundane, such as Sister Pius with paintbox, or Wolfe Tone with Hat Box, or British Rail with Sandwich, casts an undeniably humorous light on the subject.

Woman in Blue reading a letter is the only of Vermeer's interiors framed entirely against the rear wall of the room. This helps to give the image a stillness, a sense of containment and completeness. Bryson states that

What still life opposes is the idea of the canvas as a window on the world leading to a distant view. It proposes a much closer space. Instead of a zone beyond, one finds a blank, vertical wall sometimes coinciding with a real wall but no less persuasively it is a virtual wall, simply a cutting off of further space. (Bryson, '90, P.71)

Leaving out the spatial context of an interior creates an intimacy, gives the image a personal dimension, leaving it open for the viewer to form associations and to conjure up personal experiences. The focus on the object gives us a release from the complicated world we've grown used to. To find ourselves moved or marvelling at an image of an artist's palette or a comb inspires in us the value of simplicity. The restful unassuming nature of Brady's paintings provides an oasis in an overheated, over intellectualised world. The lack of clutter in his work is liberating for the viewer, giving a freedom to think one's own thoughts or to fill in the rest of the story. Despite the still life image being the world minus the human subject, its capacity for provoking thought or relating stories is not lost. The object can be a portrayal of humanity.

Brady does not intensify the subject. Through his use of simple minimal composition, the isolation of the object and colour saturation he does something of the opposite. As Dorothy Walker points out, he is "investing the image with greater reality by de-intensifying its appearance making it something that is mild simple and inescapable." (Walker, Irish Times, 6.6.87)

At a time when still life was the underdog, paradoxically it was regarded as most valuable in schooling the painter in the essentials of his art. "The painter who works from a motionless model more readily fathoms the secrets of forms and their

states that (James) Brady is adamant that his use of the letter is never for sentimental or associational reasons: there are no messages in this envelope (see fig. 17). He says that he just notices an object that he can 'use'. It is his shape but as McAvoy points out, the titles suggest that there is more than just the purely visual reason for selecting a particular bus ticket or parcel. For Brady the artist of the post everyday, was important communication with America never ceased. At times Brady gives the object a character by describing it in the title as belonging to someone in particular. Brady felt that in landscape work was important. There is humor in his titles such as Sister Jim's Paintbox. However, the painting to read the British Constitution is a simple blue sofa. Wolf Tone's Hat Box could be taken as a stand up of the institution. Certainly many of the titles are charged with connotations: British Hat. Samuel's Hat implies an implicit sense of humor. His slightly dramatic titles give the work another dimension by combining a serious element with the mundane, such as Shoe Box with paintbox, or Wolf's Tone with Hat Box, or British Hat with Sam's Hat, casts an undeniably humorous light on the subject.

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At a time when still life was the underdog, paradoxically, it was regarded as most valuable in schooling the painter in the essentials of his art. "The painter who works from a model's model more readily learns the secrets of form and their

relations with light and space.” (Sterling, 1981, P.96)

Of all the French artists previous to the nineteenth century, Chardin, alongside Poussin and Claude Lorrain, is the one who has had one of the greatest influences on modern painting. Only in Cezanne and in post Cezannian painting can we hope to find so much power in so much simplicity. In Chardin's pictures no part of the painting is seen as unimportant (see fig.18) and the space around the object is just as significant as the objects themselves. This is difficult as it involves activating and energising areas of a scene, which vision is normally quick to pass over. And what is impressive is that this investment in blank or empty areas of the canvas does not result in an over laboured image.

All the forms tend towards blur as though Chardin were trying to paint peripheral rather than central vision and in this way to suggest a familiarity with the objects in the visual field on such intimate and friendly terms that nothing anymore needs to be vigilantly watched. In a Chardin still life there are never more than a few points emerging as 'focussed', which conveys the idea of vision moving in a relaxed way over a familiar scene. *Brief journeys across a corner of everyday life, nothing significant happens: the eye moves lightly and without avidity, it is at home,* (Sterling, '81, P.113)

It is interesting to note how in conversation with Brian Lynch (Hibernia 14.2.80) it was suggested that the object found in his pictures doesn't matter that much in itself. Brady agreed and said that he was trying to paint a total environment. "I spend more time on everything else besides the object." He did not want to be literal, feeling that would kill it for him. He was interested in that moment just before you recognise something, objects captured in a brief hazy moment. This, I feel, relates in some way to Chardin's experiments with painting peripheral vision. What Chardin was trying to achieve then was a casual familiarity with the still life objects of his paintings, that slightly blurred background of our domestic lives. Chardin has been quoted as saying:

That to paint anything I need to forget everything that I have seen, I need to place it far enough away from me so that I no longer see the details. I need to concentrate on the general masses, the colour tones, the volume and the effect of light and shade. (Lynton, '96, p.104)

Here I am drawing a parallel between Chardin's painterly concerns and Brady's interest in forms just before they become recognisable. Farm buildings seen at a distance when driving through the countryside grabbed his attention. He painted "objects on the brink of dissolution into pure form" (Hutchinson, Sunday Press, 31.5.87). His pile of Paperbacks (see fig.19) and Nearly Finished Artist's Tissues (see fig.20) just have barely enough representational information to be recognisable; the titles help to pin them down. As with Chardin, Brady activated and energised his backgrounds in his effort to paint a "total environment", a moment of vision suspended in paint.

Of all the French artists previous to the nineteenth century, Chardin stands alongside Poussin and Lorraine as the one who has had one of the greatest influences on modern painting. Only in Courbet and in post-Courbetian painting can we hope to find so much power in so much simplicity. In Chardin's pictures no part of the painting is seen as unimportant (see fig. 18) and the space around the object is just as significant as the object itself. This is difficult as it involves analysing and envisaging areas of a scene, which vision is normally quick to pass over. And what is impressive is that this investment in blank or empty areas of the canvas does not result in an over-laboured image.

