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IRISH CULTURAL INFLUENCES IN PAINTING  
IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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## INTRODUCTION

All cultures engage in various forms of artistic activity and these activities reflect in different ways the concerns of the culture from which they spring. Many of these concerns are universal, by virtue of the fact that all human societies have a great deal in common with each other. However, cultures by definition do differ in many respects; having developed separately it would be impossible for them not to. Each culture evolves within its own unique framework of, among other things, language, religion, climate, location and history. To the extent that the arts are products of those unique aspects of a particular culture, they will naturally constitute a tradition which in itself will be unique. It is within this area of the arts, particularly in painting, that a distinctive Irish tradition is to be found. This is especially true of the twentieth century, which has seen the strongest and most sustained development of such a tradition to have occurred in this country.

The development of this Irish tradition, in all its ramifications could only be adequately treated in a work of encyclopaedic scope. It would be necessary to review the whole history of art in Ireland, and to show phase by phase how each style and mannerism arose out of the cultural climate of the times, and how painting as one expression of human experience was woven into the general pattern of the prevailing culture. In this paper however, the intention is more particularly to explore the general nature of the links which must presumably exist between the form of Irish society during the twentieth century and the forms of contemporary Irish painting within this distinctive Irish tradition. Chapters I. and 2. deal with respectively the historical context of an Irish tradition in painting and an examination of the artist's role within



Irish society. Succeeding chapters consist of an examination of a selection of work from the Irish tradition done by a number of artists and spanning the period in question. By discussing the interrelationships which exist between the artist, his work, and the society from which both spring, I hope to give an insight into the development of this painting tradition up to the present day.

\* \* \* \* \*



## CHAPTER I.

### Irish Traditions in Art - An Historical Perspective

"Few people can name a single Irish artist with the possible exception of Jack Yeats. It is commonly thought that all artists, even if they were born in Ireland, are English". (1) Taken in isolation, this quotation from the book "The Painters of Ireland" by Anne Crookshank and the Knight of Glin, must appear as a quite extraordinary assertion. However, while recognising that in the last twenty years the arts have gained a much higher profile and acceptance generally within Ireland, it must be admitted that there is an underlying truth behind the claim. For the better part of this century, the attitude of the majority of people in Ireland towards the arts, has been one of either indifference or outright rejection. In such a hostile environment it is not surprising that the notion of a living and cohesive Irish tradition in painting has not been given much consideration. To understand how such attitudes could have arisen, one must examine the historical factors which gave rise to them.

In Ireland, medieval society and customs survived until well into the eighteenth century, though from the early seventeenth century the newly imported European Renaissance tradition ran parallel with the native survivals, and in some instances the two intertwined. The eighteenth century was in fact a very prosperous time for the arts in Ireland and though the nineteenth century displayed a more introspective and provincial approach, due to a change of patronage, there was still a considerable amount of artistic activity. Alongside this however, it must be remembered that the seventeenth century had been in another sense, a cataclysmic period; with wars and rebellions following, each quick on the heels of its predecessor; Elizabethan, Cromwellian and Williamite in steady progression. Even the comparatively peaceful eighteenth century experienced the burnings and lootings of 1798, and



in the early 1920's an even greater destruction of furniture, libraries and pictures took place, which further helped to denude Ireland of her artistic heritage. This sad progression of destruction was accompanied by the general diaspora of the Irish landed gentry, which began with the Act of Union in 1801 and continued until it reached its peak after the 1914-18 war. This dispersal of the Irish gentry meant that those artworks which had survived the centuries were often removed from the country, and, as many are now to be found in England and Scotland as are in Ireland.

The result has been an almost complete evaporation of knowledge concerning the continuity of Irish artistic traditions back to the seventeenth century and beyond. This collapse of knowledge has resulted in the few serious writers on Irish artists failing to find any useful background against which to see their subject developing and therefore attempting - often with little success - to slot them into a purely English context. In addition to this, by the early 1900's, the visual arts had come to be firmly associated in the public mind with the political establishment which was British. Because of this, the various "national" movements, both cultural and political, reacted against them and to a large degree rejected them as being basically alien to a revitalized Irish culture. This rejection of Ireland's artistic traditions, eventually so conditioned the people that they began to see those traditions as English rather than Irish. Thus Ireland was left without a politically acceptable visual arts tradition. This lack was accounted for by various nationalist apologists by the assertion that the Irish do not naturally express themselves through the visual arts or possess much appreciation of them. Our natural means of expression, it was maintained is language, and in this we are highly gifted, which was evidenced by the contributions of Irish men and women to the literary world, as



Bruce Arnold has stated; "There is a widely held fallacy that Ireland's contribution to the art of the world has been almost exclusively in the realm of the written word". (2) This combination of factors created a situation whereby it was almost impossible to examine the development of the visual arts in Ireland until comparatively recently. The view that the visual arts are alien to the Irish and that therefore there are no Irish traditions in the visual arts, is impossible to justify in the light of any considered appraisal of Irish art through the centuries.

That excellence in the arts has existed in Ireland in the past is beyond question. The visual arts during the early Christian period are both well-known and justly celebrated, and it is generally agreed that during that period Ireland produced some of the artistic masterpieces of European culture: "What is not accepted to anything like the same extent is the fact that various artistic traditions were established during the intervening centuries since the golden ages in which the Book of Kells, the Ardagh Chalice and the Cross of Cong were produced, and that these traditions grew, expanded and enriched themselves and ultimately produced artists of considerable stature". (3) This reluctance to accept or even recognize the existence of these traditions has operated against the emergence of any clear idea of Irish art, and even when their existence is admitted, there is often an unwillingness to accept them as Irish. The reason for this reluctance, as has been said, stems from a belief that the artistic traditions which developed after the Norman invasion were imposed upon an unwilling people and are then, in some way un-Irish. While it is possible to understand how such an attitude might arise, it relies on far too simplistic an understanding of history to stand up to close scrutiny.

The art of a nation can survive invasion. It can even survive destruction, so long as the artists themselves survive and re-establish



themselves and the stable environment needed for their work. However, if that environment itself is destroyed or broken up, then the artist becomes isolated and his sense of social involvement and obligation disappears. Any national tradition will disappear too. In the period after the Norman invasion, examples of distinctively Irish or Celtic influenced visual art became increasingly meagre and fragmentary and succeeding centuries of war and hardship gradually wiped out such influences; "The visual arts need leisure, stability and above all money to flourish and survive. Music on the other hand, and literature, can be passed on orally even in times of change and instability. Thus the literary talents of the Celt were sustained and developed, used to maintain his cultural identity, even practiced as political protest, while his capacity to produce tangible and visible works of art atrophied for lack of use".(4) It is unlikely however, that Ireland, even had she not been invaded, would have remained aloof from the artistic influences which were to come to her through her association with England. Even prior to the invasion, Irish artists were absorbing European influences in every branch of the arts and in this they were merely continuing a process of cross-fertilization between Ireland and the continent which had existed for centuries. The Celtic art which is so readily accepted as Irish, can just as readily be seen as a regional development of the arts within the confines of a larger Celtic civilization, which was European. Similarly, the visual artistic traditions which emerged subsequent to the Norman invasion are in all probability precisely the traditions which the Gaelic ascendancy would have come to support had it survived as a political entity. They would doubtlessly have been assimilated to a greater extent, into the broadly homogeneous society of the European aristocracy. Inevitably then, they would have developed a taste for the forms of the visual arts which were favoured



by the patrons of Europe. The O'Neill of Ulster was a patron of this European art, as were many other Irish chieftains. To reject this art as un-Irish is both inaccurate and illogical, when in all likelihood they are precisely the traditions which would have developed in Ireland in the natural course of events.

As I have already said, the eighteenth century was one of the great periods for "Irish Art". (5) Though it was strongly influenced by English art, it had a character of its own which distinguished it quite clearly from the art produced in England.

"Many of the patrons were of the old Celtic stock, or had been settled for so long that they had taken on many of it's qualities. A great number of the designers and craftsmen were also Irish. Given the opportunity there was no lack of artistic skill among the native Irish, as witness the quality of the plaster work, silver, bookbinding, architecture, painting and sculpture they produced during that period. Had Irish art in the nineteenth century been a matter of continuing the work of the eighteenth, a coherent and distinctly Irish style might have emerged". (6)

Unfortunately, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the aristocracy, which was the principal patron of the arts, retired to country estates or left Ireland altogether after the Act of Union. Dublin, the central pivot of their society lost it's attraction for them with the dissolution of it's Parliament, and the atmosphere in which the visual arts flourished, disappeared. The resultant lack of continuity, ensured that painting in Ireland was never strong enough, for a sufficiently long period to allow a distinctively Irish style to develop.

However, while painting in Ireland never developed stylistically into what could be termed a uniquely Irish mould, it has always



contained within it, a significant strand which is distinctively Irish in character, as Richard Walker has said of Irish art: "A first impression that there is nothing specifically Irish here proves, on closer examination to be a superficial estimate... One begins to discover elements which lead one to conclude that, recurring as they do, they are in fact manifestations of a characteristically Irish way of feeling: of dealing with and experiencing, rather than of merely seeing, the world". (7) This aspect of Irish art is of a kind which manifests itself in every culture.. It's unique qualities stem from the distinctive nature of the culture which produces it and which it reflects. This is especially true of Irish art in the twentieth century which has seen perhaps the strongest and most sustained development of this type of art in Ireland. It is within this area of the arts that a distinctive Irish tradition, particularly in painting, is to be found.

\* \* \* \* \*

6. Sherry, J. The Irishman's Face: The Celtic Revival 1890-1920, p.8.

7. Walker, R. Arts Review, articles on Irish art.



1. Crookshank, A. and the Knight of Glin. The Painters of Ireland, p.16.
2. Arnold, B. A Concise History of Irish Art, p.7.
3. Ibid. pp.8,9,10.
4. Sheehy, J. The Rediscovery of Ireland's Past: The Celtic Revival 1830-1930, p.8.
5. Throughout this paper when 'Irish art' is mentioned it is intended to refer in a broad sense to all the visual arts produced in Ireland, irrespective of whether or not a particular type or style of art is associated with any particular section of Irish society. As Bruce Arnold has said; "History has given to most of the artists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the unfortunate labels of 'Anglo-Irish', 'Ascendancy' or 'Plantation'." (A Concise History of Irish Art, p.10.) In this paper these 'unfortunate' labels are dispensed with, as they are to some extent pejorative and tend to act against a proper appreciation of the development of the arts in Ireland.
6. Sheehy, J. The Rediscovery of Ireland's Past: The Celtic Revival 1830-1930, p.8.
7. Walker, R. Arts Review, article on Irish art.



## CHAPTER 2.

### The Artist In Ireland

In the preceeding chapter I have argued that there has existed in Ireland a painting tradition which contains within it an element which is distinctively Irish in character and that this distinctiveness is an inevitable by-product of those 'environmental' factors which are unique to Ireland. In this chapter the intention is to give an insight into that interaction between the artist as an individual and Irish society, which produces this type of art. One often hears it suggested that the most important factors influencing the work of artists are a combination of moment, race and milieu. The most easily explained of this trio is moment which is, of course, the present; the here and now of the artist's life. In any consideration of race however, the ambivalence of a conclusion drawn from that source must be only too familiar. To attribute specific phenomena, especially those related to the arts, to racial influences is a questionable exercise. This is not to imply that there are no racial influences which affect the production of art, but rather that they must be impossible to identify in any definitive way. For example, what is usually said of the racial components of the Irish and their influences on art, is summed up by the art historian Nikolaus Pevsner as follows; "The Celts had a special delight in the spiral curve and the tight interlacing of such curves and that whenever later interlacing, whirls and intricacy occur they may be traced back to the Celtic component. A fantastic spiritual and spirited element may also be called Celtic". (1) Whatever racially or genetically inspired influences exist in Irish art, it is hard to accept that '...a delight in the spiral curve...' can be attributed with any certitude to such influences. I would think that it must



be largely impossible to differentiate between a genetic and a cultural influence on art, as Pevsner himself admits; "Racial origins help little, it is rare that in an individual artist his racial status is of use in explaining his art".(2) While in popular mythology, what is called the 'Celtic psyche' manifests itself in much Irish art, it can be argued that it arises from the cultural rather than the genetic influences at work on the artist. In other words, whatever inclinations or predilections influence Irish art, they are as likely to come from sub-conscious responses to cultural indoctrination, as much as from genetic programming, governed by the extent to which the artist is racially Celtic. I intend therefore to treat these influences as being cultural rather than racial in origin, which in effect, involves a move from the consideration of race to the consideration of nation, about which Pevsner says; "The nation, as a self-conscious cultural entity, is always stronger than race". (3) The artist's milieu is thus automatically brought into focus, as a sense of national identity must necessarily be a part of his milieu, along with all the other cultural baggage with which society equips it's members. While a large part of this milieu is uniquely Irish or national in nature, increasingly throughout the twentieth century it has acquired an international flavour as much of what is termed "Western" culture has been assimilated. When these international aspects of Irish life are expressed in the arts, they are by definition as accessible to foreigners as to Irish people. In dealing with the national aspects however, the arts often contain specifically Irish references which are not always readily accessible to people from different cultural backgrounds. The artist, as a product of Irish society has his own measure of that received knowledge which is disseminated to everyone in varying quantities and mixtures and



which usually succeeds in conferring upon the recipient, some sense of an Irish identity. Inevitably therefore, he uses a visual language which has evolved within that society and which to be properly understood must be viewed in that context.

The practice and appreciation of art are distinct; art begins as a solitary activity, and only insofar as society recognises and absorbs such units of experience does it become woven into the social fabric: " Society in it's full sense...is never an entity entirely seperable from the individuals who compose it. No individual can arrive at the threshold of his potentialities without a culture in which he participates, conversely, no civilization has in it any element which is not the contribution of an individual". (4) In every culture all the miscellaneous behaviour involved in living, is integrated into consistent patterns, in accordance with unconscious rules of choice that develop in every society. In the case of the arts, this process of integration so works within the community that what the artist creates and what the community appreciates has at any time a typical character. The artist objectifies and thereby socializes his own experiences; the group accepts this individual expression as a socially valid symbol or myth. Within the Irish tradition in painting, the artist is expressing that part of his personal experience which is derived (to whatever extent) from the national as distinct from the international aspects of Irish culture. When doing this he can draw upon the ready-made ideology of Irish society, to create works which appeal to others through their understanding of that ideology.

Of all the elements which have gone into the make-up of this ideology, I believe that the most important is the relationship of the people to the land itself. The pre-eminent position of



agriculture, both socially and economically, is reflected in the language and literature of the country. Even now, in the latter half of the twentieth century, few Irish people can claim to be more than a couple of generations removed from a rural environment. In painting, the importance of the land is evidenced by the fact that it appears as a dominant motif, both directly as a landscape subject, or indirectly as it influences the artist's use of materials and colour. "A significant strand of Irish art has provided us with a consistently poetic response to the environment... (it) tends to be figurative rather than non-objective, intuitive rather than intellectual or academic... The colours are generally subdued and atmospheric, with a softness that is completely compatible with the Irish countryside". (5) The tradition in landscape painting of the panoramic vista, has continued in Ireland up to the present, and in fact the importance of landscape within the Irish tradition is one of the main features which distinguish it from the international mainstream. The effect of the land on the Irish character is so profound, that in certain instances, aspects of the landscape have been elevated in the public consciousness, to the extent that they have assumed the force of a national icon. (6)

Given the rural dimension of Irish life, it is not surprising to find that attitudes are marked by a strong conservatism. This conservatism, coupled with an obsession about the past and a passion for indirect statement also shape the way the Irish artist expresses himself visually. The Irish have a reputation for verbal nuance, for the innuendo or understatement which conveys much more than it appears to. This is paralleled in painting by the use of the visual anecdote, which acts like a mirror to the world by alluding to the more important essences of



things, which often seem to hover somewhere beneath the surface. These are some of the characteristics which act as influences within the Irish tradition in painting, others will emerge when individual works are discussed in the following chapters. The selection is of course a personal one and consists of works which for me contain some of the typical attributes of this tradition. Some of the selections are easily explained, dealing as they do with obviously Irish themes, others perhaps less so. If one is not convinced of the particular "Irishness" (7) of some of the works, I feel that collectively they reflect a cohesive attitude and as such are indicative of a continuing and vital tradition in Irish painting.

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FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER 2.

1. Pevsner, N. The Englishness of English Art, p. 184.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid. p. 185.
4. Benedict, R. Patterns of Culture, p. 253.
5. Ruane, F. The Delighted Eye, foreword no pagination.
6. With the founding of the Irish Free State after the War of Independence the concept of farming families living upon 'small homesteads' in what was then termed 'frugal comfort' became one of the primary political objectives. The lifestyle of the peasantry, seen as a type of ideal became firmly established as an important part of the cultural ethos of the nation and the visual and literary arts both contributed to the development of this ideal. Within landscape painting certain types of image recur; the rick of turf, the thatched cottage, etc., which tended to be set in a countryside of imposing power and grandeur. This emphasised the resilience and strength of character of the people who lived in such an environment, as primarily the source of this inspiration was the impoverished west of the country rather than the wealthier east. Much of the painting of the period gained a wide audience through reproduction as prints and eventually there evolved an archetypal landscape painting, which through the use of this developed visual language reflected not only the actual landscape but also contained a world of associations which was readily accessible to most Irish people.
7. Arnold, B. The Irish Revival, foreword no pagination:  
"Belief in the 'Irishness' of Irish art should not be overstressed. The claiming of Jack Yeats for Irish art must be qualified just as the claiming of his brother, W. B. Yeats, for Irish literature begs far too many questions about the separating of it from literature as a whole. The same may be said about two voluntary exiles from the Irish creative genius, William Orpen and James Joyce". I hope I have satisfactorily answered the question raised by Arnold in the above quotation. It is not my intention, when discussing 'Irishness' within the Irish tradition, to imply that the works are of a unique type, in fact, every culture has some form of an equivalent for this type of art.



