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IMELDA TIERNEY, 4th Year Education.

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TITLE:

"TWO IRISH ARTISTS; CAMILLE SOUTER and BARRIE COOKE."

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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I will discuss and compare the work of Camille Souter and Barrie Cooke, two artists who hold esteemed places in the contemporary Irish art scene. Their work has been included in many international shows of Irish art and features in most important Irish collections, both public and private.

One might ask why I have chosen these particular two artists; first of all I like their work immensely, and secondly, when I began my research I discovered that they had very much in common. Both were born in England and have travelled a lot, they began painting in the early fifties, are largely self-taught and strangely, have painted similar themes, although not simultaneously. For instance, they have both painted meat, bones, fish and landscape, their individual interest in these subjects varying in strength. Cooke, for instance, took the meat and bones to a much deeper level of involvement than Souter; landscape, on the other hand, had a more magnetic effect on Souter than Cooke, and it remains a constant feature of her work. Souter has never taken a subject into a three-dimensional form, but Cooke has done so with bone and landscape. I am not the first to put their work side by side; in 1965 they shared an exhibition of paintings from the collection of the late Sir Basil Goulding, Bt., at the Ulster Museum, Belfast, and another exhibition entitled "Two Deeply", in 1971.

On a purely visual level, their work is quite compatible. Both painters are very painterly in style, often indulging in a rich, lush use of paint. Both are masters of subtlety, Souter achieves it through her colour range, Cooke through a fluid technique. Their paintings contain the freshness of spontaneity as neither artist believes in 'planning' a painting. Common to both is an obsession with nature, it is the kernel of their subject matter. Their response to nature however, is quite different; Souter's is intuitive, she paints a subject as she perceives it. Cooke's involvement with nature is almost primitive, he understands nature as though his very life depended on it. In a painting he attempts to include every level of his understanding of a subject, layer upon layer. Although Souter's paintings often contain a mysterious element, she does not consciously set out to create the same level of complexity.

Talking to these artists gave me a clearer understanding of why their work can be so different. Souter does not like to discuss her paintings, particularly those from a very early period, she is a very private person. Souter believes that a painting cannot be expressed in words because both are different languages. She regards herself as a visual rather than a literary person, hence her reluctance to accept situations which oblige her to talk or write about her work. Cooke, on the other hand, is very articulate. He talks freely about his work, often seeing links between it and that of the Great Masters. He studied Art History

at university, so perhaps this has strengthened his analytic abilities.

In order to contrast and compare the work of these two superb artists, I will first discuss their work individually. Chapter One will concern Camille Souter's work and Chapter Two will concern that of Barrie Cooke. In Chapter Three I will compare their styles by discussing in depth, two paintings by each artist of a similar theme. I have chosen a painting by each of meat and fish.

CHAPTER ONE

CAMILLE SOUTER

BIOGRAPHY:

Camille Souter was born Betty Pamela Holmes in Northampton in 1929. Both her parents were English but they left England to settle in Ireland in 1930, when she was just a year old. She studied nursing in Guys Hospital, London, but contracted T.B. and had to abandon her studies. During her convalescence she became interested in painting. Because of gaunt looks she was named "Camille". Later she became the wife of Old Vic actor, Gordon Souter - hence the "Souter".

She returned to Ireland in the early Fifties and began exhibiting her work in restaurants and pubs in Dublin.

She won an Italian Government Scholarship in 1958 and worked for a year in Italy. She had already been there during her nursing days and had fallen in love with the country. "Italy is a visual country. I think it called me. The first time I went to Italy, it was like going home."(1)

She eventually came back to Ireland and lived in Achill for a year. In 1960 she married sculptor Frank Morris and settled in Calary on a small farm.

Since then she has had many exhibitions, including a Retrospective in the Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, in 1980. She has had exhibitions outside of Ireland - London, Paris, Rome, Glasgow, Monaco, Montreal and New York.