All the forces tend towards him as though Chardin were trying to paint peripheral rather than central vision and in this way to suggest a familiarity with the objects in the visual field on such intimate and friendly terms that nothing anyone needs to be vigilantly watched. In a Chardin still life there are never more than a few planes converging as if towards a point, which conveys the idea of vision moving in a relaxed way across a familiar scene. What journey across a corner of everyday life, nothing significant happens: the eye moves lightly and without striving. It is at home. (Kunstler, 1981, p. 117)

It is interesting to note how in conversation with Brian Lynch (Hibbard 14-1580) it was suggested that the object found in his pictures doesn't matter that much in itself. Lynch agrees and says that he was trying to paint a total environment. "I spend more time on everything else besides the object." He did not want to be literal, feeling that would kill it for him. He was interested in that moment just before you recognise something, objects captured in a brief half-moment. This, Lynch, relates in some way to Chardin's experiments with painting peripheral vision. What Chardin was trying to achieve then was a casual familiarity with the still life objects of his paintings, that slightly blurred background of our domestic life. Chardin has been quoted as saying:

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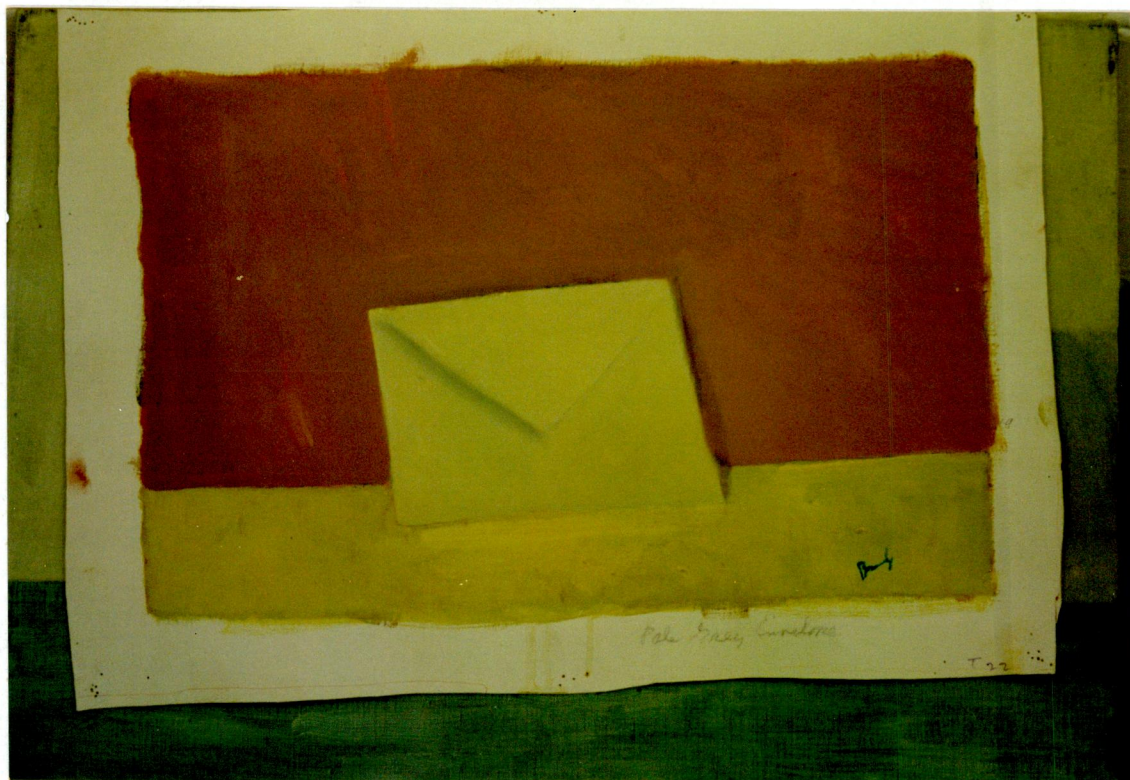


Figure 17
Pale Grey Envelope
Charles Brady



Figure 18
Still Life
Chardin





Figure 19
Paperbacks
Charles Brady



Figure 20
Artists Tissue
Charles Brady



While Chardin's special interest lay in offering intimate reality Brady, so much later, produced images that were intimate but were pulled into an ambiguous state through the influence of his abstract expressionist beginnings.

Another artist that Brady is often compared with is Morandi. Both painters concentrate on small objects painted in a soft muted light. Both painted with the same concern for clear composition and tonal subtlety. Morandi's paintings reflect a fascination with renaissance composition. He approached his subject with detached analysis. Despite construction and balance, there remains something intentionally mysterious about them. The paintings have a quiet atmosphere about them, as do Brady's, they both invite quiet contemplation of the value of the humble things in life. But as Brian Fallon points out (Irish Times 12.7.89) "While Morandi painted everyday objects, Brady's are laughably commonplace." Morandi actually painted his objects all the same colour before he painted them, so it was not reality but architectonic space and light that interested him. His still lifes are monumental and imposing; they don't contain humour or the casual appeal of Brady's. They are sometimes painted to bursting point, displaying a seriousness and earnestness that is definitely not Brady's style. I would agree with Fallon's analysis that Morandi's works "are the creations of an aesthetic sensibility, so finely attuned in their poetic quality, that they might reasonably be described as precious." (I.T., 12.7.89) It is interesting to note the remarkable similarities in colour and tone between Brady's Eye Drop Bottles and Morandi's still life painted in 1937. (See fig's 21 & 22). the cardboard and paper qualities of Brady's objects evoke a non-precious feeling. perhaps Brady was playing his bottles off against Morandi's, indulging his sly sense of humour once more, or merely referring to Morandi's still life with his use of almost identical colour and tonal values.