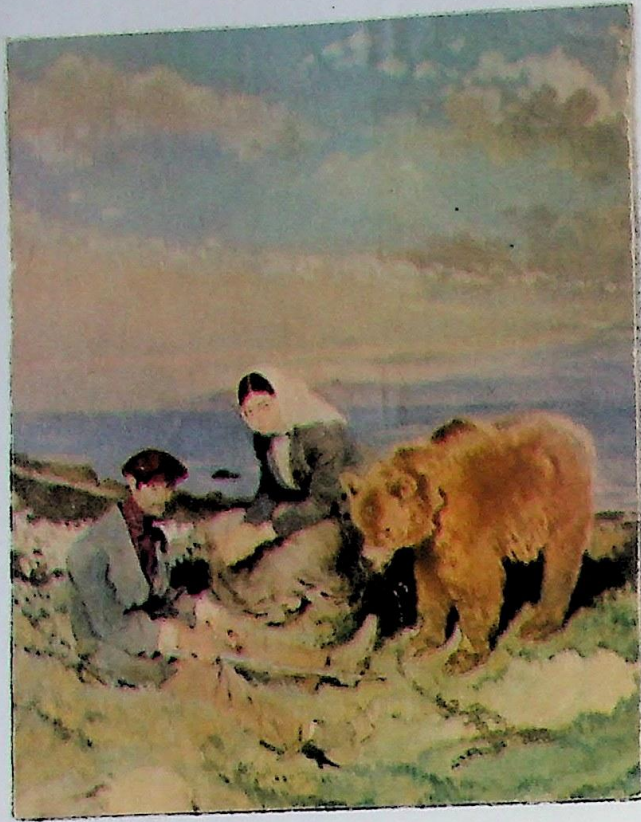
### CHAPTER 3.

Sir William Orpen R.H.A., R.A. (1878 - 1931)

"I was brought up on the 'Irish Question', but what the Irish question was I have no idea... I should think there must have been thousands and thousands of 'Irish Questions!'" (1)

The turn of the century was a supremely exciting time for the arts in Ireland. It was a fermenting period for a new national identity which both fed from and gave inspiration to the arts. It was the great period of Lady Gregory, Sarah Purser, Edward Martyn, George Moore and Hugh Lane. Admittedly it is for its literary and theatrical contributions that it is world famous but the visual arts too played their part in the cultural revival. The dominant figure in painting at that time was William Orpen who was probably the best known artist in both Ireland and Britain. He was the last of the great society portrait painters, succeeding Sargent and becoming, in his turn, the most successful artist of his day. He was also the wealthiest, earning staggering sums each year from portrait commissions. He was born in Dublin and grew up in the Parnell era, and the political tensions of that time left an indelible impression on him. He considered himself to be culturally Irish and yet ultimately his political loyalty lay with England, to which he felt he owed his success. However, as an Irishman, successful in England, he was never entirely accepted in either country. Orpen was very active in the Irish Cultural Revival and was a friend of some of its leading figures, many of whom he painted. At one time he and Hugh Lane shared lodgings and it was Orpen's intense love of Ireland, which helped to set Lane off on his campaign to obtain for Dublin a Modern Gallery and also to so richly endow the Irish





(ILL.I)  
The Rest.

One of a group of works depicting Dublin Bay, in this instance from Howth. The couple are Hungarian gypsies who used to visit Orpen in the National College of Art with their bear whose claw marks are still visible on the college staircase.

National Gallery with paintings. During the First World War he produced a body of work which earned for him the title 'The Samuel Pepys of the Western Front'. This collection constitutes one of the most complete visual documents of World War One; a complex tapestry of battles, disasters, wastelands, mutilated corpses, portraits of generals, prisoners, the fighting men and the politicians who controlled their destinies. Throughout the 1920's he dominated the social scene, and was in fact far more famous than many of his wealthy and illustrious sitters. Orpen was also a very complex personality; his personal life was the cause of much scandal and ultimately he drank himself to death. But in spite of this he was a basically sensitive and shy person, capable of great compassion and honest to a fault.

One might wonder why such a prominent Irish artist could be so little recognised in his native land. The main reason was political, in that his role as Britain's principal artist of the war and Peace Conference precluded him from returning to Ireland in the uncertain political climate which followed independence. He had wholeheartedly espoused the British cause - though in Europe not Ireland - and he never returned home after the war. It was assumed that anyone who was so integrated into English society as to have obtained a knighthood, could have little to contribute to Irish life. Orpen's actual achievements however, belied ideas such as this. His importance, particularly within the Irish tradition, but also as a teacher and as a model to emulate cannot be ignored. His influence on Irish art was greater than anyone else's, and can still be traced in the style and attitudes of living Irish painters. Of his work as a whole Bruce Arnold says;



"A handful of his paintings are among the great and original works of art of this century. A score or so more are major statements both in portraiture and in the genre subjects to which Orpen turned his talent". (2)

Of all the works which relate to his life in Ireland and which are part of the Irish tradition, the most important were done in the period before he became a war artist. Three major works, all of which were painted in a flat decorative manner influenced by Eastern art and executed between the years 1913-16, summarise Orpen's feelings and attitudes towards Ireland. "Sowing New Seed" is about the arts in Ireland while "The Holy Well" and "The Western Wedding" deal with the Irish peasant, his religion, his sexuality, and his sense of drama. All three works have bizarre qualities containing a mixture of deep penetration of character and symbolism as well as the artist's own idiosyncratic view of his fellow countrymen. Personally, I believe that on the basis of these works alone, Orpen merits a prominent position within the Irish tradition.

All three of the paintings were done in a new medium, a 'marble' technique just developed by Winsor and Newton, which gave to these canvases a flat opaque quality similar to tempera. While this tends to emphasise the difference between these works and his previous output, it is interesting to note that this technical departure, though brief, did influence his later war paintings. His eldest daughter and a cousin, Eileen, modelled for the figures in the series, as did Sean Keating who was not only Orpen's pupil but also his studio assistant and friend. "Sowing New Seed" was exhibited in 1913 at the N.E.A.C. under its full title "Sowing New Seed for the Board of



Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland". The painting contains the figures of a young naked girl pouring seed from her hand on to barren-looking ground and a couple composed of a young woman and an old man in fancy dress as onlookers. There are also two babies in the composition. The overall composition creates an extraordinary sense of sculptural intensity, which is accentuated by the vivid powdery colours of the new medium and by the almost flat two-dimensional background. The painting is described by Orpen thus:

"The scene is Dublin Bay, painted from Howth, with Kingstown, Bray and the Sugar Loaf Mountain in the background. The figure in black represents the several heads of the Board of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, which board, beside their agricultural and technical duties, have control of the money for, and the management of, art in Ireland. The lady sowing the seed represents myself, or any other unfortunate trying to introduce more modern movements or fresher life and thought to the schools under the board. But anything outside the conventional red tape method is not tolerated by the board. Yet 'Young Ireland' the children, receive it gladly. The lady leaning on the department's arm is the very ordinary departmental wife, who understands nothing, but wishes to be on the safe side, and is afraid perhaps that her husband has not noticed the 'sowing lady' at all. The decayed tree is the department and the single magpie is 'bad luck to it'." (3)

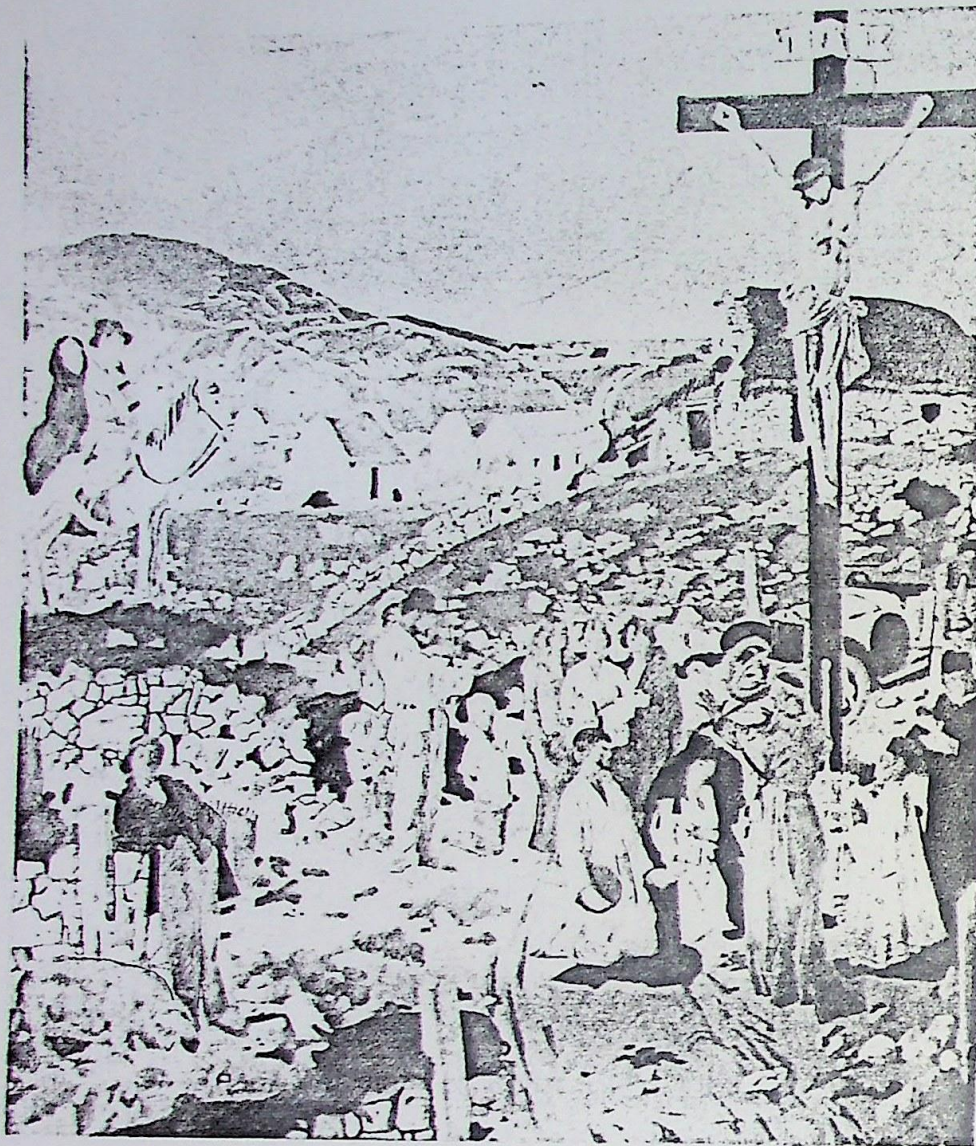
Orpen is also quoted as claiming that the painting symbolised; "...the new Sinn Fein in 1913, sowing the seed. You see the crops springing from it while the older ones look on". (4) The importance Orpen attached to these paintings can be gauged by the number of preparatory drawings and sketches, their size and detail, and the care he took afterwards to ensure that groups of them should remain together as collections. In the case of



"Sowing New Seed" drawings and an oil study remained in the artist's studio until after his death.

"The Western Wedding" (ILL.2.) continued the sequence of 'marble medium' works in 1914, and it too was preceded by drawings and oil sketches, including a large canvas study of the three females standing in the centre behind the kneeling couple. The models were his daughters, Mary and Kit, and their cousin Eileen. Orpen also includes in this picture, somewhat incongruously but in my opinion very effectively, his own black and white Rolls Royce. It was however, "The Holy Well" (ILL.3.) which was the most important of the three works in Orpen's eyes. He spent longer on it than on the other two and technically it represents the furthest departure he was to make in the direction of decorative, symbolic painting. The painting included a significant measure of local Connemara colour. Keating, who regularly visited the Aran islands brought Orpen a gift of a collection of tweed and woolen clothes from there, which included Bainíní, crios, white trousers, coloured socks, hats and woven jackets. Keating himself modelled for the superb figure above the well and in profile for the man on the right, he provided too, sketches of Aran for this composition, the background of which is a composite partly of drawings done there and at Maam Cross.

As with other works within the Irish tradition, these three explore themes of Irish art and culture, Irish faith and morality, Irish landscape, dress and manners, and Irish sexuality. The paintings by their nature involve the Irish viewer in a sort of 'examination of conscience' and this, I believe, was Orpen's intention. He was making the type of visual statement about Irish society which forces the viewer to analyse it's content. In a sense, they seem to



(ILL.2)  
The Western Wedding.



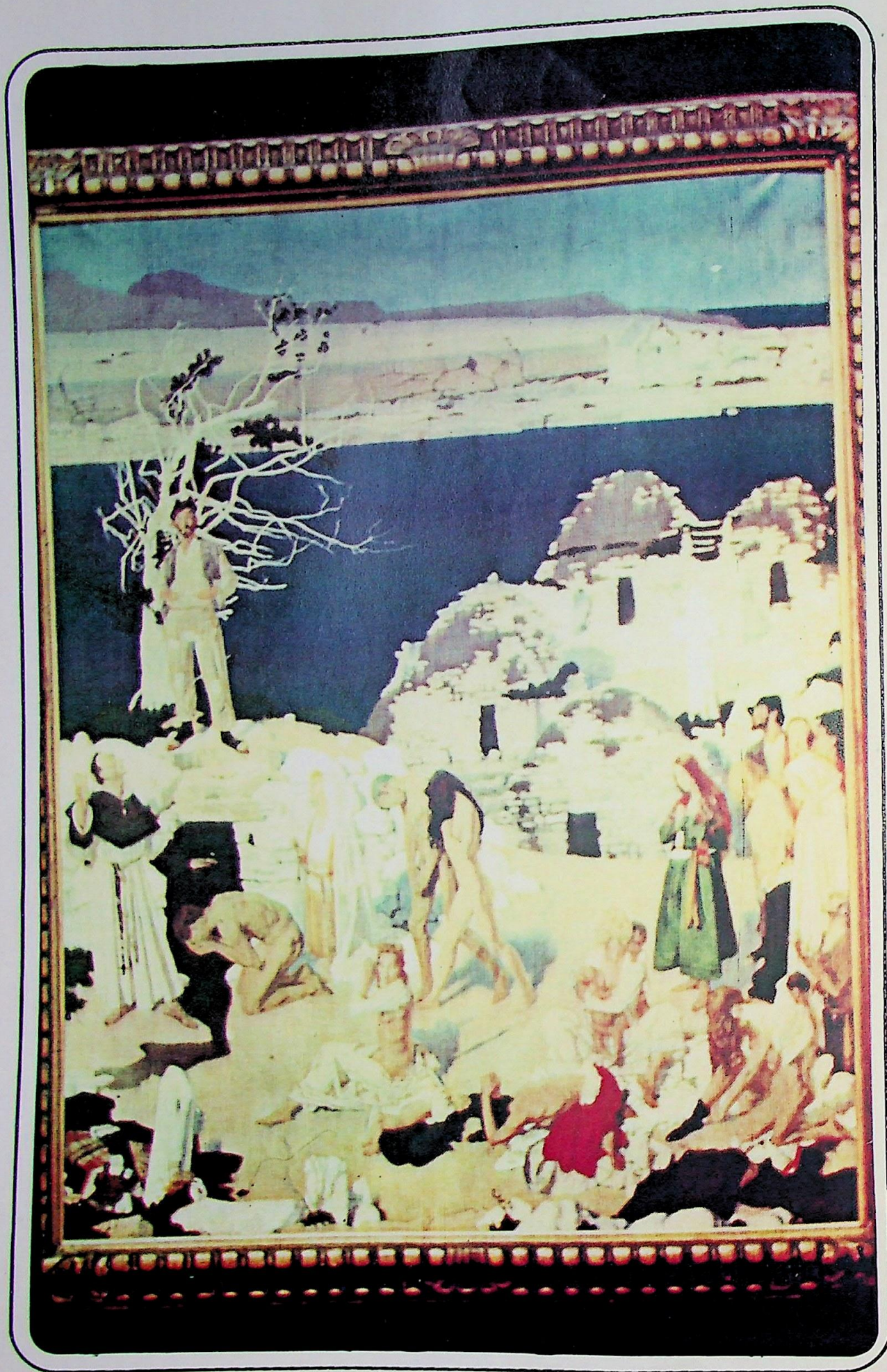


(ILL.3)  
The Holy Well.

be a long way removed from the reality of Irish life, as the country moved steadily nearer to political independence. Orpen himself, was very much in the tradition of J.M.Synge and James Joyce and had little patience for the vaporous romanticisms then current. Synge's use of satire and the dispassionate objectivity of James Joyce's view of his fellow countrymen appealed to him, and he emulates them in these paintings. In "Sowing The Seed" the Metropolitan School of Art is the chosen target for his wit and satire. The atmosphere in that establishment, stultified and fossilised as it was, had remained exactly as it had been when Orpen first entered it in the Autumn of 1891. Similarly, in "The Western Wedding" (ILL.2.) the nobility of the symbolic occasion lies in the almost primeval presence of the background world of rock and stone perched as it is on the edge of the Atlantic, where the priest is king and the matchmaker is a Faust-like magician on an ancient horse, and where the only freedom is the dramatic freedom of word, gesture and laconic attitude. The painting caricatures the types and costumes of the West of Ireland and the peoples' attitude to religion, and appears anti-clerical in intent.