(1) N.R. 29

Bruce Arnold has said of Camille Souter's work, that "all things are equal in Camille Souter's world, and the only inequality she has to contend with is the degree of her success in transforming vision into the reality of a finished canvas."
(1)

If you asked Camille what she likes to paint her answer would most likely be - "Anything towards which I am drawn." It could be a corner of a field, something she sees in a pool of water or fields near Shannon Airport. She is capable of painting both the microcosm and the macrocosm. Her wide range of subject matter painted over the years proves that she does not restrict herself; she responds to anything which "calls" her. She speaks about this "calling" over and over again. "A place does actually call you. The only really evil thing a painter can do is to ignore a place that is paintable." She is quite adamant about this; "If you didn't place yourself in that place you knew was paintable at that time, you'd be quite evil."

What is it that draws her to a particular subject? "It's love. You paint that which you love. That which you love actually gives out an energy and the thing to do is to paint it. In other words, you have more love for that thing at that time."

Not surprisingly, most of Souter's subject matter is organic. She is a lover of plants, her house is full of them, large and small potted ones with unusual flowers. She talks about them affectionately and says that she loves the soil in Dublin because it is so suitable for growing them. "As you get older, you become more interested in what grows on this earth. It becomes more precious to you."

"Nothing is too commonplace or ugly for her to tackle. With her brand of special magic she has seen beauty in Odlum's Mills at Sallins, at Goulding's depot in the dock area of Dublin and the red-brick walls of Belfast." (2) This is how Blaithin O Ciobhain described Camille Souter's work during her Retrospective Exhibition in 1980. "I'm quite sure that everything in the world is paintable. The trouble with Dublin is there's too much. It's almost too beautiful." Listening to her, one realises that she is so observant that it is frustrating for her to have so much visual stimuli so tightly packed together in one place. At times though, even the countryside can have the same impact on her. She talks about the "sheer mental exhaustion of just looking," when walking in the country. She feels that the artist is like a sponge constantly soaking up visual information.

She becomes so involved with her subject matter that she goes to great lengths to be near it. "I have to be right in the middle of what I'm doing, the Calary paintings, Achill, canals, the meat, the fish. For the fish I had to have a place near the market because the fish goes off. And I couldn't take it back for another reason; Calary was so strong, it would have

(1) 14 P.96

(2) N.R. 32

intruded". During the seventies when she painted the meat series, she actually went to a slaughterhouse to study the meat more closely. "I had terrible trouble getting into a slaughterhouse. 'Oh no', they said, 'you're a woman. The men would go on strike.'" But she did manage to get into one in Bray. She sees this as normal practice for any serious artist; "Years ago an artist would climb a huge mountain to get a closer look at the sky or a better view of the area."

She is quite philosophical about her vocation as a painter, and believes that if she did not have to make her living from it that her work would not be any different. "Once you know you really haven't any choice in the matter. Ideally it would be great if one didn't have to sell a painting. But the other side of me believes that one should live by one's work."

She does feel however, that some painters would benefit by not having to sell their work. She thinks that it would cut out a lot of 'fashion'. "I'm not denigrating it - I think there's a lot of good painting fashions, but I think there's a lot of dishonest work." She goes on to say that "in an exhibition there might be two very honest paintings, and the rest is usually blown-up to fill up the walls... and that to me is dishonesty."

Souter believes that each painting should be individual. She never consciously tries to copy a painting that she has done. That would be unethical for her. She sees painting as a progression towards a perfection which is never actually attained. "Even the best of paintings are still only towards something. It's the human condition. Nothing is ever completely achieved."

She constantly refers to the importance of looking. "The only machinery we have is our eyes, a brain and the illuminating light," hence all we can do is look. "I think people are born lookers - you can almost tell people who are lookers. Oh no, they don't all become painters. They are people who look at the world around them." She talks about looking as an on-going process; "If you think back to when you were young, if you were walking along you could be shattered by one thing, you'd almost feel as though God had possessed you! But there would be millions of things that you wouldn't have seen at all ... I think that as the looking process increases, one is constantly shattered all the time, perhaps not quite so as that first experience ... But all the time it's back to looking. And it's not even a conscious looking."