Referring to Eye Drop Bottles, (see fig.21) there appear to be contradictions of light in this painting, the overall light quality is one of outdoor light, but the strong yet subtle shadows, falling at slightly different angles, as if from different light sources, results in a light pull on the harmonious nature of the painting. Maybe this is an example of his painting of "mental light", as mentioned in Chapter I.

Here the parallel between these two artists ends. Morandi's seriousness contrasts with Brady's humour. John Hutchinson writing on Brady's work (S.P. 31.5.87) connects the humour in Brady's work to

the Japanese wisdom of Zen which views the world with an intensity that is so simple and direct that it is almost laughable. Bus ticket on Sandymount Strand is the title of one of his pictures; Two Nearly Finished Artist's Tissues is another. While most of his peers may struggle with emotive themes Brady is content to paint what he finds under his nose.

Irony and humour are a major part of his work and this may have something to do with Zen Buddhism which some say was a formative influence on the Abstract Expressionists. Brady's still lifes do not have the emotional detachment seen in

While Chardin's special interest lay in depicting intimate reality, Brandy, so much later, produced images that were intimate but were pulled into an ambiguous and through the influence of his abstract expressionist beginnings.

Another artist that Brandy is often compared with is Mondrian. Both painters concentrate on small objects painted in a soft muted light. Both painted with the same concern for clear composition and formal subtlety. Mondrian's paintings reflect a fascination with repetitive composition. He approached his subject with detached analysis. Despite construction and balance, there remains something intentionally mysterious about them. The paintings have a quiet atmosphere about them, as do Brandy's, they both have a quiet contemplation of the value of the humble things in life. But as Brian Fallon points out (Irish Times 12.7.89) "While Mondrian painted everyday objects, Brandy's are laughably contrived." Mondrian actually painted his objects at the same colour before he painted them, so it was not really, but an abstract space and light that interested him. His still lifes are monumental and imposing; they don't contain humour or the casual appeal of Brandy's. They are sometimes painted to bursting point displaying a seriousness and earnestness that is definitely not Brandy's style. I would agree with Fallon's analysis that Mondrian's works "are the creation of an aesthetic sensibility, so finely attuned in their poetic quality that they might reasonably be described as precious" (11.1.12.7.89). It is interesting to note the remarkable similarities in colour and tone between Brandy's *Fig* (1937, *See figs 21 & 22*) the cardboard and paper qualities of Brandy's objects evoke a non precious feeling. Perhaps Brandy was playing his cards off against Mondrian's, indulging his six sense of humour once more or merely referring to Mondrian's still life with his use of almost identical colour and total values.

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the Japanese wisdom of Zen which views the world with an intensity that is so simple and direct that it is almost laughable. *Fig* (1937) (see fig 21) is the title of one of his pictures. *Fig* (1937) (see fig 21) is another. While most of his pictures are simple and direct, Brandy's is a struggle with emotion. Brandy is content to paint what he finds under his nose.

Irony and humour are a major part of his work and this may have something to do with Zen Buddhism which some say was a formative influence on the Abstract Expressionists. Brandy's still lifes do not have the emotional detachment seen in