"The Holy Well", (ILLS.3,4) was the most stylised gesture of all, it is possibly a reflection of Synge's play "The Well of The Saints" and portrays the naked figures of a 'pagan' Ireland drinking from the well and thus being transformed into costumed islanders of Aran against the background of Celtic Crosses and 1,200 year old beehive dwellings. As in the other two paintings, the inclusion of nude figures in a context where, in the light of Irish society of the day, they seemed very much out of place, is deliberately startling. Orpen's strong emphasis on youth and fertility, was in a sense a total distortion of the actual reality of Irish life.





(ILL. 4)

The Holy Well.

He seems to be appealing to the underlying nature of his fellow countrymen which is generally suppressed. The painting possesses a strange dream-like atmosphere which is derived from the flat opaque colouring, the sharpness of the light and the dramatic composition. The figure above the well is a characterisation of the artist, Keating, as a messianic observer of the uneasy cohesion of faith and life. To Orpen he is symbolic of all that he could send back to the country of his birth in 1916: a youthful disciple. In a barren wilderness of roofless houses, bare rock, sparse vegetation and an old and half-dead tree, young men and women with their children gather to undress and bathe in the Holy Well. The artist, standing on the well, is both literally and figuratively above it all, as with his jaunty cap and beard he cynically surveys the scene of Christian renewal below.

Taken together, the three works have a bitterness about them, which is tangible. In them, Orpen has distilled his disenchantment into a series of parables which he relates with great honesty and mastery but also with a certain warmth and sympathy. The vision of Ireland inherent in them cannot be denied. Any Irish person looking at the cultural, social, or political history of the period, or even at the evolution of the Irish state since then, must admit that Orpen's perceptions about hypocrisy, about morality and behaviour, about youth struggling against tradition and religious taboo, are embarrassingly accurate. I personally believe that they stand out from anything done at the time. On first seeing "The Holy Well" I could hardly credit the fact that it was sixty years old, its relevance had not been diminished by the passage of time. As I have said, after the war Orpen did not return to Ireland to work. He spent much of his remaining years in France



and died in 1931. His contribution to the arts in Ireland has tended until recently to be undervalued, particularly in the context of his contribution to the Irish tradition in painting. With the advent of the Irish Free State the arts in Ireland were to develop without the benefit of his particular genius.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kennedy, P.B. and ...  
p.165.



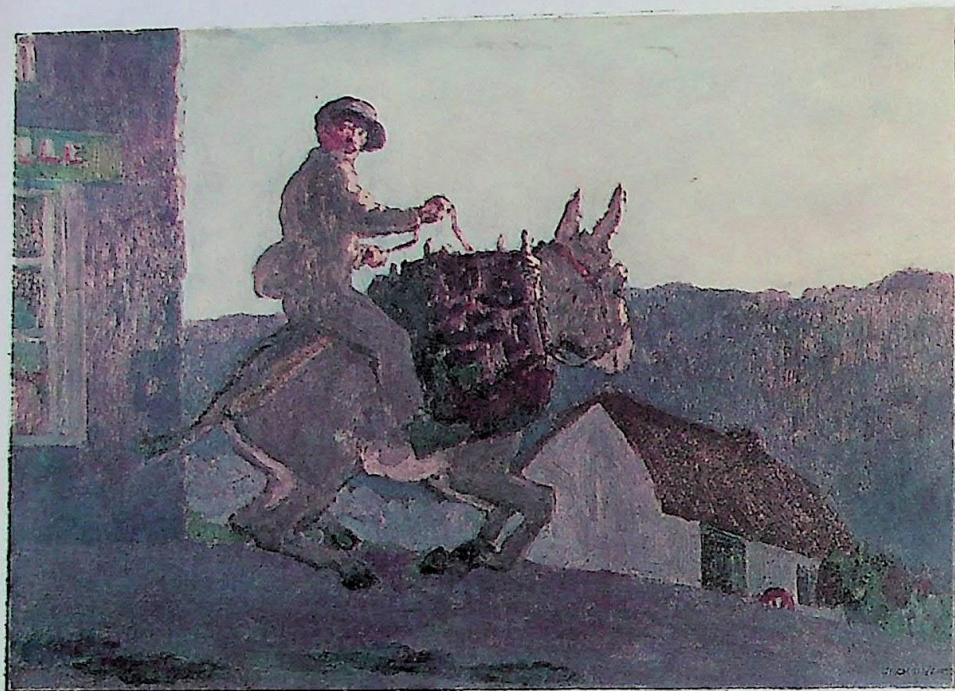
1. Orpen, W. Stories of Old Ireland and Myself, p.7.
2. Arnold, B. Orpen - Mirror to an Age, pp.9,10.
3. Orpen, W. Letter to Adelaide Public Library Board,  
August 15, 1914.
4. Konody, P.G. and Dark, S. Sir William Orpen Artist and Man,  
p.166.



Jack B. Yeats R.H.A. (1871 - 1957)

Painting in Ireland in the 1920's and 1930's was dominated by a group of artists whose work was influenced by a combination of the Slade School and Impressionist continental art. Their mentors were William Orpen and Sir John Lavery, and they included such artists as Sean Keating, Leo Whelan, James Slater, Dermot O'Brien, Maurice MacGonigal and Sean O'Sullivan. Many of these artists worked extensively within the Irish tradition and others amongst them were Paul Henry, Charles Lamb and William O'Connor. There were of course prominent artists who would be considered less distinctively Irish in their work, such as Mary Swanzy And Henry Kernoff, amongst others. However, towering above them all, working in his own very individualistic way and yet perhaps more Irish in sentiment and sensibility, was Jack B. Yeats.

It is often said that Yeats was the great, the overreaching genius of his time. He both belonged to the Irish tradition and transcended it. For the general public, he is the man who best represents the Irish tradition in painting though this is partly due to the fact that with the rest of his family, including his brother the poet W.B. Yeats, he was closely associated with the Celtic Revival. However, there is nothing of the conventional Celtic atmosphere about his work, and it can not be said to be Irish in style, since it is highly idiosyncratic, and its affinities are more with European Expressionism than with anything nearer home. His work instead, draws upon certain types and atmospheres powerfully evocative of Ireland, especially Dublin and Sligo, with which he had family connections, and where he spent much of his boyhood. Typical of such work are "Empty Creels"(ILL.5) and "Singing 'On Had I the Wings of a Swallow'"(ILL.6) which shows



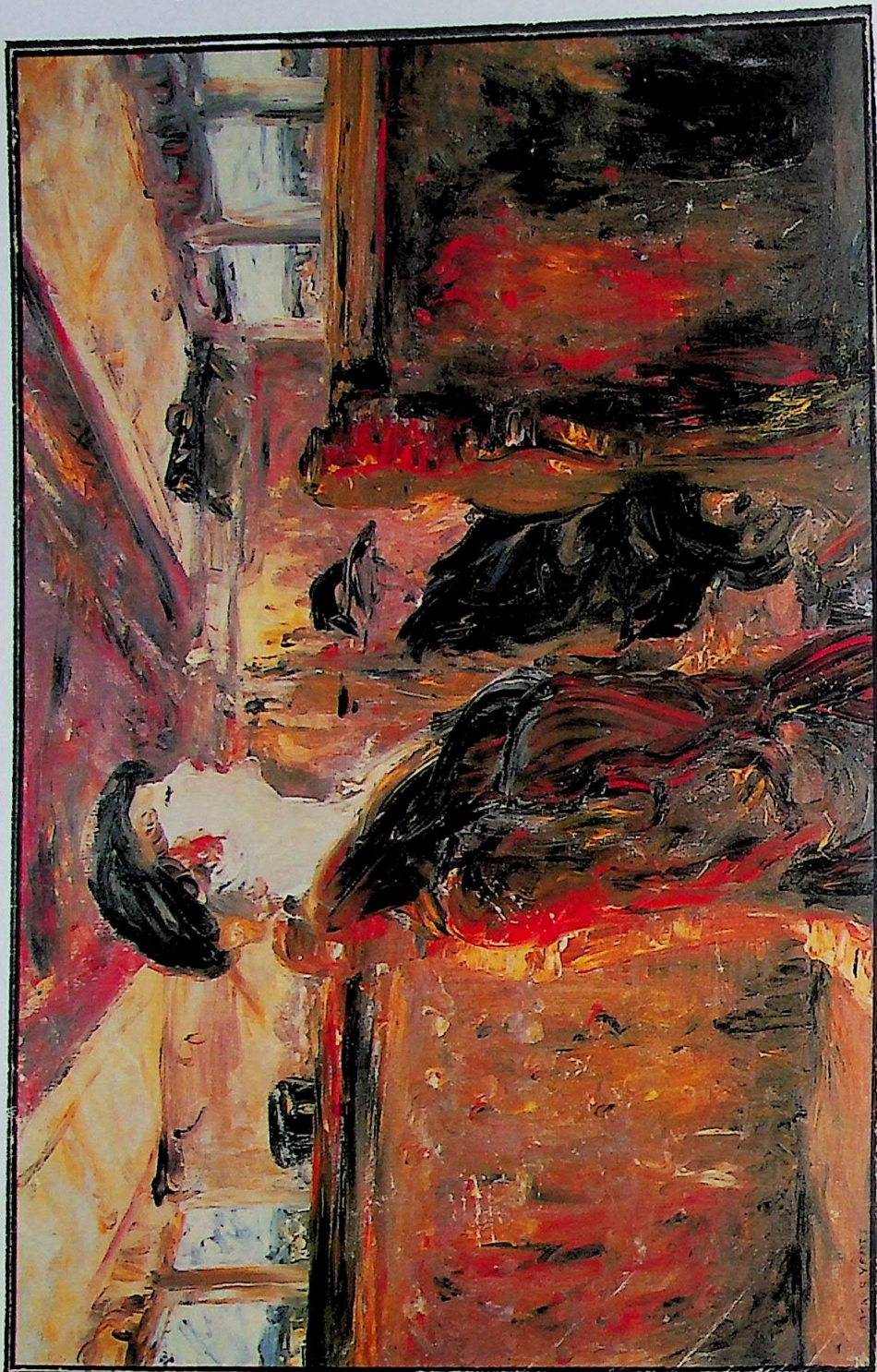
(ILL. 5)  
Empty Creels.



a woman singing a popular ballad while travelling on a Dublin tram. It was said of him that he "filled a need that had become immediate in Ireland for the first time in three hundred years, the need of the people to feel that their own life was being expressed in art." (1) This is misleading, in that the wealthier sections of Irish society always had access to the arts and the general public or 'people' here referred to, did have artistic outlets other than painting. It would be wrong too, to imply that Yeats enjoyed popular success, which can not be said to have occurred until the 1950's at the earliest. However, it must be admitted that he was one of the few painters of his time, who managed to show an essential Ireland without sentiment or condescension or a striving for outlandish effect.

It is difficult, if not impossible to categorize Yeats. In his early years he was more of a Londoner than Orpen; in the twenties he grappled with, and conquered, the difficult problems of capturing the Irish experience in paint; by the 1940's his vision became a universal one, and latterly his work was an important influence upon younger artists like Colin Middleton, Basil Blackshaw and Louis le Brocqy. His importance for Irish art, quite apart from his qualities as a painter, lies in the dignity and strength he gave to it by living out his whole adult life in Dublin; a city very much isolated in the wilderness years of a new Irish state coming to terms with an independent destiny. He was content to go on painting, surrounded by only a selection of colleagues, since throughout the whole period up to the Second World War, there was a drift of talent abroad.

It is a commonplace that, despite his London birth and upbringing, the influence of the Sligo of his grandparents, the Pollexfens,



(ILL. 6)  
Singing 'Oh Had I the Wings of a Swallow'



where he spent his childhood and which he visited annually for years, dominates his entire oeuvre. He is quoted as saying; "Sligo was my school and the sky above it" and also as James White records, "That whenever the wind turned to the West he felt a nostalgic longing for his boyhood." (2) Symbolic of these feelings is perhaps his painting "A Westerly Wind" (ILL.7) of 1921, in which a sidecar is seen preparing to set off from Dublin westward to Sligo down along Aston Quay.

His formal artistic education was in the London schools at South Kensington, Chiswick and Westminster, and in his early career he published black and white illustrations in various magazines. He produced very few oils before 1905 and even after his return to Ireland in 1910, he continued to produce illustrations for Punch under the pseudonym, W. Bird. These illustrations are described by Kenneth Clark; "The life they illustrated was fierce, feckless and independent... These proud, angry - looking men, with cloth caps pulled down over one eye, those high - stepping horses and stormy ragged race meetings, suggested a way of life in which man was neither an economic criminal with a respect for law and order, nor an aesthetic animal with a respect for learning and the Russian ballet." (3) Yeats' early paintings have much in common with his black and white illustrations and watercolours - they too have strong, simple outlines and only a hint of his later expressionist manner. The Irish struggle for independence and its associated cultural movements had a strong influence upon the artist. He produced a whole series of oil paintings throughout the years 1920-25, which use this period of Irish history as source material.

One of the earliest of the paintings in this series is "In Memory" (ILL.8) also known as "Bachelor's Walk in Memory" which records



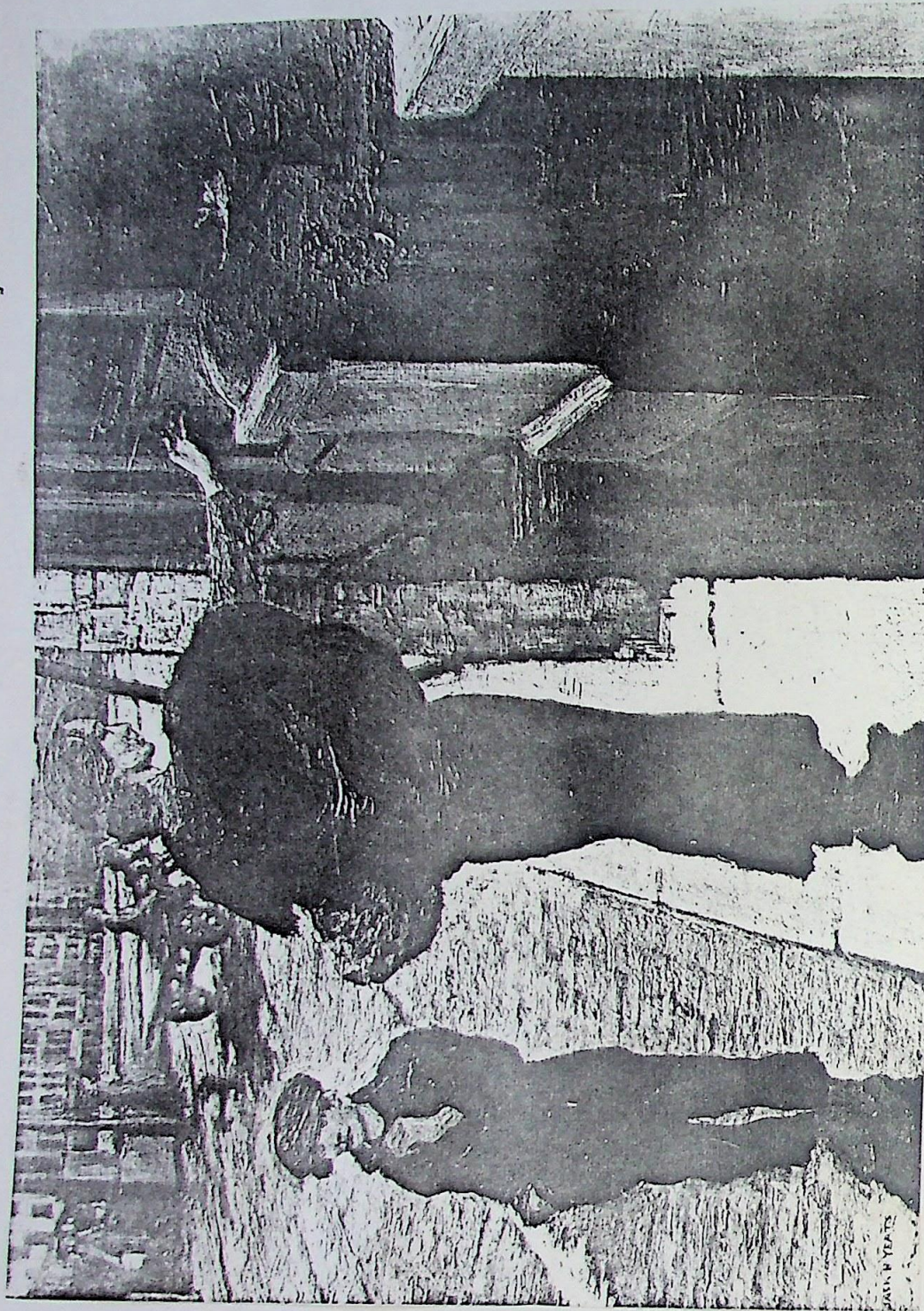
(ILL. 7)  
A Westerly Wind.



a specific incident mentioned by Yeats in his diary, of a flower-girl placing her own offering on the scene where the King's Own Scottish Borderers fired on a Dublin crowd, killing three people and injuring thirty two. Yeats did not witness the shooting but he visited the scene a few days later to sketch and make notes. The incident seems to have brewed in his mind, and resulted in the oil painting of about one year later. The central figure is shown throwing a rose from her basket through the open gate of a house on the right of the picture. This painting has become a symbol of the archetypal Irish woman mourning her lost man, both literally in wars and rebellions and metaphorically, through the sadness of constant emigration. It has a sombre dignity accentuated by the woman's stance which is at once reminiscent of classical poses and at the same time is firmly rooted in everyday life. The horse and cart proceeds along the road about its normal business while a young barefoot boy stands preoccupied and perhaps unaware of the flower-girl's gesture behind him. Yeats has endowed her with an innate grace and nobility which raise both herself and the incident to the level of Greek tragedy. Yeats himself, identified totally with the ordinary people who lived life on its simplest and purest levels;

"Whether they were or were not conscious of being his models is of no importance. What is of importance is that they drew him,...to themselves and held him so that he came to identify himself in them and in all his painting years has scarcely ever gone outside of their lives for the subject matter of his pictures. He and they between them have expressed a way of life that had not previously been expressed in paint. His work, therefore, is a new chapter in the history of art". (4)

By the 1940's his work becomes more subjective and visionary. Aspects of Dublin workers are searched for inherent character or nobility. Anna Liffey receives due tribute; reflective moods flood



(ILL. 8)  
In Memory.