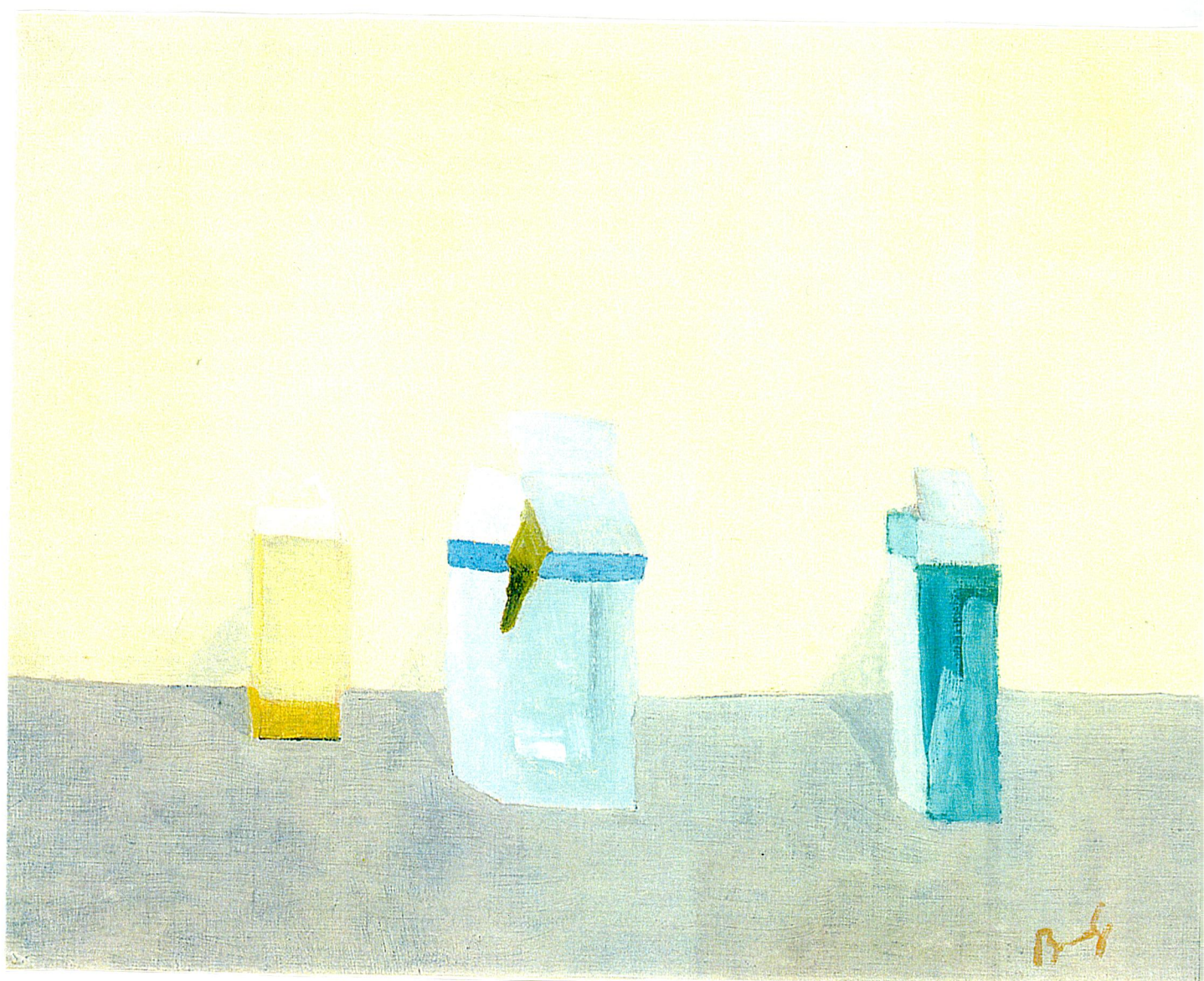


Figure 21
Eye Drop Bottles
Charles Brady





38 Natura Morta, 1942

Figure 22
Still Life
Morandi



Morandi's, they reflect a "Zen-like perception of the absurdly profound simplicity of ordinariness". (Hutchinson, S.P., 31.5.87)

Chapter III

The still life image has never provided much of a contribution to the painting tradition in Ireland. The rich and dramatic landscape and erratic light of Ireland has ensured that landscape provided sufficient inspiration and subject matter from which to work for many artists. When Charlie Brady first arrived in Ireland he took to evoking the rich green countryside of Waterford where he settled for a while. His style and techniques smacked of his Abstract Expressionist background. This was an interesting change from the romanticised images of Ireland that we had grown used too, in many instances. Commenting on Brady's approach to landscape, Desmond McAvoek noted:

At times, in the 50's and early 60's these gave a view of this subject that was refreshingly different from all the Paul Henry derivatives which still held sway. (McAvoek, '92, P.8)

It was in fact McAvoek who recognised in Brady's individual approach something worthwhile and encouraged and supported him by buying some of his earlier efforts.

Brady brought with him from New York a streetwise attitude and the effects of the excitement painters were experiencing in New York at the time. Rural Ireland could not have been more unrelated to New York. An impact of this extreme cultural difference was to highlight the pressure and affectation of the painting community in New York. There, it was all about changing the way things were done and Brady could not see what was so great about change. When he returned to New York for a brief spell in 1950, he met Bill de Kooning who asked him what he thought of it. Brady's reply was "I haven't seen that much painting Bill. It's all show business," (Gandon, McAvoek, '93. P.21) Brady explained

The enthusiasm I experienced in New York when I was a young man was because I was a witness but not really a practitioner. Ireland has afforded me an enthusiasm that comes from inside myself as I sit at my easel and grow into late middle age. (Brady, 1993, P.25)

His early works were executed with the energy and expressiveness of the New York style, Brady felt that this was something he had to work with until he evolved a means of expressing the easy pace of Irish life. However, the simplified composition, featureless background and closely cropped format, which had the effect of pushing the subject forwards, were features of modernism that he never abandoned.

When Brady moved to a town environment, landscape featured less in his work. He began using objects to paint from, keeping the work small in scale. He remained working with this formula for the rest of his painting career and could be criticised for having a lack of variety or a lack of development. This I feel reflects his reaction to the pressure in New York to change attitudes to art. Brady painted what he saw.

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The enthusiasm I experienced in New York when I was a young man was because I was a witness but not really a participant. Ireland has afforded me an enthusiasm that comes from inside myself as I sit in my chair and grow into late middle age. (Brady, 1993, P.25)

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When Brady moved to a town environment, landscape featured less in his work. He began using objects to paint from, keeping the work small in scale. He remained working with this formula for the rest of his painting career and could be criticised for having a lack of variety or a lack of development. This I feel reflects his reaction to the pressure in New York to change attitudes to art. Brady painted what he saw.

When he was in New York he painted subway stations, pigeons, manhole covers; he painted the same thing again and again. The impact of his exhibitions could be described as "an object lesson in how a painter who pursues apparently limited modest aims can reach well beyond these self-imposed limits, not what he paints but what he puts into it" (Fallon I.T. July '89). In conversation with Brian Lynch (Hibernia 14.2.80) Brady said "Looking back it was the pigeons that got me into envelopes, the pigeons against the palisades". Lynch describes how Brady painted two or three hundred oils on paper based on the river, the palisades and the sky. Brady felt "whether it was the palisades or an envelope it's the same structure on a surface". Lynch emphasises how "for thirty years Brady worked on the theme of a disturbed horizon, surely a remarkable almost Giacometti-like example of the heights intense concentration can lead to." But this is just one element of his paintings. It's been said that the object was just a starting point for his painterly expression but considering his American background and the tradition of object painting there, his choice of object, the scale and intimacy of the finished picture, the theme of a disturbed horizon were not his only motivation.

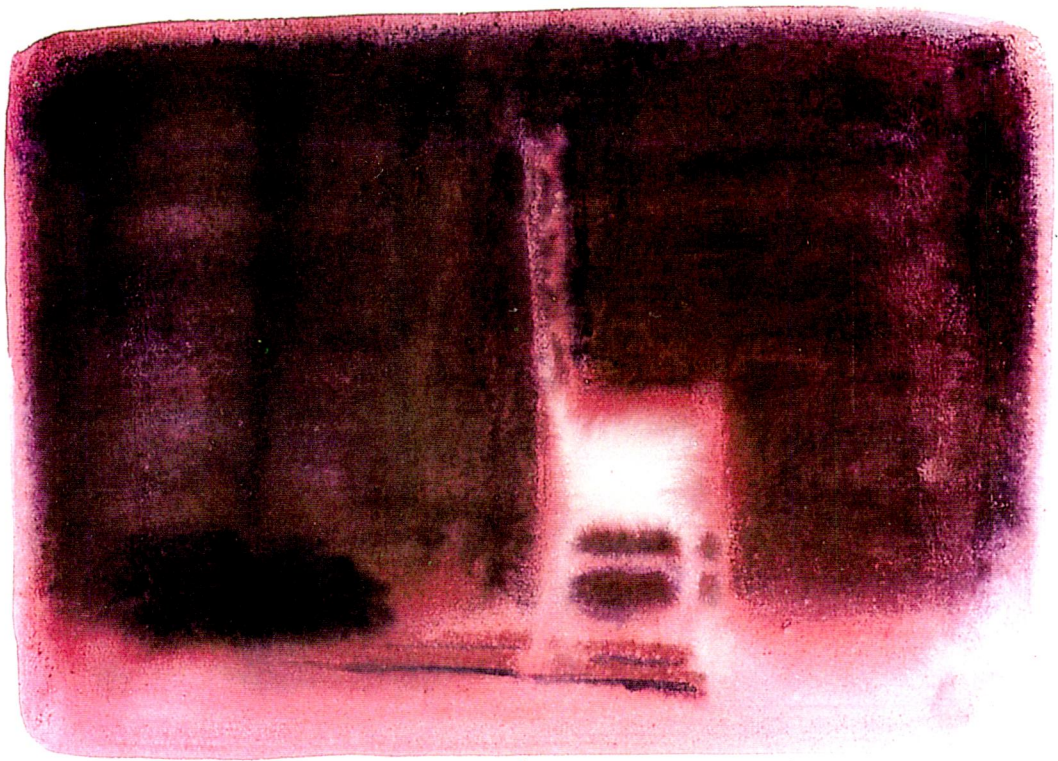
A contemporary of Brady's with whom parallels can be drawn is Camille Souter. Her work is on an intimate domestic scale and is muted in colour. She also delights in the everyday object. Souter's objects might be a rusting bed end thrown into a country ditch or an old boat tied to a jetty. For Souter the distinction between abstraction and realism is blurred. If she uses a section of a rock pool or a peeling painted door it could be described as abstract but she would argue that it is a still life. Her work is not obviously expressionist, but does have a subtle emotional content. For Souter the light on a subject is a very important ingredient of her work. She has an intuitive feel for the light and colour of nature. As with Brady, the edges of her shapes are ambiguously defined. Her paintings have that quiet and mysterious presence. Her immediate environment provides the visual stimulus for her paintings. Her interest in light and how it modifies our vision of objects would link her with Brady as would her focus on the humble object. A concern and love for life in its simplest terms connect the work of Brady with Souter.

Another Irish artist with whom Brady has been compared is Neil Shawcross. The main parallel to be drawn here is his delight in the presence of objects but while Brady's objects are quietly waiting to be seen, Shawcross imbues his with a sense of drama. They don't have the character and intimacy in common with Brady's; they speak of something else. Chair Against Red (see fig.23) has a slightly oppressive quality that is vaguely threatening. The isolation of the object in this case evokes feelings of futility and sadness - there is no warmth or humour here. "Importantly the vital transcendent, highly saturated paintings of Rothko have had their effect. His objects are luminous with a dramatic aura about their presence." (Kelly, '96, P.101) Shawcross' work is concerned with giving the object power through the effects of luminosity and intense use of colour. His objects take on the scale of architecture, taking on an importance. The understatement that works so well for Brady is missing.

When he was in New York he painted a few small-scale, pigeon, miniature covers he painted the same thing again and again. The impact of his exhibition could be described as "an object lesson in how a painter who pursues apparently limited modest aims can reach well beyond those self-imposed limits, not when he paints but when he puts into it" (Fallon 1, July 1989). In conversation with Brian Lynch (Hibbard 143-80) Brady said "Looking back it was the pigeons that got me into envelopes, the pigeons against the palisades". Lynch describes how Brady painted two or three hundred oils on paper based on the river, the palisades and the sky. Brady felt "whether it was the palisades or an envelope it's the same structure on a surface". Lynch emphasises how "for thirty years Brady worked on the theme of a disrupted horizon, surely a remarkable almost Giacometti-like example of the heights intense concentration can lead to". But this is just one element of his paintings. It has been said that the object was just a starting point for his painterly expression but considering his American background and the tradition of object painting there, his choice of object, the scale and intimacy of the finished picture, the theme of a disrupted horizon were not his only motivation.

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Shawcross 1982

Figure 23
Chair Against Red
Neil Shawcross



Still life is the perfect model on which to examine the way one actually sees an object. There have been painters (Caravaggio, Cezanne, Morandi) who focussed on the object as a way of displaying painterly skills. As Norman Bryson established in his book Looking at the Overlooked, Caravaggio deliberately abstracted his still lifes from any mundane location, cutting its ties to the earth. He injected into his still lifes qualities of the heroic and the extraordinary: mundane space is intensified to the point of theatricality and hyper-reality. The tricks of chiaroscuro bring forth from his still life objects a drama that is for the eye alone. Caravaggio used the humble object in order to focus attention on his individual creative skills and for no other reason. For Cezanne the still life formed a compositional armature for the paintings; what is presented in his paintings is not the objects but the means by which he represents them. I have already pointed out in Chapter Two the interests Morandi had in focussing on still life objects, and the use still life had for him.

Still life painting has shown constant change in some relation to the transformation of society as well as to the artistic ambitions of its time.

The still life is a system of objects. The system inherent to still life painting can be defined as both visual and signifying. It is based essentially on a choice of objects and a manner of organising them in a spatial field. (Rowell, '97, P13)

Brady concentrated mainly on the visual but his images convey a humanism, a communication about the value of the ordinary trivial aspects of our lives. For Brady the anecdotal, personal and social aspect of life was just as important as his work. The two were integrated. In New York the combination of art and life was particularly exciting. He discussed this with Brian Lynch (Hibernia 14/2/80). His excitement at being so close to something so important came across as he talked of 1950, when the Expressionists were just about to mount their first ever exhibition on Ninth Street.