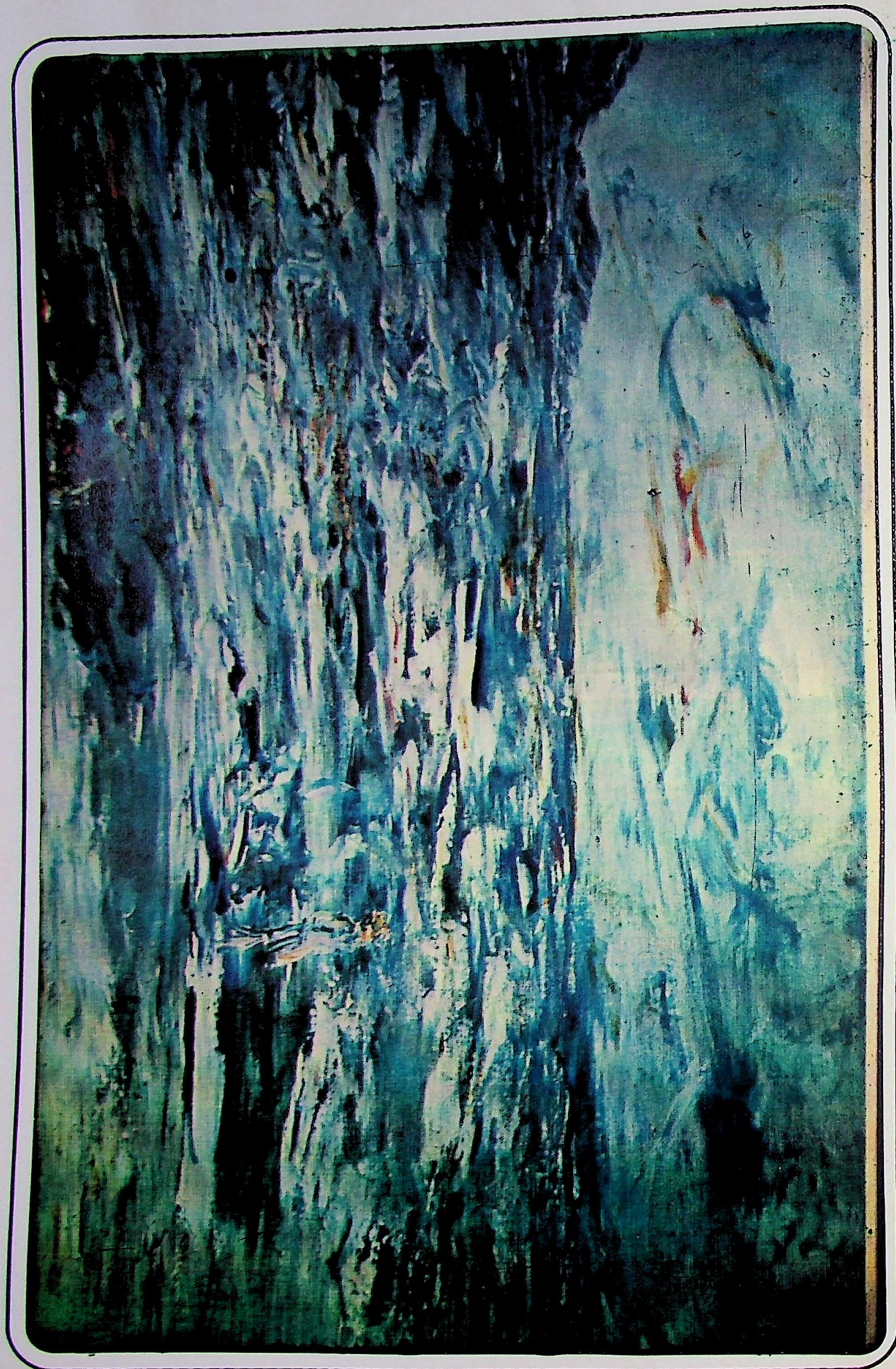


(ILL. 9)  
Defiance

people and furniture in light-splashed rooms; or light itself is the subtly dramatic force. He had always a strong sense of man in relation to the impersonality of the Irish scene, as can be seen in "Defiance" (ILL.9) In his work of this type, the isolated figures never dominate the landscape, but they are related to it in a symbolic significance which gives them a different type of importance. As he got older Yeats was less concerned as to whether or not his subject matter should seem obscure, and he was often quietly amused at the various interpretations which were placed on some works. His inventive process had its beginnings not in the immediate experience or object before him, but in the sudden confrontation with a past experience, of an event seen or imagined in the present. Both are complimentary so that there are at least two trains of thought, one contemporary and one historic. In later works such as "The Path of Diarmuid and Grainne" and "Queen Maeve Walked upon this Strand" (ILL.10) Yeats developed even further this link of the legendary past with the present. As an artist working within the Irish tradition his paintings portray the romantic Ireland of the legends, and yet by connecting them very much with the present he succeeds in maintaining the sense of mystery of the stories while avoiding sentimentality.

In many of the works the only direct connection between the paintings and Ireland's legendary past is the title itself. For example, in "The Path of Diarmuid and Grainne" which relates to the pursuit of the two lovers after their flight by a vengeful Fionn and the Fianna, there is nothing within the composition to tie it directly to the legend. The painting contains the figures of a young boy and a yellow horse in the centre foreground of a panoramic landscape, painted in Yeats' characteristic vibrant manner. He explains the composition thus; "The yellow horse is just passing along the path some





(ILL.IO)

Queen Maeve Walked upon this Strand.

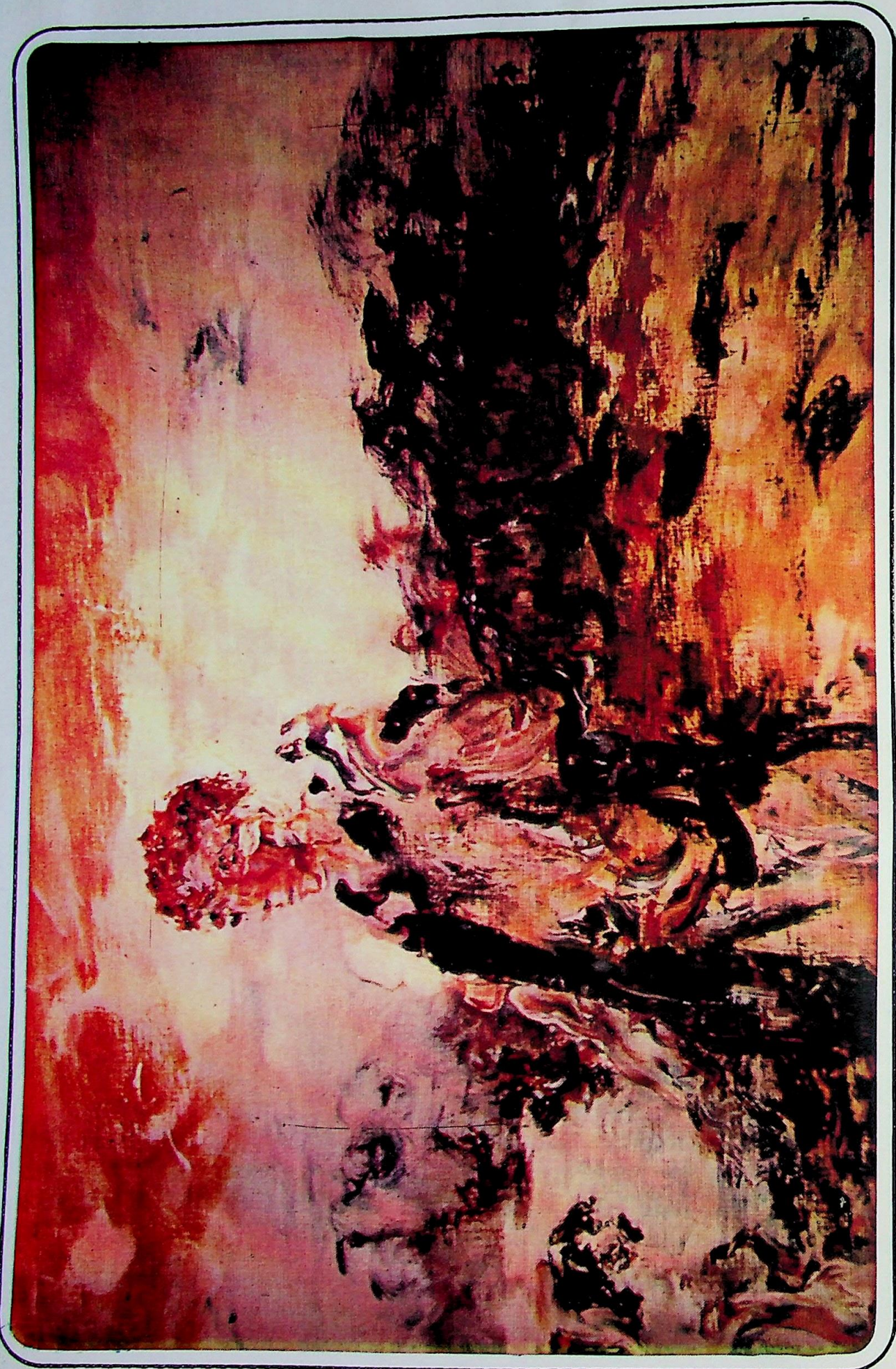
time in these later years - I know of no story of a yellow horse in the heroic age".(5) Similarly in "Queen Maeve Walked upon this Strand"(ILL.IO) the title is the key to the interpretation of the work, which is a response to the personal associations that the place evoked in the artist's mind. The past was very much alive for Yeats who could easily imagine the legendary Queen Maeve, one of the main characters of the Táin Bo Cuailgne striding down the strand before him. The painting with its blending of blues, yellows and reds is a visual equivalent of the sense of wonder which the artist experienced when he first imagined the scene. The viewer shares in that sense of wonder and yet is able to allow his own imagination and cultural background to stimulate him. The artist acts consciously as the initiator of the experience and at the same time allows the viewer the freedom to make that experience uniquely his own.

Yeats worked very consciously within an Irish context. Even a painting such as "Eileen Aroon"(ILL.II) where the principal theme is life and its continual perpetuation, for which the young golden-haired man is a frequent image, in the late paintings, he places the whole thing into an Irish context. The title, which is in Irish, refers to a traditional love song, and the young man; a ballad singer, is singing it to the woman beside him. This is the context in which the painting is intended to be seen and it is the title which gives the viewer this insight into what was one of the artist's last works. It is fair to say that in the greater part of all Yeats' art there is one common distinction to be noted; that of 'something happening'. His work is distinguished by his emphasis upon actions, encounters, moments of decision, moments of truth. And if one adds to this Yeats' isolated and solitary figures, his men of the west determined to conquer, his jockeys determined to win, then to a great extent



the universal nature of his art may be seen in terms of the individual's encounters with the world. At the same time however, his work is placed very definitely within the Irish tradition through the artist's consciously giving his work a strong Irish flavour. The Ireland of Yeats' work is a complete world of accurate observation transformed, of dreams realised in paint, of the ethos of a nation captured in two dimensions. His originality of mind and technique placed him among the most daring of modern artists and in a way he acts as a bridge to the younger generation of painters who were coming to prominence towards the end of the 1950's.

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(ILL.II)  
Eileen Aroon.



1. MacGreevy, T. Jack B. Yeats, p.19.
2. White, J. Jack B. Yeats - Drawings and Paintings, p.12.
3. Clark, K. Jack B. Yeats 1871- 1957, introduction no pagination
4. MacGreevy, T. Jack B. Yeats, p.19.
5. Yeats, J.B. Letter to Lady Aberconway, 7 August 1948.



Paul Henry R.H.A. (1876 - 1958)

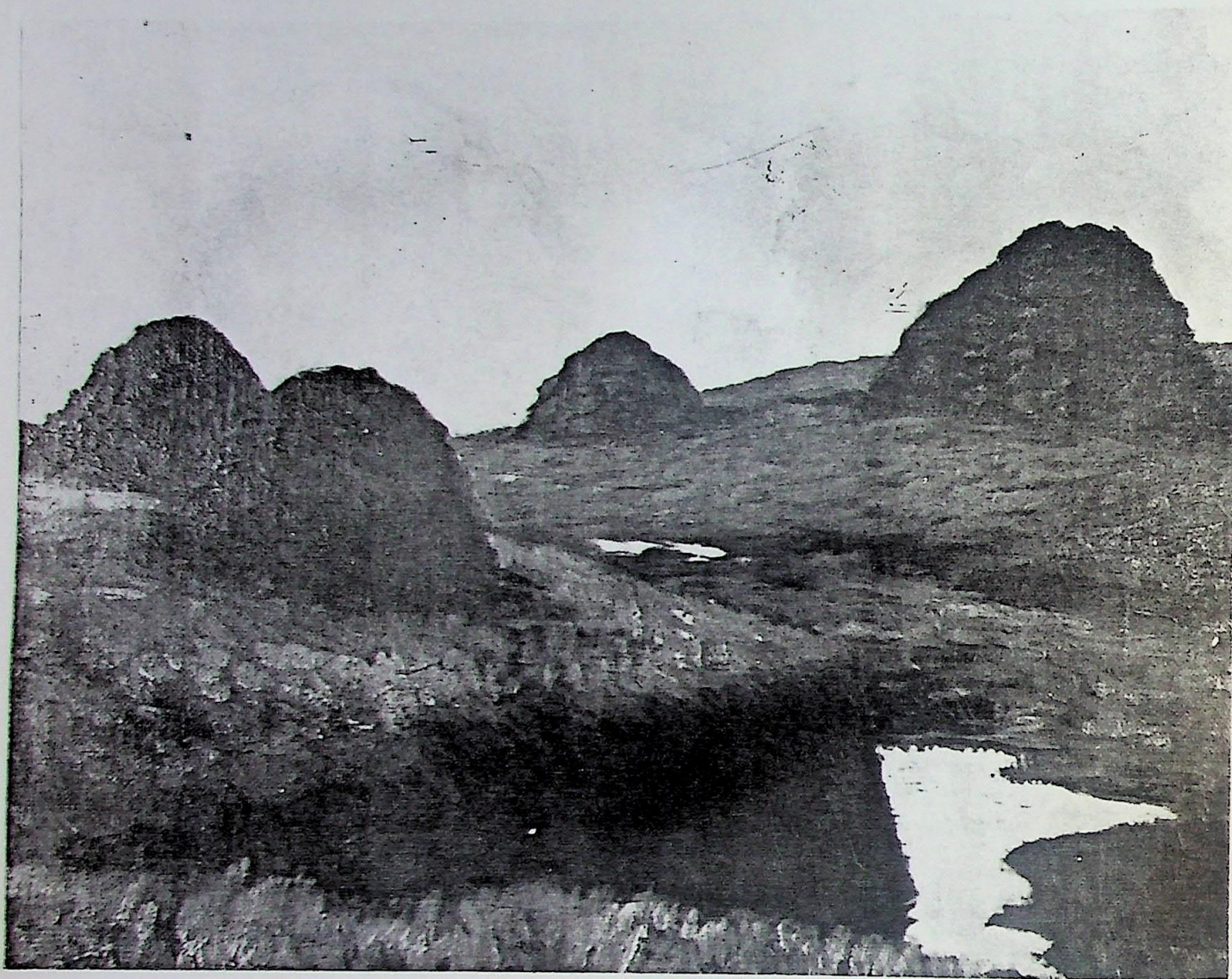
Before discussing the generation of painters which came to prominence in the 1960's and 1970's, I intend first, to examine a quite separate aspect of the Irish tradition; that of landscape painting. As is evident from the preceeding two chapters; both Yeats and Orpen represent predominantly a specific type of work within the Irish tradition. It is allegorical and symbolic even lyrical in some instances, and contains references to recognisably Irish scenes or items of character and event from Irish life. Paintings such as these, where the content and images and thoughts they arouse are paramount, have enormous scope for the artist to express himself. Yeats and Orpen were able to portray their widely different attitudes to Irish society; Orpen alluded to it's failings and hypocracies, while Yeats was less critical and tended to express the innate nobility and aspirations of his contemporaries in a celebratory manner. There is however, as described in chapter 2, another part of the Irish tradition; that of landscape painting, which is in it's own right an equally important aspect of that tradition.

The best known and most influential of landscape artists up to the 1950's was the Belfast artist Paul Henry who was a contemporary of both Yeats and Orpen. His early training was followed by a period at the Academie Julien in 1898. Unfortunately, his early works have been lost, except for a small number of etchings and drawings and a few paintings done in England during the first decade of this century. The great influence on his life and work was his discovery of the West of Ireland in 1912 when he visited Achill, where eventually he was to live for seven years. He had a real understanding of the small-farmers and fishermen of the west coast which for him was a place of beauty



(ILL. 12)  
The Potatoe Diggers.





(ILL. 13)  
Landscape.

and mystery. Stylistically, his chief influences came from Cezanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh and Whistler, and much of his importance as an Irish painter derives from his being the first to introduce these influences to Ireland. In later years, these different influences were to become predominant at different periods of his work. Although occasionally, the influences of Whistler and the impressionists appear in his later paintings of lakes and mountains, it was those of Millet and Van 'Gogh which are most apparent in his response to the Irish landscape.

His early work done on Achill are often of people; capturing their everyday lives and their struggle against a harsh environment. These works are usually small, with simply outlined figures and are often painted in a thick impasto as can be seen in "The Potato Diggers"(ILL.-12) The landscape he portrays is gloomy and frequently features the boglands of the area. He was in fact more interested in the physical properties of the earth itself at this time, than by the distant view as can be seen in "Landscape"(ILL.13) Henry was deeply sensitive to the visual aspects of his environment and could adapt his style to convey precisely his response. Indeed his attitude to the West was not dissimilar to that of Synge and this instances once again a parallel between the approach taken towards Ireland and things Irish, by both the literary and visual arts. In his later works, after he had left Achill for Dublin, the immediacy of response contained in these paintings is lacking as he was more frequently painting from memory rather than from observation. However, this later period is distinguished by an increasing range of landscape subjects and also by the use of a different colour range. The dark colours are replaced by various tones of blues, greys and greens with some beautiful harmonies of purples, and while the colour range is comparatively small, the



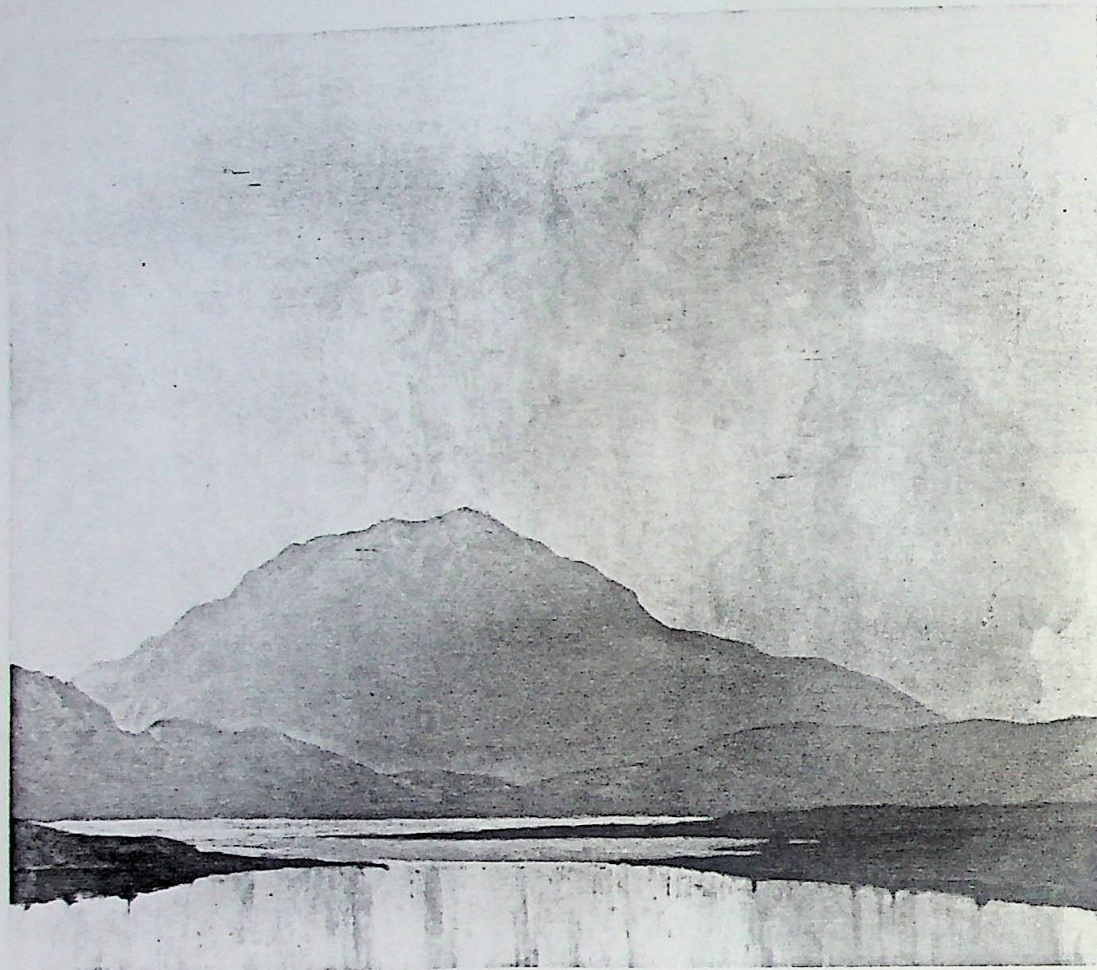


(ILL. 14)  
The Tree.

areas of different hues are often patterned with a fine sense of almost abstract composition. The landscape is seen in greater detail than before; the smooth surface of rocks, the bark of trees, the many faces and angles on a mountainside are often finely drawn and one becomes aware of a scene painted for its own sake rather than as a vehicle for portraying a way of life. As can be seen in works such as "The Tree" (ILL. 14) and "Killary Bay" (ILL. 15) Henry has begun to paint in the style for which he is best known; with few exceptions people disappear from his pictures and their presence is suggested only by the lanes and cottages which are almost always present in his later works.

It was after his return to Dublin that he embarked upon the body of work which was to have such a profound effect on the development of Irish landscape painting. He began to design posters and produce pictures for them which were to gain for him a far wider audience than his regular exhibitions in Dublin and abroad ever could. One highly successful series for the London Midland and Scottish Railway which he designed, included a poster called "Connemara Landscape" which had larger sales than any other L.M.S. poster, and in 1943 he produced one for Bord Fáilte of which over 10,000 were printed. The success of these works was derived to some extent from the particular vision of Ireland they provided for the public. The associations which they could evoke were very much a part of the cultural ethos of the time and the works themselves contributed to the formation and development of that ethos. After independence and the establishment of Saorstát Éireann, Ireland became in certain respects isolationist, a position which was accentuated by the state's policy of neutrality during the Emergency. Throughout these years and up to the late 1950's the general policy of successive Irish governments



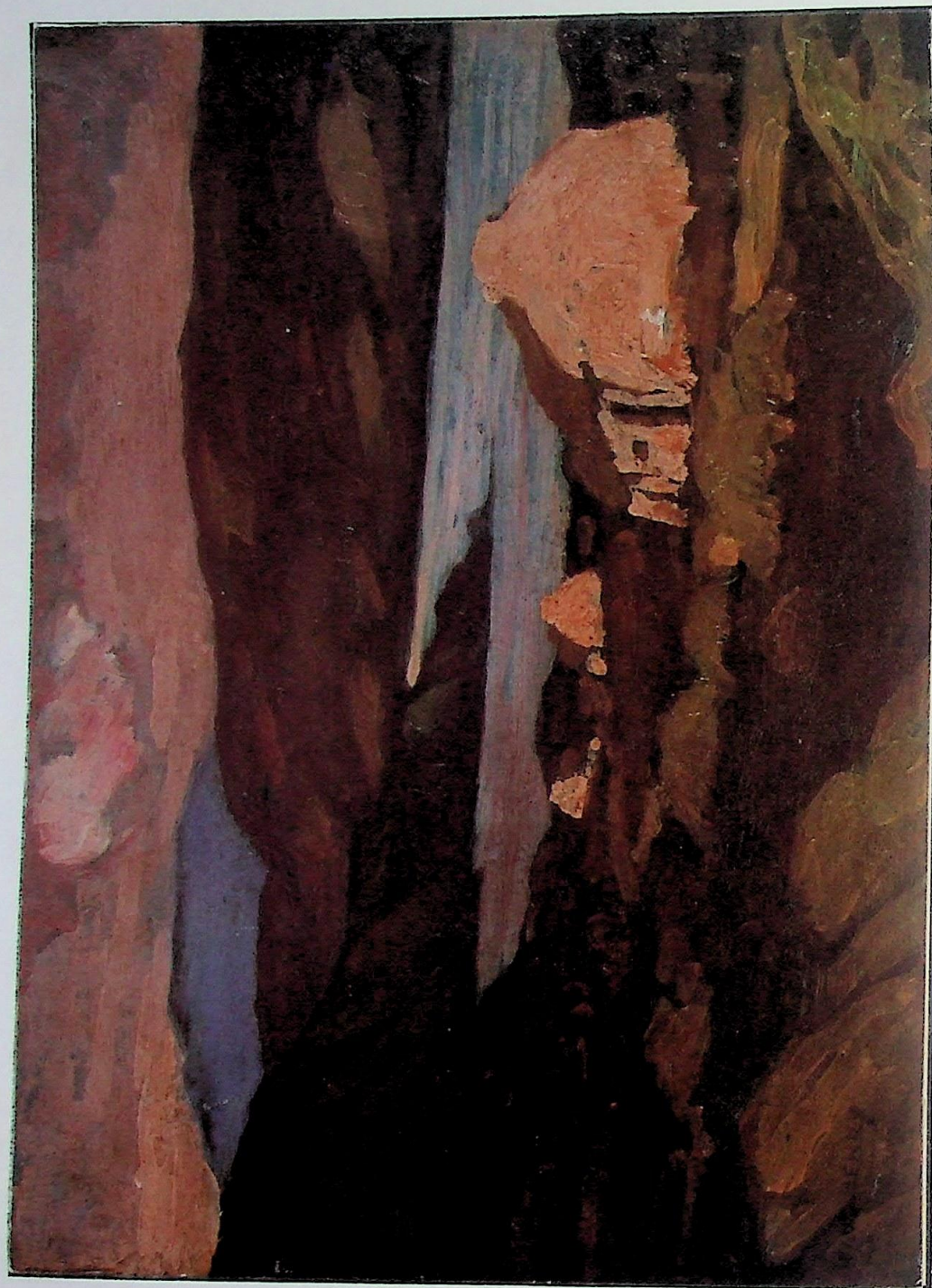


(ILL. 15)  
Killary Bay.

was one of self-sufficiency in all possible areas. Central to this policy was the notion of a nation of small-farmers living in rustic simplicity, and as the popular catchphrase of the time had it; in 'frugal comfort'. Rural life was idealised and advocated to the extent that it became virtually synonymous with Irish life. Most Irish people did in fact, live in rural areas and their lifestyles were similar in many respects to the 'ideal'. The strong ties to the land or sense of place, which exists in all agricultural societies made this ideal extremely attractive to many people. In reality the tendency of Irish society was away from this type of lifestyle, however, this seems only to have increased the popular appeal of the official vision or national ideal for the average Irish person. The visual and literary arts helped to define this ideal Ireland, though both often portrayed some of the less appealing aspects of rural life. The official vision became an essential part of people's perception of themselves and was firmly incorporated into the cultural ethos of Irish society. Indeed, the currently accepted image of Ireland is still partially derived from this source, and while it must be admitted that it contains admirable features, it could never have been a practical option for a large proportion of the people. Nonetheless, the mythology of this Ireland still shapes the attitudes of Irish society today.

Certain artists like Yeats and Paul Henry eulogized the peasantry and their lifestyle. Gradually too, pure landscape painting came to be seen as supportive of this type of work. Most landscapes are in a sense tributes to the countryside they portray and naturally enough by association, they were and are seen as tributes to those who live their lives there. The paintings of Paul Henry, specifically because of their wide audience set a standard which others followed, often





(ILL. 16)  
Connemara Cottages.

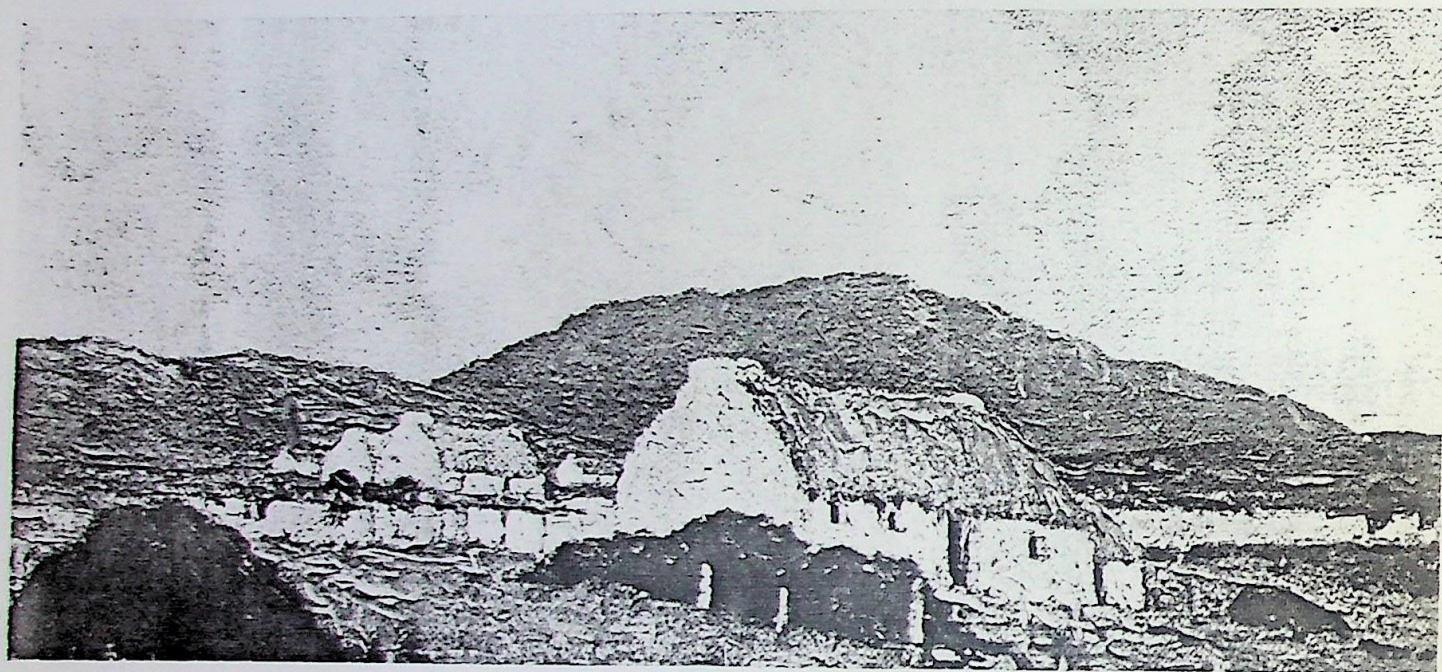
by the simple expedient of copying his style and content. In his work certain types of image recur ; the rick of turf, thatched cottages and quiet boreens, etc. which make indirect references to the presence of people in the countryside. Also, the land itself, the sky, the coastline and Henry's billowing cloudscape are imbued with an imposing power and grandeur ; a dramatic landscape where nature is an adversary to be reckoned with. In effect, this emphasised the strength of character of the people who lived there ; the source for much of this work being the impoverished West of Ireland. In time there evolved an archetypal landscape painting, which, using the elements of this developed visual language, reflected not only the actual landscape, but also incorporated a world of associations, which gave the works a symbolic significance as being representative of something essentially Irish. Typical of these works are "Connemara Cottages"(ILL.16) and "Lakeside Cottages"(ILL.17). They illustrate in characteristic vein Henry's approach to landscape ; the dense clouds towering above blue mountains with snug white cottages nestled into the lower slopes and the shimmering surfaces of the lakes are all typical of the aspects of the Irish landscape which appealed to him.

Henry was one of the best known of Irish landscape painters of the twentieth century. His influence upon his contemporaries and upon those who today work within the landscape genre of the Irish tradition has been considerable. Through the wide audience which he obtained for his work, he so imprinted his own personal vision of the Irish landscape upon the consciousness of his fellow citizens, that certain of his works have become almost iconographic in their ability to encapsulate, for many of them, a particular "Irishness" or sense of Ireland. "For the influence and for the vigour with



which he created his vision of Irish landscape and fixed an individual convention on the seeing of a generation he must be accepted and saluted as one of our half dozen authoritative painters".(1)

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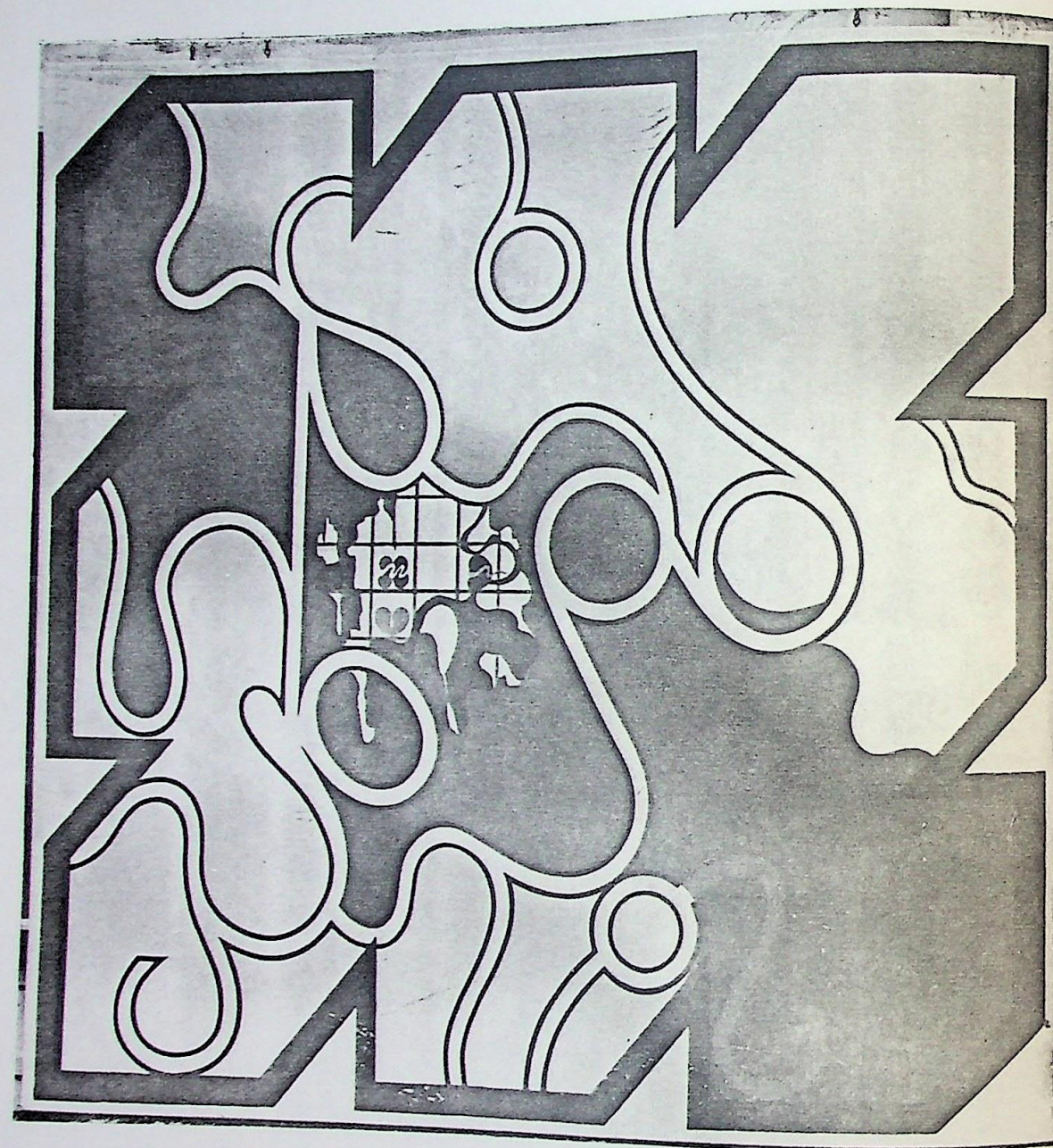


(ILL. 17)  
Lakeside Cottages.