It wasn't a dealers show but he was 'bowled over'. 'I'd never seen anything like it, I saw it at least five times. This was a world I was in touch with. These were guys who'd come up to me in the street and asked me how the Yankees were doing or the Red Sox.'

For Brady to keep art at a level where it didn't become lofty or out of reach for people who were not involved was important. The fact that he was disciplined enough to paint everyday was 'beautiful' for him. He considered himself a professional but 'never a careerist'. He felt fame would be an intrusion. It was life at the street level that made sense for him and this culture in a way must have provided a stimulus for the production of so much of his work. He was openly curious and visually aware, observing details of life as he went through his day. He was gregarious and got to know many people, sharing stories in public houses over a drink. The warmth and intimacy of his paintings, I feel, reflect this aspect of his personality. Brady's paintings provide for the viewer images that quietly invite a

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Beady concentrated gazing on the visual but his images convey a humanism, a communication about the value of the ordinary trivial aspects of our lives. For Beady the aesthetic, personal and social aspect of life was just as important as his work. The two were inseparable. In New York the combination of art and life was particularly exciting. He discussed this with Brian J. Jack (Whitman 141200). His excitement at being so close to something so important came across as he talked of 1930 when the Expressionists were just about to mount their first ever exhibition on Ninth Street.

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For Beady to keep out at a level where it didn't become holy or out of reach for people who were not involved was important. The fact that he was disinterested enough to paint everyday was 'revolutionary' for him. He considered himself a professional but never a careerist. He felt fame would be an intrusion. It was life at the street level that made sense for him and this culture in a way must have provided a stimulus for the production of so much of his work. He was openly curious and visually aware, observing details of life as he went through his day. He was gregarious and got to know many people, sharing stories in public houses over a drink. The warmth and intimacy of his paintings, I feel, reflect this aspect of his personality. Beady's paintings provide for the viewer images that quickly invite a

reaction. At a time when so much art is difficult to understand and intimidating to those who have no background in the field of art, Brady's work affords an accessibility and a commonality that shares art with life. To involve the spectator more directly with the work of art was one of the aims of painters like Franz Kline and Bill De Kooning, who Brady was close to in New York.

Each of Brady's still life images are the starting point of familiar stories - they are not narrative but do provide an essential link with the story of humanity. They suggest rather than state and the viewer has the space to relate to the imagery. As Fallon points out, 'He has been called a painter's painter, yet the evidence is that he can also appeal to a surprising variety of people,' (Irish Times, '91) Brady was interested in keeping the prices of his paintings low, so that they might be affordable to his friends and people he knew. He liked the idea of being able to see his work again.

The simplicity of Brady's paintings is quite deceptive. They are expertly painted and sophisticated in their techniques and as I have already, hopefully, unearthed they are profound. There is a paradox in the childlike honesty of the choice of subject and the highly skilled painterly qualities that seems to reaffirm his interest in keeping art at a level with ordinary life.

Brady carried through from his landscapes to his still lifes the delicate modelling of the edges by brush stroke. This could be regarded as the defining mark of his personal painterly expression, coaxing form from such minimalist means, at times with an almost monochromatic palette. The pull between the vagueness and the certainty of the presence of the object was something he seemed to respond to with charged interest. In particular, the two paintings Blue Cheese (see fig.24 & 25) and Two Half Cookers provoke this reaction. The ambiguity present in these paintings is created through a sense of veiling the objects in a subtle light. The light is what he tries to capture. The light of Ireland softens the edges, blurring the distinction between the object and the background. He painted with a special sensitivity to light usually in muted tones and sometimes balancing the composition or activating an area with small patches of richer colour. For example, his section of an artist's palette (see fig.9) is set against a neutralised background the rich blue patch reflects the saturated blue of the background and the pure red patch provides a fixed point of interest for the eye. Brady's paintings were expertly constructed technically; the elements to make something of quality were there. He used the science of colour in order to unify the composition, balancing yellow with blue, as in Farm Building in the Afternoon (see fig.26), red with green in White Comb (see fig.27). Similarly, in Eye Drop Bottles (see fig.21) the objects are dependent on Brady's sense of tone and colour for a feeling of unity and composition, again the pure yellow is reflected by the saturated yellow of the background and the turquoise by the diluted blue grey foreground. The delicate light evoked through his use of subtle shadow gives the objects presence and character. The tactile quality of his painting, the immediacy of the stroke or drip, also helped to imbue his objects with character. As Dunne points out, "the texture of the paint, which is richly worked suggests that its own actual

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Brady's still life images are the starting point of familiar stories - they are not narratives but do provide an essential link with the story of humanity. They suggest rather than state and the viewer has the space to relate to the imagery. As Fallon points out, "He has been called a painter's painter, for the evidence is that he can also appeal to a surprising variety of people." (Irish Times, 1981) Brady was interested in keeping the prices of his paintings low, so that they might be affordable to his friends and people he knew. He liked the idea of being able to see his work again.

The simplicity of Brady's paintings is quite deceptive. They are expertly painted and sophisticated in their techniques and as I have already hopefully mentioned they are profound. There is a paradox in the childlike honesty of the choice of subject and the highly skilled painterly qualities that seems to reflect his interest in keeping art at a level with ordinary life.