- I. Hewitt, J. and Snoddy, T. Art in Ulster, pp.80,81.



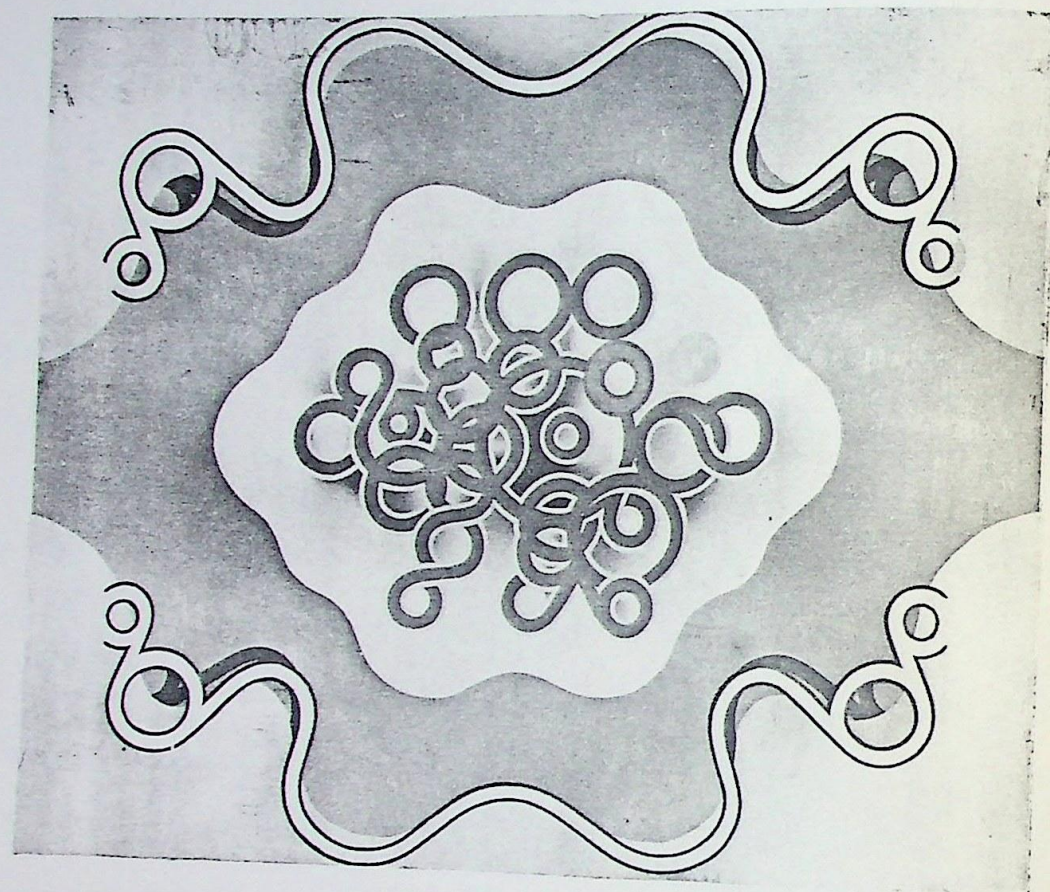
Micheal Farrell (1940 -)

(ILL. 18)  
Thourable's Wake.

The three painters whose work has been discussed in the previous chapters were members of a generation of artists whose influences were drawn from the traditional continental and British schools. Irish artists generally borrowed from the developments on the Continent and selected whatever elements appealed to them. Yet, even in the 1940's and 1950's there were few Irish artists who could be identified with any continental or British movement. Those artists who were receptive to the newer movements were influenced by Cubism, Constructivism, Surrealism, etc. and the major effect of these influences upon their work was the introduction of a new sense of freedom in artistic expression. However, they met with resistance from the Irish art establishment and were rejected by the R.H.A. which was then the most prestigious artistic body in the country. In response to this, the artists concerned, in 1943 established the 'Living Art' exhibition which was supportive of artists who wished to experiment with the newer movements. In the period after the war the impact of formal and informal abstract art from continental Europe and the United States was beginning to be felt in Ireland. It is not surprising, with the more enlightened atmosphere then prevailing in Ireland that some younger artists should look rather more international than their predecessors. They thus came to be called naturally enough, the 'Younger Generation' of modern Irish artists. As with their predecessors these younger artists adapted the new movements to suit their own needs, both within and outside the Irish tradition in painting.

It is important to remember that these movements coincided with a new political departure for the country as a whole. In the late





(ILL.19)  
Contained Motif.

1950's and early 1960's the Irish government abandoned it's old isolationist policies and opened the country up to foreign investment and modernization. This brought about fundamental changes in Irish society ; it was in fact a socio-economic revolution. Ireland was exposed to the cultural influences of 'international Western civilization' and quickly absorbed many of it's attitudes and assumptions. This was facilitated by the fact that in the 1960's the world as a whole was getting it's first taste of the age of mass communication and quick travel. The new international culture brought with it it's own international art styles which a number of the younger Irish artists began to adopt. Some of them worked almost exclusively in an international context, but others, as has always been the case in Ireland, began to adapt the principles of the international styles into a consciously Irish context. Micheal Farrell is an artist whose work has evolved in just this way.

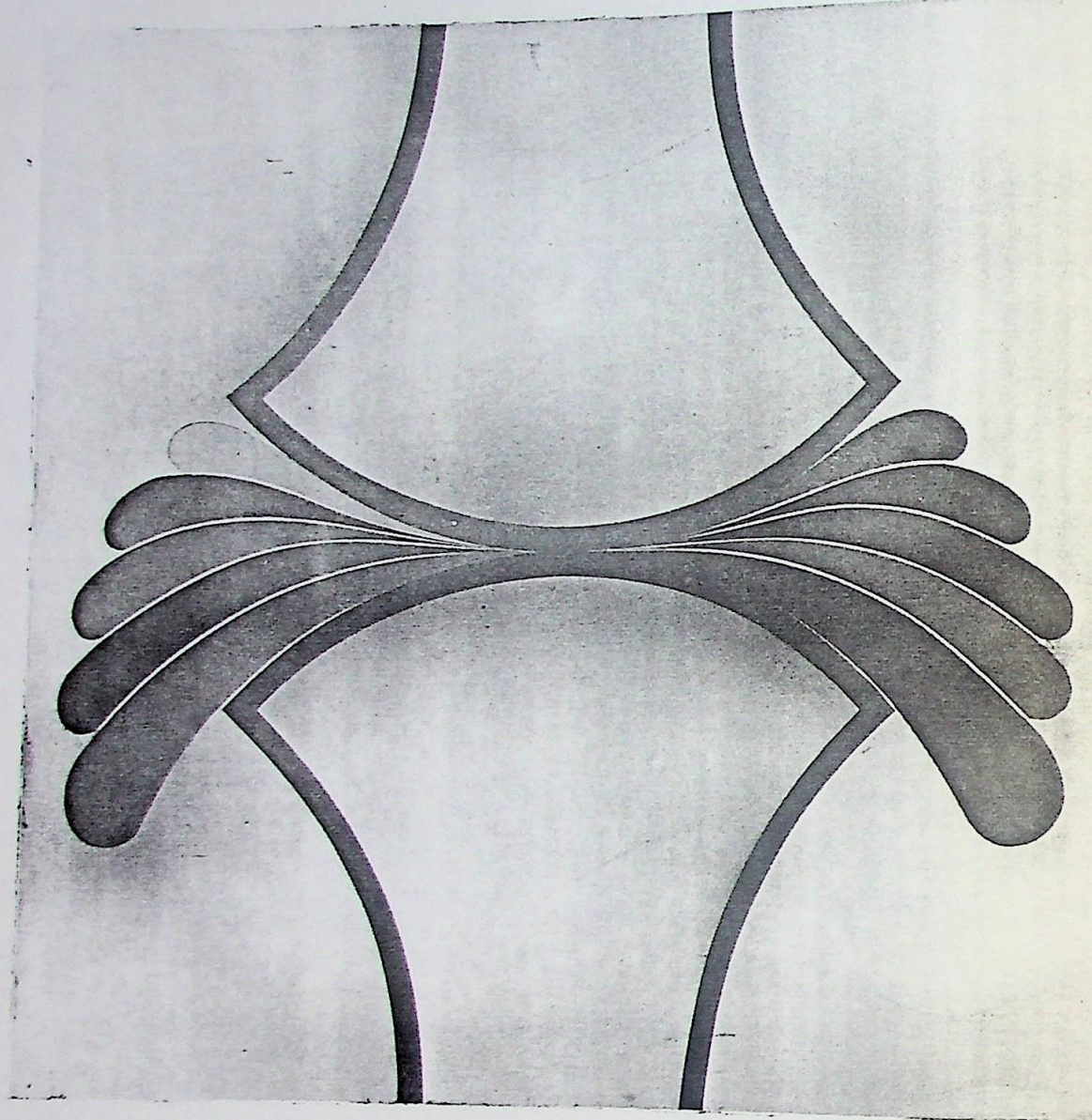
Farrell was born in Kells in 1940. In 1957 when he was seventeen years of age, he went to St.Martin's College in London, which at that time was one of the first schools of art to set in motion the artistic revolution in Britain which, in the 1960's made it the principal competitor with the United States in contemporary art. In 1960, three years after joining St.Martin's, he was exhibiting with this new wave of artists in an important exhibition called 'The Young Contemporaries'. Between 1961 and 1964 he worked in London and in Ireland and during this period he passed from figurative pictures to a semi-abstract format. These works were predominantly 'hard-edge', that is, each shape had a firm unsmudged outline, even if that outline was curvilinear. In this early work the shapes were predominantly curvaceous, often amoeboid, like certain shapes in Arp or Miro or late Matisse but there were always rectilinear



elements; crosses and suchlike, as well as regular figures, such as segments of circles. Farrell's main interests during this period were primarily aesthetic. He was exploring various relationships of curvilinear and rectilinear forms and indeed, has continued to do so in his work right up to the present.

During the period 1964 to 1967 his work began to change, though the essential ingredients remained the same. Farrell began to introduce elements to his work which had specific Irish references and which brought him into the sphere of the Irish tradition. He developed an interest in Celtic imagery, which he interpreted for the most part in the form of intertwining circles in works such as "Contained Series" and "Thourable's Wake"(ILL.18) which refers to the coils of smoke which float in the wake of a censor or thurible. These coils and intertwining circles are almost free of straight, rectilinear lines, except perhaps at their boundaries, and are very evocative of the ornamentation found on the work of the Celtic goldsmiths and sculptors. From this point on, Farrell has consistently produced a body of work which has been self-consciously Irish in sentiment, though he has continued to produce work which is 'international' at the same time. His attachment to Ireland is very strong as was to become increasingly obvious in later years. In works such as "The Cairn Series" he continued to work in this vein, but once again in this series he began to introduce rectilinear elements to his work. Intertwining circles were also used for a large mural in the Bank of Ireland in 1967 with the addition of intertwining triangles. Throughout these years his work continues to display his interest in the geometric shapes which proliferate in his paintings.

By 1970 he embarked upon the "Pressé Series"(ILL.20) which initially had nothing specifically Irish about them. These works



(ILL. 20)  
Pressé Series with Many Colours.





(ILL. 21)  
 Presse Series with Floor-Piece.

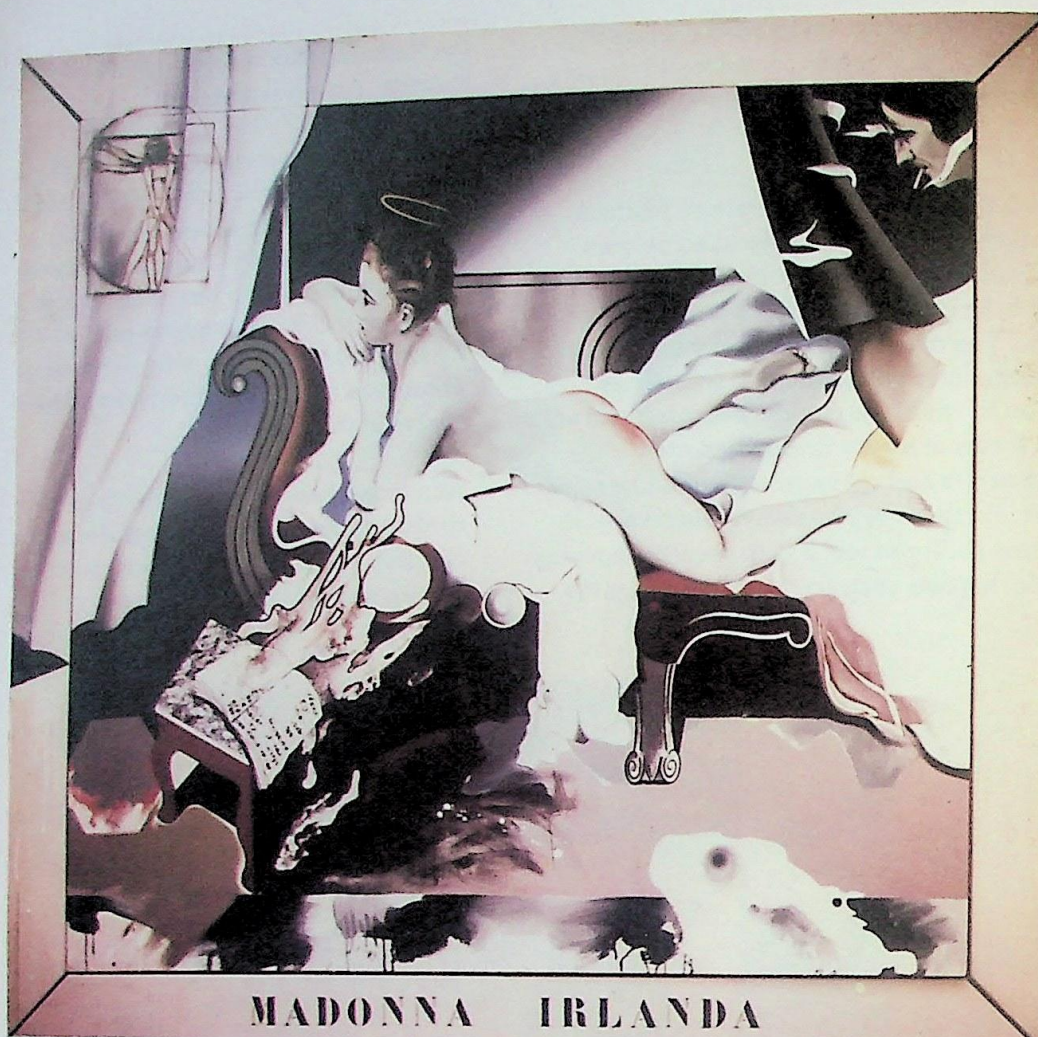
consist of two axe-like shapes which press against each other from above and below, and squirt out what appears to be a type of juice. Some are painted on canvas, others are reliefs of painted wood. Farrell's reputation was by now firmly established, at home and abroad. He had won numerous prizes and exhibited all over Europe ; Italy, Germany, Yugoslavia, Scandinavia, Poland, Holland and of course France where he had taken up residence in 1971. He had also exhibited in the United States and in India. Although he has lived much abroad Farrell has maintained a very strong attachment for Ireland. He had demonstrated this by his incorporation of Celtic motifs into abstract works such as "Contained Motif"(ILL.19) but by the 1970's his work began to change once more as he started to express his emotional involvement with the 'Troubles' in Ulster. As the political situation deteriorated Farrell's paintings, reflecting that situation changed dramatically in response. From being formalist, purely aesthetic, at times nothing more than elegant and decorative, it suddenly took on meaning and symbolism.