Brady carried through from his landscapes to his still life the delicate modelling of the edges by brush strokes. This could be regarded as the defining mark of his personal painterly expression, coming from such minimalist means at times with an almost monochromatic palette. The paint however, the vagueness and the ambiguity of the presence of the object was something he seemed to respond to with changed interest. In particular the two paintings *Blue Cheese* (see fig. 24 & 25) and *Two Glass Cakes* provoke this reaction. The ambiguity present in these paintings is created through a sense of veiling the objects in a subtle light. The light is what he tries to capture. The light of Ireland softens the edges, blurring the distinction between the object and the background. He painted with a special sensitivity to light usually in muted tones and sometimes balancing the composition or activating an area with small patches of richer colour. For example, in *Two Glass Cakes* the white cake (see fig. 26) is set against a neutral background, the thin blue patch on the saturated blue of the background and the pure red patch provides a fixed point of interest for the eye. Brady's paintings were expertly constructed technically, the elements to make something of quality were there. He used the science of colour in order to unify the composition, balancing yellow with blue, as in *Two Glass Cakes* (see fig. 26), red with green in *White Carrots* (fig. 27). Similarly, in *Two Glass Cakes* (see fig. 26) the object - not dependent on Brady's sense of tone and colour for a feeling of unity and composition, again the pure yellow is reflected by the saturated yellow of the background and the turquoise by the diluted blue grey foreground. The delicate light evoked through his use of subtle shadow gives the objects presence and character. The tactile quality of his painting, the immediacy of the stroke or drip, also helped to imbue his objects with character. As Donnan points out, "the texture of the paint which is thickly worked suggests that his own account