The first change was in the "Pressé Series". In "Pressé Series with Floor-piece"(ILL.21) the 'juice' which spurts from between the upper and lower axeheads is no longer the innocent lemon juice or orange squash, but blood. And it was painted as such ; blood-red, and splashing in abundance off the canvas and across the floor in rivulets. It was intended to be a metaphor for a nation bleeding itself to death by matching violence with violence. The following works within the series made this quite explicit when around 1975 Farrell began to introduce elements of collage to the works: He utilized newspaper cuttings describing the various atrocities and abandoned the axe-like shapes altogether thus allowing the 'blood' to spurt out in all directions in wild streaks. Some of the headlines are legible to a certain degree, and the viewer can read snatches









(ILL.23)  
Madonna Irlanda.

or stark naked on her stomach on a sofa. She was Irish and in her time gained notoriety as a courtesan in Paris. By using the image of Miss O'murphy, Farrell is able to make a less direct but fuller statement about Ireland's problems. As Farrell himself explains, the series makes "...every possible statement on the Irish situation, religious, cultural, political, the cruelty, the horror, every aspect of it".(2) Some versions are seductive some coy, some innocent, some hard, avaricious and grasping, some cruel. In one painting the model's anatomy is labelled as though indicating butcher's cuts as though it was taken from a cookery book : forequarters, gigot, knee cap, etc. a pun on boucher (boucherie á la mode irlandaise) which is the French for butcher. Miss O'Murphy is invariably referred to as "Madonna Irlanda" and thus acts as a link between the religious and political aspects of Irish life in a mildly blasphemous way. "She is my Mother Ireland. Why? Because she is a whore"(3)

In these works Farrell like many other artists of the Irish tradition is expressing his personal vision of Irish society. It is an expression based upon reflection, not only about Ireland but also about his own position as an artist within Irish society. He uses images, language, allusion and symbols which are derived from the cultural environment in which we all share. It is through the use of these references that the message is transformed into a very personal experience for the viewer. The series is a complex collection of ideas and symbols, all of which are carefully organised by the artist into a cohesive pattern. In "Madonna Irlanda"(ILL.23) he has incorporated a voyeuristic element by including a profile of himself smoking a cigarette, in the top right-hand corner of the picture. He is at the same time illustrating the sort of love/hate relationship which many Irish people have with their mother country ;



through his portrayal of Ireland as the Miss O'Murphy/ Madonna/ Mother Ireland/ seductive, desirable female. This is a particularly effective image for the country which has over the centuries, been traditionally equated with either a beautiful young woman (Cathleen Ní Houlihán) or an old hag (An tSean Bhean Bhocht). His works are loaded with symbolism and imagery of this kind, including many art-historical references drawn from a variety of sources.

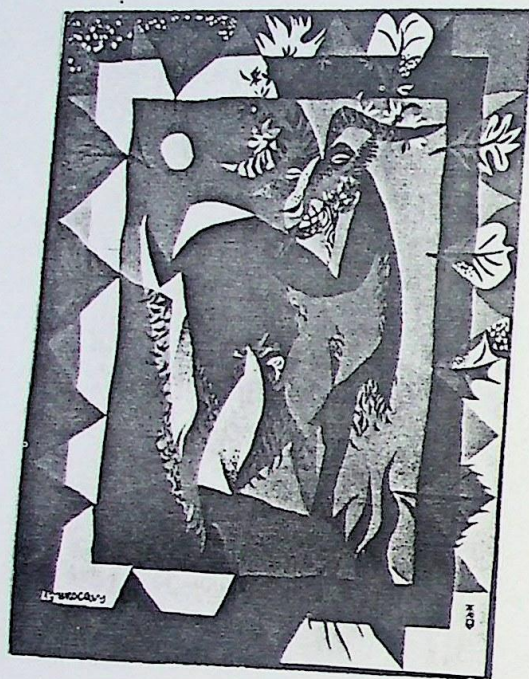
The selection of Farrell's work which I have discussed in this chapter are good examples of a type of work which is currently being produced within the Irish tradition. Of course, he also produced paintings of a more personal nature which is universally human in it's concern for the individual. Indeed, although the "Madonna Irlanda" was a vehicle for his feelings about Ireland, she has led him back to art and speculation about art through an examination of himself and his role as an artist in Irish society. Now in his forties, Farrell is in fact in mid-term. Unlike the three other artists already discussed he is still with us and we can look forward to future contributions from him to the Irish art scene.

\* \* \* \* \*



- I. Barrett, C. catalogue of Micheal Farrell, p.14.
2. Ibid. p.15.
3. Farrell, M. catalogue of A Sense of Ireland, p.51.



Louis le Brocquy (1916 - )

(ILL.24)  
Garlanded Goat.

One of the most important Irish artists of the present day is undoubtedly Louis le Brocquy. He was born in Dublin in 1916 and worked in the family business until he was twenty-two years of age when he decided to concentrate his energies entirely into painting. As an artist he was largely self-taught, studying in France, Spain, Venice, Geneva and London. In the course of his long career to date, he has represented Ireland both in Europe and the United States and his work is in many of the world's major collections. Le Brocquy is an artist with a highly individual vision and his work is not quite so obviously Irish as some of those discussed previously. The human form has always been his primary subject and many of his paintings deal with what can only be considered to be 'universal' themes, like the essential isolation of the individual within society or the nature of human communication. Nonetheless, upon examination it becomes apparent that le Brocquy quite consciously uses Irish cultural and historical sources in his work and that he shares with many other painters of the Irish tradition a strong awareness of the literary arts in Ireland. He himself sees parallels between his approach to painting and that adopted by some Irish writers to their work. As I have said in previous chapters, one of the characteristics of the Irish tradition in painting is the close associations it has with the Irish literary scene in particular as well as with various other art forms. Indeed, the way in which painting of the Irish tradition dovetails with other cultural activities is in my opinion indicative of the overall accuracy of its portrayal of Irish society.

Le Brocquy's work has evolved through several distinct personal



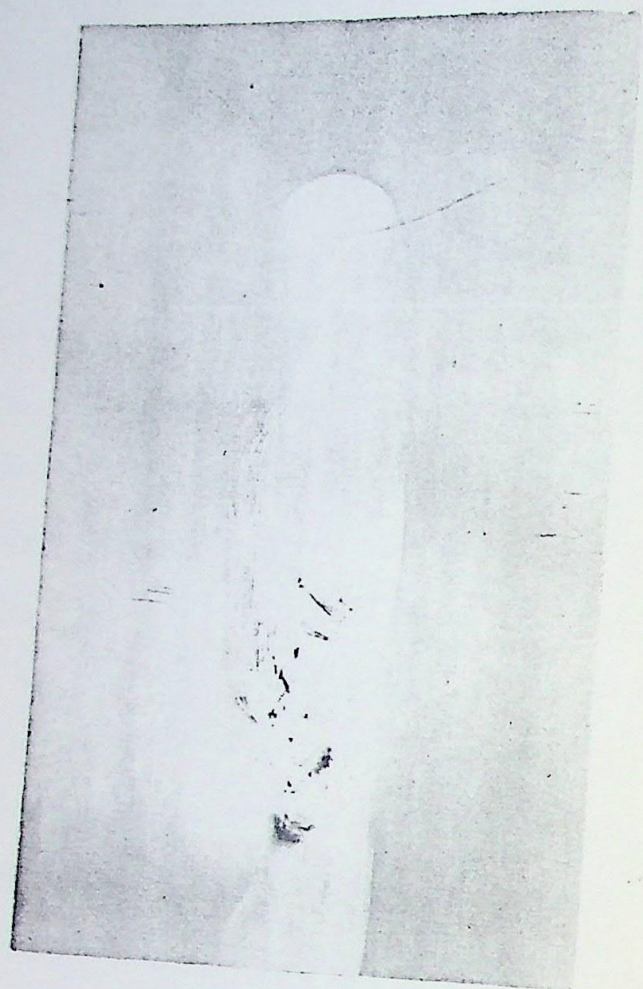


(ILL.25)  
Tinker Girl.

styles in drawing, painting and tapestry. Indeed, it is in both drawing and tapestry that he has produced some of his most obviously Irish artworks dealing with, amongst other things Irish history and in works such as the "Táin" tapestry, with Celtic mythology. His early works display influences from Manet and Degas, and are followed by a period when he experimented with Cubism, elements of which can be seen in works such as "Garlanded Goat" (ILL.24). He returned to Dublin during the Emergency where he exhibited with the Living Art Exhibition. At this time he had begun to explore in his work the theme of isolation, using as his models both prisoners and tinkers. For le Brocquy, the tinker represented an example of the isolation of an alienated group in a larger community, a subject he picked up in the Midlands and in response to which he executed a series of paintings on the life of the 'travelling people' an example of which is "Tinker Girl" (ILL.25). This period culminated in paintings based on the theme of family, children and communication between individuals.

By 1956 a notable change occurred in le Brocquy's style. Having reached a point of understanding with the family as the central focus he began to explore the even more crucial problem of the existence and significance of the individual being. Interestingly, this work is similar in nature to some of Yeats' later paintings and it displays also, a certain technical similarity to that of the older artist. "Isolated Being" (ILL.26) is a typical example of these works and points the direction in which the artist's work was progressing. In the picture a barely recognisable human form stands forlornly in the centre of the canvas which is devoid of any other feature. The figure is neither male or female and simply stands in the middle of the painting seeming to gaze out at the viewer





(ILL.26)  
Isolated Being.

with it's hands clasped in front of it's body in mute appeal. These paintings marked the beginning of what has become known as the artist's 'White Period' and it contains many works which are charged with subtle references to Irish history and literature.

In "Study for reconstructed Head of S.B." (ILL.27) le Brocquy is applying a combination of physical and psychological representation to, in this case, Samuel Beckett. This is one of a series of works dealing with famous Irish literary figures. In this painting he has dealt with the difficult problem of transforming his psychological impressions of Beckett into visual terms. He is trying to encapsulate the essence of Beckett's own complicated and obscure art into the haunted emergent face, and the grey flecked, whitish mist from which it seems to be materializing. The inspiration for these paintings comes from such diverse sources as the decorated ritual heads of the Oceanic cultures and from the remains of the Celto-Ligurian art of Southern France. Overlying these influences is a developed awareness of his own ancient Irish culture. Le Brocquy connects his preoccupation with the human head to the Celtic tradition of the head as a magic box which contains the spirit. He uses the traditions of the ancient past, as well as more recent ones such as the literary tradition, to shape the development of his work. His paintings are unselfconscious extensions of these influences without any heavy-handed symbolism. He has compared himself to an archaeologist penetrating the surface of his canvases in search of the appropriate image. He connects his probing approach to "...Yeats's desire to bring the 'mask' of his own antithesis to the surface of his personality. So we find le Brocquy decomposing the portraits of Joyce, Beckett, and Yeats in an effort





(ILL.27)  
Study for Reconstructed Head of S.B.

to discover an image that goes beyond appearance to reach the depth of personality"(1). Naturally, the pitfalls of such an approach are greatly increased by the physical familiarity of the subject, and the fact that the temptation to allow this aspect to predominate can be countered only by the extremely difficult problem of transforming psychological impressions into visual terms. Le Brocquy realises the difficulty of trying to do a single definitive portrait. When he was working on portraits he studied numerous photographs and did numerous studies of each subject, as he says himself ; "trying to discover an image underlying the ever-changing external appearance of the man".(2) The finished works have an iconographic intensity with their spectral images staring unrelentingly out at the viewer.

Le Brocquy's work is less accessible in many ways than that of the artists in previous chapters. While it is figurative it is often minimally so and the associations which it has with his cultural background sometimes need to be explained. However, when his painting is taken overall and viewed in the context of his other works and in conjunction with his own writings it becomes evident that a large proportion of his painting is very much part of the Irish tradition. Like Farrell, Le Brocquy continues to work prolifically and these two artists are tokens of the continuing vitality of the Irish tradition into the 1980's.

\* \* \* \* \*



- I. Ruane, F. catalogue of The Delighted Eye, foreword no pagination.



## CONCLUSION

The Irish tradition in painting depends for its uniqueness upon those unique 'environmental' factors obtaining in Ireland which help to determine the Irish psyche and which in turn gives to the Irish tradition in painting its distinctive character. In this paper I have discussed a selection of work from five particular artists. I could easily have chosen five other artists and while their work would have differed in many respects from those actually chosen, the underlying nature of the work would have emerged unchanged. As is evident from the works themselves, the Irish tradition is not a stylistic one. Its cohesion derives from the common cultural heritage of those who work within it, and yet at the same time it is quite capable of allowing great individuality. I have discussed the socio/ economic and political background in which these works were produced to give an insight into the artist's very personal vision of his work which essentially is a catalogue of his own interaction with Irish society. Paintings done within the Irish tradition can at times be very personal and even obscure and if some of the works discussed here do not appear particularly Irish individually, I feel that taken collectively they possess a perceptible homogeneity. Some of them are more obviously rooted in the Irish cultural ethos than others but my intention was to give an idea of the very wide range and type of work which flourishes within the tradition. The artists discussed here in common with nearly all Irish artists, have displayed a willingness to accept and absorb new ideas and incorporate them effectively into their work. The range of painting styles and the willingness to experiment evidenced by these artists is indicative of a vital and continuing development within the Irish tradition and this ensures that it will continue to be an important component of the artistic life of the country in the future.



# ABBREVIATIONS

R.H.A.	Royal Hibernian Academy or Academician.
R.A.	Royal Academy or Academician.
N.G.I.	National Gallery of Ireland.
N.E.A.C.	New English Art Club.



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WHITE, James

to recognise the importance of that leader of modern art in the 1870's.

The Cafe Royal of 1912 is much less serious in intent than the "Homage to Manet". This time he has created a kaleidoscope of bohemian artistic life in London, blatantly florid and redolent of the period. He must have been tempted to evoke Toulouse Lautrec's famous interiors of the cafes of Paris, but intent on his studies of John Nicholson, Pryde and George Moore he has created a document which must in time be more and more treasured for its power to evoke a world which was wiped out by the first world war.

 One wonders if the world is yet ready to appreciate the large and successful conversation pieces which Orpen was able to continue to produce. Perhaps they still have an air of Edwardian splendour and gracious living which is unsympathetic to present day standards.

Perhaps, indeed, more time will have to have passed before his achievement can be judged on purely painterly standards just as for instance 19th century Romantic painting is now being reconsidered.

It seems likely however that no one will have difficulty in recognising the excellence of his small genre pictures in which he represents with such splendid passages of light-filled space the anguish of the "Wash House" or "The Knacker's Yard". His total involvement with the nude model in the studio should also find a response amongst those who have understood so well the quality of a Degas or of a Bonnard. Orpen also found intense pleasure in the figures of the Gypsy or of the travelling pedler or toy seller. Their worldly predicament seemed to attract him and some element of their independence of our social order encouraged him to make studies of their arrogant and indifferent countenances and attitudes and sometimes he enlarged his studies and related them to the landscapes he made of the hillsides around Dublin.

In 1913, a new use of technique seemed to have been inspired by his nude studies. This was the use of tempera — that is colour mixed with egg medium rather than with oil. The first work he made in this medium was "Sowing the Seed for the Board of Agriculture and Technical Instruction in Ireland" in which he uses the figures of a nude woman, two cherubs, and a pair of comic figures in fancy dress as onlookers, all of whom create an extraordinary sense of sculptural intensity in the vivid powdery colours of tempera against an almost flat two dimensional ground. In the "Western Wedding" of 1914 and "The Holy Well" of 1916 he developed this technique in works of extremely vivid colour and of clear satirical intent. "The Holy Well" in particular is possibly a reflection of Synge's play "The Well of the Saints" and it depicts the naked figures of ancient Pagan Ireland being made to drink from the well and thus be transformed into the costumed islanders of Aran against a background of Celtic crosses and beehive dwellings of the 6th and 7th centuries A.D. It was his artist friend John Keating who provided him with the sketches of Aran for this composition and it is Keating with the jaunty cap and black beard who stands above the well cynically surveying the scene of Christian renewal below.

The departure into the surprisingly different technique of these tempera compositions on an Irish theme did not prevent the artist from later turning out ravishing nude studies in his more typical style of rendering flesh tones with a realism which recalls

Orpen

'The Holy Well'  
'The Western Wedding'

'Sowing the Seed'

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S.B. Kennedy

BECAME STEREOTYPED. ALSO, IN THESE YEARS HE HAD DOMESTIC DIFFICULTIES AND HIS MARRIAGE TO GRACE FAILED IN 1930. IN THAT YEAR HE SETTLED IN ENNISKERRY IN COUNTY WICKLOW AND REMAINED THERE UNTIL NEAR THE END OF HIS LIFE. THROUGHOUT THE 1930S HE TRAVELLED INFREQUENTLY TO THE WEST AND RELIED MORE AND MORE FOR HIS COMPOSITIONS ON SKETCHES DONE EARLIER. IN THE MID 1940S HE SUFFERED AN ILLNESS WHICH RESULTED IN ALMOST TOTAL BLINDNESS AND THUS HE HAD TO GIVE UP PAINTING FROM THAT TIME, ALTHOUGH, WITH THE AID OF A DICTAPHONE, HE TOOK TO WRITING AND BROADCASTING, PUBLISHING A NUMBER OF SHORT STORIES AND HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY, AN IRISH PORTRAIT, WHICH APPEARED IN 1951. PAUL HENRY DIED IN 1958.

A LARGE MEASURE OF PAUL HENRY'S IMPORTANCE AS A PAINTER IS THAT HE BROUGHT A FRESH VIEW TO THE IRISH LANDSCAPE. DURING THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY A NUMBER OF ARTISTS HAD VISITED THE WEST AND DRAWN THEIR INSPIRATION FROM IT. BUT USUALLY THEY EITHER PORTRAYED A STAGE VIEW OF RUSTIC LIFE OR, AS FOR EXAMPLE WITH W.H. BARTLETT, AN ENGLISH PAINTER WHO CAME TO IRELAND, RECORDED A STRICTLY NATURALISTIC VIEW OF EVERYDAY EVENTS. HENRY, ON THE OTHER HAND, PAINTED THE AREA WITHOUT THE FEELING OF ROMANCE COMMON TO MOST OTHERS, YET AT THE SAME TIME HE CREATED A PERSUASIVE VIEW OF THE LANDSCAPE WHICH REMAINS WITH US STILL. ALSO, UNLIKE A NUMBER OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES, HENRY WAS UNENCUMBERED BY THE DESIRE TO CREATE A 'NATIONAL' OR DISTINCT IRISH SCHOOL OF ART. IN HIS WORK, PAUL HENRY DID FOR THE PEOPLE OF ACHILL ISLAND WHAT JOHN SYNGE HAD DONE FOR THOSE ON ARAN: HE TOOK THEM ON THEIR OWN TERMS AND CREATED A DISTINCT ART, UNLIKE MANY OTHERS WHO MERELY USED THEM AS A CONTEXT AND SETTING TO EXPRESS THEIR OWN PERSONAL IDEAS. IN HENRY'S DEPICTIONS OF THE WEST

OF IRELAND THE POVERTY OF THE PEOPLE - AS OF THE LANDSCAPE TOO - AND THE HARSHNESS OF LIFE THERE ARE NOT HIDDEN, RATHER WE ARE MADE ACUTELY AWARE OF THEM AND OF THE UNIVERSAL, CEASELESS TOIL AND UNEVEN STRUGGLE BETWEEN MAN AND NATURE.

PAUL HENRY BROUGHT A DISTINCT AESTHETIC TO BEAR UPON HIS PAINTING AND THIS ALSO DISTINGUISHES HIM FROM MANY OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES. IN THE JUXTAPOSITION OF FORMS AND DECEPTIVELY SIMPLE MANIPULATION OF MASS AND COLOUR IN THE PICTURES WHICH HE MADE SHORTLY AFTER HE WENT TO ACHILL, HE WAS THE FIRST IRISH ARTIST, WORKING IN IRELAND, TO ADOPT A POST-IMPRESSIONIST MANNER. LATER, FROM THE 1920S, AS HIS LANDSCAPES ON OCCASION BECAME ALMOST ABSTRACT - **DAWN, KILLARY HARBOUR** (ULSTER MUSEUM) AND **LOW TIDE** (HUGH LANE GALLERY, DUBLIN) ARE GOOD EXAMPLES - HE RETAINED A STRONG UNDERLYING SENSE OF GEOMETRY.

THE 1920S WERE THE PERIOD OF HENRY'S GREATEST SUCCESS DURING HIS LIFETIME. IN FUTURE YEARS, HOWEVER, HE FELL VICTIM TO THIS SUCCESS. IN THE YEARS AFTER 1922, SUCCESSIVE IRISH GOVERNMENTS ENCOURAGED THE ADOPTION OF A SET OF VALUES BASED ON TRADITIONAL LIFE IN THE WEST, AND HENRY'S LANDSCAPES, LIKE THOSE OF SOME OTHERS, WERE SEEN AS TYPIFYING THE ESSENCE OF THOSE VALUES. THUS, AS WELL AS BEING USED ON POSTERS, HIS PICTURES WERE REPRODUCED IN MANY OFFICIAL AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS, SUCH AS THE BOOK OF DUBLIN (1929) OR THE IRISH FREE STATE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK (1932), WITH THE RESULT THAT PUBLIC DEMAND FOR THEM IN EFFECT CURTAILED HIS FREEDOM TO CHANGE, OR EVEN TO VARY, HIS SUBJECT-MATTER.

DURING THE 1920S AND 1930S A NUMBER OF ARTISTS TRIED TO CREATE A DISTINCT IRISH SCHOOL OF PAINTING, WHAT WAS OFTEN REFERRED TO AS A 'NATIONAL' ART. SEAN





In Tir na n-Og, 1936

oil 61 x 92 cms  
 De. Michael W. J. Russell 1936

Tir na n-Og, the Land of Youth of Old Irish literature, and the inspiration of the modern Irish Literary Renaissance, recurs as an image in various forms in Yeats's paintings. The Land of Youth is an eternal land, a Paradise enjoyed by the pagan Irish poet Oisín for a period, who returned to recount his experiences, and to be accepted into Christian baptism.

For Yeats, the idea of eternal youth generally appears in his golden headed boys, at

he is reading — which is explained for us in the title. The paint of *In Tir na n-Og* itself, with its harmonious colours and its lyrical movement, creates the notion of freedom and permanent youth.

The boy lying full length across the painting, delicately drawn, looks up from the book in which he has been engrossed. The book is lit up with spots of colour, his face is pink and dreamy. (It may be a self-portrait of the artist as a boy.) Beyond the





THE Liffey swim. 1923. oil on canvas. 61 x 91 cms  
 National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin.

what he paints, which was to become so important to Yeats in his later subjective work.

The style is confident and free, having abandoned the characteristic strong outline of his early figurative oils. Brushstrokes are long and broad. Colours are rich, and

This picture of 1923, in a transitional style, recording the annual swim down the River Liffey through Dublin City, shows a return to capturing the thrill of sporting events, abandoned for a time while the artist concentrated on quieter, less arresting subjects during the early twenties. Spectators in the foreground crowd the riverside path on Bachelor's Walk, while others have a grandstand view from passing trams,

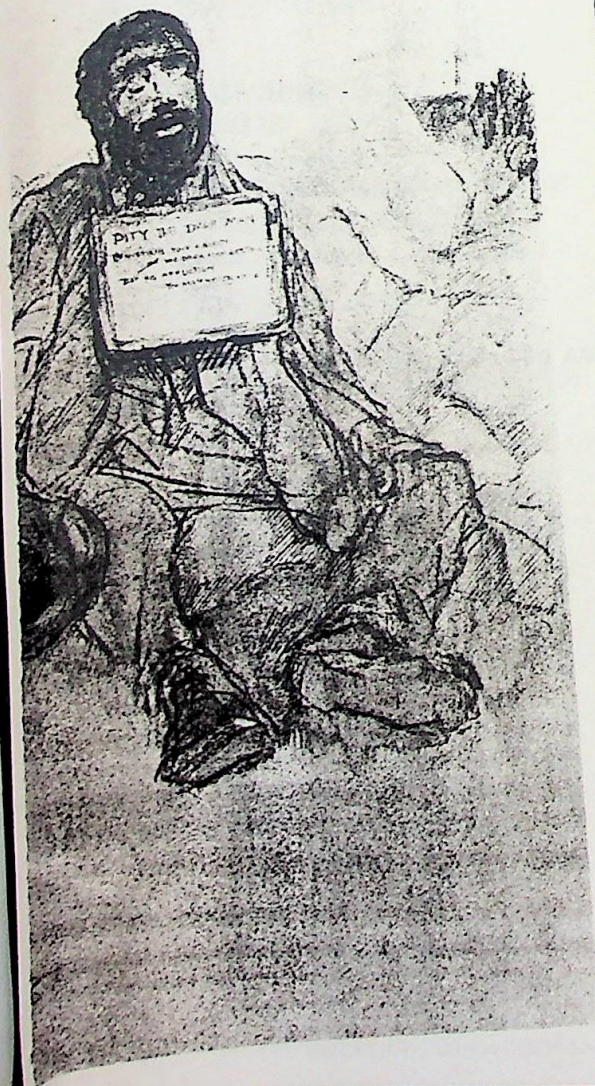
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ne still has the unity of style between here, as in *The Dwarf of the Circus*, greater freedom to alter and to experiment has enabled Yeats to go into characterisation and situation. The dwarf, is, for all his individuality, an archetype Yeats has made at once pathetic by his and defiant by his sense of colour. In fact, a symphony of different reds the stripes of the tent, the rose-decked lips and hair and, finally, the defiant in *Bachelor's Walk* is, again, an archetype representing all Irish women the loss of their men. These paintings, the paintings where the content—and the it arouses—is paramount.

the middle and late twenties that Yeats rich, impasto style which was to revolutionise make of it a symphony of shimmering vibrant vitality was unequalled except by paintings done between 1925, the date of (Private Collection, Ireland), and his present a remarkable resolution of the his rapidly loosening technique and the his imagery, in which ideas are sparked late in the spectator's mind at the same

ARK MAN. PRIVATE COLLECTION, U.S.A.



3. THE HURLEY PLAYER. PRIVATE COLLECTION, U.S.A.

time as the sheer *joie de vivre* of the paint surface beguiles his senses.

The later Yeats almost deceives one into thinking that one is looking at abstract expressionist work by someone like Pollock or Tobey, so freely is the paint applied, so apparently unfigurative are the shapes. Yet beneath the riotous paint and the exuberant colours lurk strictly figurative paintings; like many a great work of art, a late Yeats requires more than cursory study. Yeats's figures are often skeletal, like the sculpted ones of Giacometti, and again like Giacometti's, they turn out to be substantial and the apparent homunculus is revealed for a Yeatsian giant as in his masterpiece *Glory* (Plate XVI), one of the last paintings he did, in which the diminutive figures on the shore are so full of life and the glory of being alive that the canvas can scarcely contain them. The glowing pigment, some of it put on with a knife or the paint tube itself rather than a brush, leaps out at you sing-



VIII IN MEMORY OF  
BOUCICAULT AND  
BIANCONI 1938  
Oil on canvas. 24 in. x 36 in.  
BY KIND PERMISSION OF JOHN  
HUSTON, CRAUGHWELL,  
CO. GALWAY, IRELAND



This painting is a passionate tribute to two  
tutions, the two -tutions, a part of a nation  
up by an Irishman, Bianconi, and a group of  
who were involved in the plays of the n  
actor-dramatist, John Boucicault, author of 'The  
(1860) and other dramatic plays.

IX THE BLOOD OF ABEL  
(TINKERS' ENCAMPMENT) 1941  
Oil on canvas. 36 in. x 48 in.  
BY KIND PERMISSION OF  
GERARD SHANAHAN, DUBLIN



One of Yeats's masterpieces, this painting, ost  
mated group of figures, can, by virtue of its  
all the past that has been shed upon th  
blood of the past, be interpreted as a com  
contemporary European holocaust. By the light  
the men are lying on the ground—the blo  
Abel and of the past.

X THE OLD DAYS 1942  
Oil on canvas. 24 in. x 36 in.  
BY KIND PERMISSION OF JOHN  
HUSTON, CRAUGHWELL,  
CO. GALWAY, IRELAND



This nostalgic essay in remembrance of bare-fi  
drawn coaches and enthusiastic spectators is,  
organized painting in which the turbulence of  
that of the fighters themselves and the 'ring' of  
them from the spectators as it separates them fr

XI THE TWO TRAVELLERS 1942  
Oil on canvas. 36 in. x 48 in.  
BY KIND PERMISSION OF THE  
TRUSTEES OF THE TATE  
GALLERY, LONDON



Although Yeats himself did not travel a great d  
idea of travel and often painted people on or ab  
a journey. This painting marvellously conjures  
ship of men who travel to the elements of l  
which they have to conquer.

XII NOW 1944  
Oil on canvas. 36 in. x 48 in.  
BY KIND PERMISSION OF THE  
WADDINGTON GALLERIES,  
LTD., LONDON



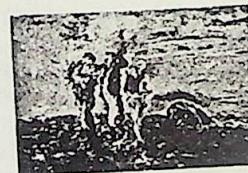
Few paintings have caught as well as this one  
of anticipatory excitement when an act, whet  
theatre, is about to begin. The performers, on  
are about to be led on, the audience is looking a  
conductor of the orchestra, baton poised to sen  
crash of sound.

XIII RISE UP WILLIE  
REILLY 1945  
Oil on canvas. 14 in. x 21 in.  
BY KIND PERMISSION OF THE  
WADDINGTON GALLERIES,  
LTD., LONDON



The very language of the title, as well as the  
couple, is full of the lyricism and tender roma  
Synge, the Irish poet and dramatist who, more  
artist's brother, offered the verbal counterpart  
for his people. Willie Reilly is in fact the ma  
here being asked by Irish womanhood to stand  
country great.

XIV SHOUTING 1950  
Oil on canvas. 40 in. x 60 in.  
BY KIND PERMISSION OF MR. AND  
MRS. P. J. GOLDBERG, LONDON



This is one of Yeats's later masterpieces. It com  
classical elements of his genius—the sumptuous  
and colouring and the recognition of the burst  
expressed by these three roisterers shouting fo  
of shouting.

XV GRIEF 1951  
Oil on canvas. 40 in. x 60 in.  
BY KIND PERMISSION OF THE  
NATIONAL GALLERY OF  
IRELAND, DUBLIN



This painting might easily have been called con  
It is a scene of war against a background of C  
(implying Dublin) and, for a moment, the fighting  
a soldier in the foreground is looking at a child w  
weeping in misery, and a woman is trying to co  
As with so many of Yeats's paintings the canv  
deep concern for humanity, both en masse and a

XVI GLORY 1953  
Oil on canvas. 40 in. x 60 in.  
PRIVATE COLLECTION,  
MONTREAL



One of Yeats's last and largest canvases, this  
painting as well as that of a master. Son, father  
youth, maturity and bowed old age greet, and  
are set against, the glory of a beautiful landsc  
day and the glory of life itself. *Glory* is in fact  
affirmation of all that life can be as well as being  
of one of his favourite themes—that of three gene

Cover Plate THE COUNTRY  
JOCKEY 1893  
Watercolour on paper. 14 in. x 10 in.  
BY KIND PERMISSION OF  
HUGO RIGNOLD, BIRMINGHAM



The placing of the short, erect figure of the joel  
race-meeting gives him a monumental and auth  
He is virile, warm and human, epitomising the  
most admired in his fellow countrymen.



# e Plates

THE MASTERS D. 7

## WHIRLYHORSES IN 1891

our on paper. 8 $\frac{3}{4}$  in.  $\times$  19 $\frac{3}{4}$  in.  
PERMISSION OF KEITH  
DUSE, LONDON



This beautiful work, with its soft colours matching the Irish 'softness' of light and weather, is redolent of the love Yeats felt all his life for fairgrounds and the people who made them come alive.

## ONLOOKERS 1897

our on paper. 4 $\frac{1}{2}$  in.  $\times$  6 in.  
PERMISSION OF MAJOR  
AY, LONDON



Next to racing, Yeats loved boxing best. This tiny sketch of a knock-out obliquely catches, with surprisingly mature economy of means, much of the essence of the nineteenth-century fight game.

## MERRY-GO-ROUND ORSE 1893

our on paper.  
1 $\frac{1}{4}$  in.  
PERMISSION OF MR.  
S. LEVY, LONDON



This exquisite and virtuoso study of horses in motion could only have been bettered by Stubbs. The combination of horses and Irish landscape sums up much of Yeats's feeling for his country.

## GRAIN SHIP 1898

our on paper. 11 in.  $\times$  9 $\frac{3}{4}$  in.  
PERMISSION OF MICHAEL  
F, NEW YORK



A typical early watercolour, beautifully composed to give a distinctive, highly observant view of men at work.

## RAKE 1902

our on paper. 18 $\frac{1}{4}$  in.  $\times$  12 $\frac{1}{4}$  in.  
PERMISSION OF  
i, LONDON



This witty sketch of a self-satisfied dandy strolling along the waterfront is an engaging mixture of caricature and character-study, over which, in the end, Yeats's talent for gentle, un-malicious mockery triumphs.

## JOHN MASEFIELD 1905

our on paper. 13 $\frac{1}{4}$  in.  $\times$  9 $\frac{3}{4}$  in.  
COLLECTION, WASHINGTON,



This is one of Yeats's rare formal portraits. John Masefield, O.M., the British Poet Laureate, was a great friend of Yeats in the early part of this century and the adventurous lives of the two young men, in their passion for the sea and its excitement, had much in common.

## DWARF OF THE 1912

vas. 36 in.  $\times$  24 in.  
COLLECTION,



This is one of Yeats's first major oils and one of the few oils, as opposed to watercolour sketches, of circus life. It was one of his five works shown in the now legendary Armory Show of 1913 in New York, the exhibition that introduced 'modern art' to the American public. With typical Yeatsian compassion the dwarf is shown as a stunted figure, yet a vital one with his own kind of tightly-knit strength.

## LOR'S WALK (JRY) 1922

vas. 18 in.  $\times$  24 in.  
PERMISSION OF  
DUNSANY, IRELAND



This is a direct, classically simple 'documentary' painting in which Yeats shows his moving but entirely unsentimental feeling for the Irish dead of the 'Troubles'—the grim period between 1916 and 1923 when Irishmen and Englishmen killed each other with an unusually grandiose folly, even for warfare. The girl is dropping a flower in a Dublin street to mark the place where some of her countrymen were shot.

## SCENE-PAINTER'S 7

vas. 18 in.  $\times$  24 in.  
PERMISSION OF  
ATES



Yeats loved the theatre and, as a painter, fully understood the scene-painter's joy in the solitary, red flower lovingly placed in a wineglass of water, as a reminder of natural, truthful beauty in the make-believe, artificial beauty of the stage set.

## 1937 vas. 36 in. $\times$ 48 in. PERMISSION OF THE MUSEUM, ISRAEL



This painting of the Queen of Sparta preparing to launch again the vast fleet that has destroyed the city of Troy seen burning in the background, with flames illuminating the spectacle, has more than Greek mythological overtones. One may, if one wishes, see in its fires the fires of Europe that were already, in 1937, beginning to blaze.