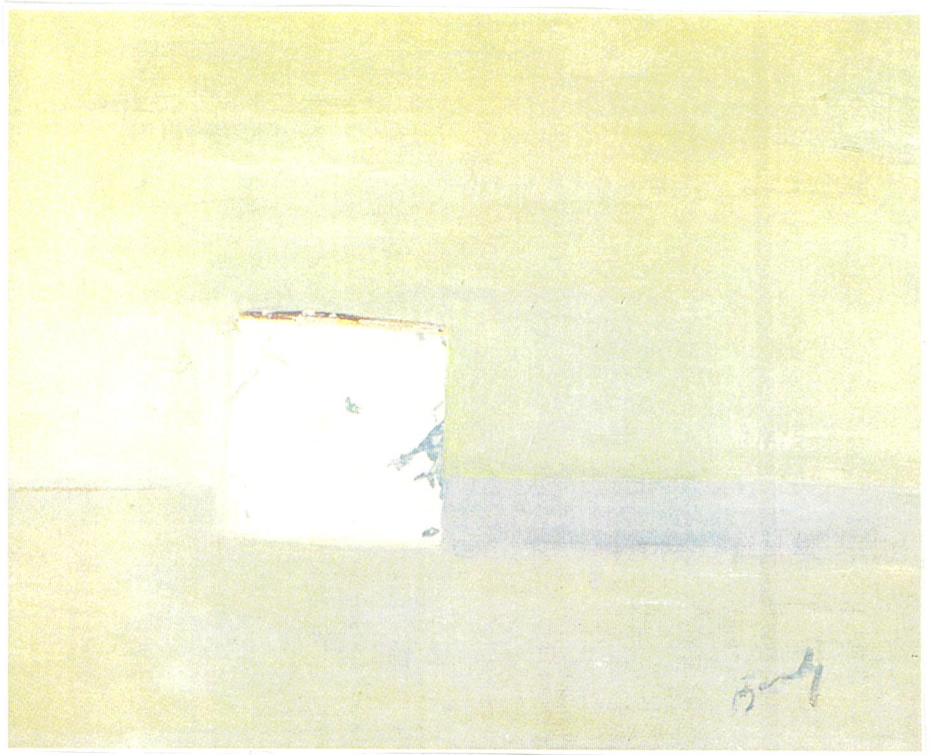


Figure 24
Blue Cheese
Charles Brady



Figure 25
Two Half Cookers
Charles Brady





Figure 26
Farm Building in the Afternoon
 Charles Brady

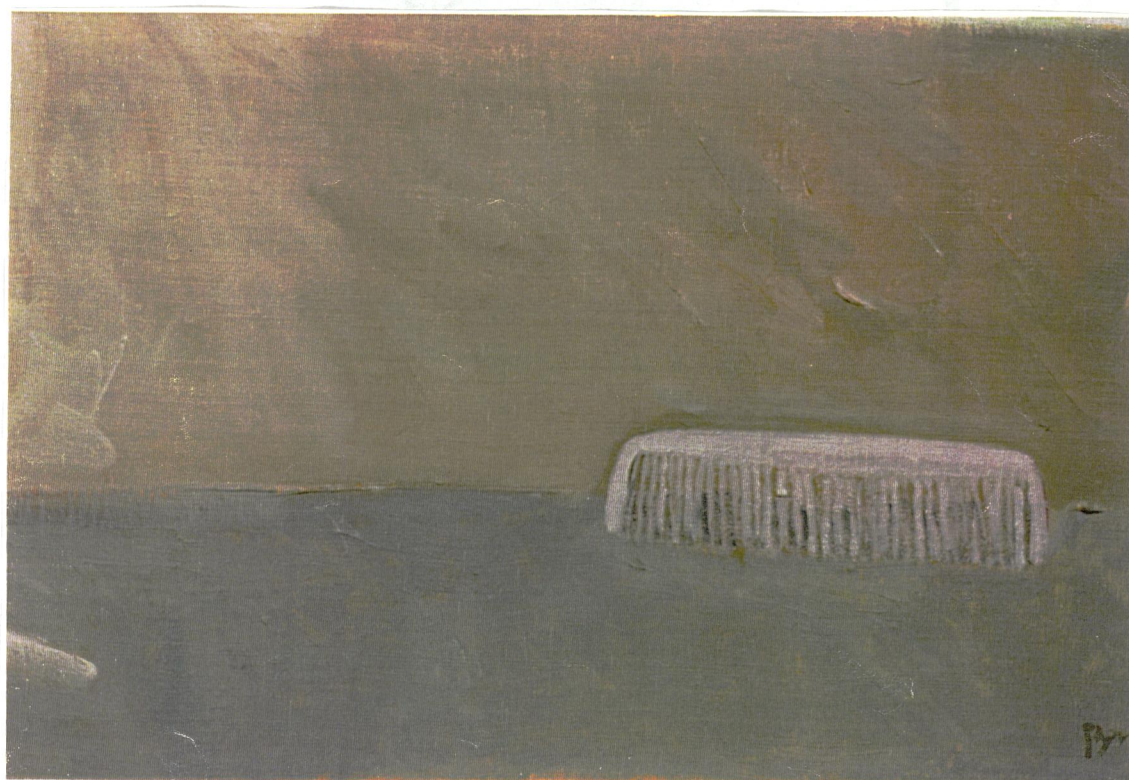


Figure 27
White Comb
 Charles Brady



depth is more substantial than the illusionist tricks it can perform," (S.P., Aidan Dunne, 21.10.84). Brady enriched images by alternating hot and cool colours and exaggerating the tactile surfaces of the objects. He relied on the expressive power of paint itself. His painting of a wallet is an example of how, through his use of colour and the texture of the paint, he can give an object a character and familiarity resulting in a feeling of intimacy.

Despite the familiarity of Brady's images, they can be veiled in a mysterious atmosphere. Objects are set ambiguously in space barely holding their form. They have a sense of being almost rendered invisible by a passing cloud, to regain clarity when the sun returns. This is the light of Ireland captured through, among other things, his background in abstraction. This pull between representation and abstraction contributes to the description of a layer of life that is unavoidable yet unnoticed.

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CONCLUSION

Brady's career began at a most eventful time in the art community of his native city, New York. Never before had American artists enjoyed such positive attention from the rest of the world. Abstract Expressionism formed the basis of his art and provided an exciting stimulus for the young painter. Ironically Brady left New York and came to Ireland. His decision to stay in Ireland, at a time when there was so much excitement in New York, reflects an aspect of his personality that could not survive the New York atmosphere and pressure. His reaction to the New York art world at the time, resulted in his settling for a life in Ireland where he found his place and pace. After settling in Ireland he produced a lifetimes work - a personal poetry.

His Abstract Expressionist beginnings, and the enthusiasm that life in Ireland afforded him, combined to make his work refreshingly different for Ireland in the late 1950s and early 1960s. His interest in the actual object used for the painting was probably not the primary motive for the work. His endless fascination for the effects of light on an object provided the impetus for a lot of the paintings. However, his curious, sociable and humorous personality was expressed in the treatment of his subject. His honest, unaffected nature helped to imbue the work with a warmth and familiarity. He described himself as an 'intimatisit' focussing on the mundane. My research into the American tradition of object painting highlighted how so many of his contemporaries were involved with a similar theme, devoting themselves to transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary.

The still life image, despite its lack of prestige, has provided many artists throughout history with a means to an end. The intense focus on the forms of still life concentrate the lessons of light and its relationship with form. The subtle nuances of light and tone provide endless opportunity for creative inquiry and experimentation. Many great artists chose to focus on this area of inquiry, and I have tried to connect the motives of these artists with those of Brady discovering that on some level the use of the still life object was just a focus for a display of painterly skills, or an undistracting way of revealing the secrets of painting. But the use of the object in Modern American Painting was for some, a way of commenting on American society.

In Ireland Brady found the light that suited his sensibility, the soft ambiguity of some of his work reflects this. These qualities are evident in the work of his contemporary Camille Souter. The pull between abstraction and representation is an aspect of these two painters that links them, and of course, the use of the humble everyday object as a subject.

Brady brings together various elements of modernism in his work. Minimalism, abstraction, expressionism and an emphasis on the flatness of paint on a surface. On to this foundation, he applies a humility and humanism through his use of small scale, simple imagery of objects that we all have a familiar relationship with.

CONCLUSION

Bridg's career began at a most essential time in the community of his native city, New York. Never before had American artists enjoyed such positive attention from the rest of the world. Abstract Expressionism formed the basis of his art and provided an exciting stimulus for the young painter. Ironically Bridg left New York and came to Ireland. His decision to stay in Ireland at a time when there was so much excitement in New York reflects an aspect of his personality that could not survive the New York atmosphere and pressure. His reaction to the New York art world at the time resulted in his settling for a life in Ireland where he found his place and pace. After settling in Ireland he produced a lifetime work - a personal poetry.

His Abstract Expressionist beginnings and the enthusiasm that life in Ireland afforded him combined to make his work refreshingly different from Ireland in the late 1950s and early 1960s. His interest in the actual object used for the painting was probably not the primary motive for the work. His endless fascination with the effects of light on an object provided the impetus for a lot of the paintings. However his curious, sociable and humorous personality was expressed in the treatment of his subject. His basic unaffected nature helped to infuse the work with a warmth and humanity. He described himself as an 'individual' focusing on the individual. My research into the American tradition of object painting highlighted how so many of his contemporaries were involved with a similar theme, developing themselves to transcending the ordinary into the extraordinary.

The still life image, despite its lack of prestige, has provided many artists throughout history with a means to an end. The intense focus on the form of still life concentrates the focus of light and its relationship with form. The subtle nuances of light and tone provide endless opportunity for creative inquiry and experimentation. Many great artists chose to focus on this area of inquiry, and I have tried to connect the theories of these artists with those of Bridg, discovering that on some level the use of the still life object was just a focus for a display of painterly skills, or an understating way of retaining the secrets of painting. But the use of the object in Robert Rauschenberg's painting was for some, a way of commenting on American society.

In Ireland Bridg found the light that suited his sensibility, the soft ambiguity of some of his work reflects this. These qualities are evident in the work of his contemporary, Liam Neill. The pull between abstraction and representation is an aspect of these two painters that links them, and of course, the use of the humble everyday object as a subject.

Bridg brings together various elements of modernism in his work. Minimalism, abstraction, expressionism and an emphasis on the flatness of paint on a surface. On this foundation he applied a humanity and humanism through his use of small scale simple imagery of objects that we all have a familiar relationship with.

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