She dislikes talking about her old paintings. She compares her relationship with them to that of a mother and her children: "... you can see them after a long time and say 'Oh, that's one of mine,' and they're so far removed, so gone from you that it's like looking at something you didn't have anything to do with yourself."

Like many generations of painters, Souter is always conscious of the illuminating light. She will only paint in daylight, never under artificial lights. She feels that all paintings should be seen in daylight unless they were intended not to be. She remembers the days when the National Art Gallery used to use natural lighting and she firmly believes that it was a big mistake to change this. "I think what the National Gallery is doing to those paintings is murderous! I cannot look at those paintings there anymore."

She stresses the importance of being able to see the effects of changing daylight on a painting; "Looking at a painting in one light, not being able to see how it's changed at different times of the day is like listening to one lovely Beethoven late quartet played badly over and over ..."

She prefers to paint in the morning when the light is fresh. The afternoon light is not to her liking though; "If you're working in the morning, by two or three o'clock the light has changed to that terrible, deadly light." She loves the light cast by snow, and has painted some snow scenes.

This obsession with light is reminiscent to that of Mark Rothko (1903 - 1976), who wished to use light as an integral part of his painting. Towards the end of his life he began painting under intense theatre lights and later insisted that his paintings be shown under dim lights - hence changing the whole effect. He also preferred to paint in the morning, as early as six o'clock.

The light in her paintings is always an important element. In some of her work it sparkles, as in "Early Evening", where the layers of dribbled paint interact and the white on blue create a scintillating effect.

The light in "Fields Near Arles" is more 'brooding', it seems to draw the viewer's attention into it. The central square is delineated in a deep cobalt blue and the area within is highlighted with bright yellow swirls.

"Achnill 1960" is a startling combination of reflected light (she uses aluminium paint) and blackness. However, the black area is speckled with silver, relieving the density. Likewise, the silver area is invaded by black streaks.

The light in "Before the Haymaking" is so evocative of the Irish light on an overcast day. It is achieved by the whole colour range and the interaction therein. The cold blue of the sky against the warm ochres and creamy greens; and on top of that, patches of stark white. Nothing is painted in vivid colour to

suggest strong sunlight; on the contrary, the colours are very subdued.

Having such an intense interest in light, it is understandable why Souter is fascinated by the sky. When she talks about a place she will almost certainly make some reference to the sky there. One of the reasons why she was so taken with Shannon was because there was so much of it. She spends much of her time observing the sky and very often, it plays an important role in her paintings, particularly in creating atmospheric effects. This is the case with "Before the Haymaking", and more notably in "Thinking of the South", where the sky dominates most of the picture plane. In this latter painting she manages to convey a warm glow through the overcast cloud by using yellow ochre.

Souter is so sensitive to the atmosphere of a place that it always comes through in her work. The mists of Calary permeate many of her paintings of that place. Perhaps the reason why she can evoke atmospheric effect so well, has something to do with her method of working. "I often work on two paintings at a time, and if the weather changed to one of those blistery March days, with a blue sky and fluffy clouds, it wouldn't be a day to work on a misty painting because of the illuminating light. So I would put away that painting and work on one which suited the mood of the day." Although she does not like to paint directly from the source, she must be "under the same bit of sky, on the same growth in the ground and in the same weather".

Although Camille Souter's work has often been described as 'abstract', and at times would appear to be so, she herself would not agree. She has never seen a sharp distinction between 'abstraction' and 'realism'. If she uses a blot on a table surface or a section of a rock pool as a basis for a painting, it could be described by some as an 'abstract' image, but she would argue that it is in fact, a still-life.

I agree with Bruce Arnold's description of Souter as a "completely integrated artist."⁽³⁾ Her response varies according to the subject matter, yet there is always a consistency. Much of her work dating from the Fifties, like "On the Edge", "Buon Diventimento" and "The Early Evening", are quite formal in style. Some of her later paintings are unquestionably representational, in as much as the subject is recognisable, yet there is so much more than a mere rendering of shape and colour. One could not say, for example, that her paintings of the dead shark are totally objective studies. Remember that it is love which draws Camille Souter to the subject. She felt pity and respect for this dead animal, whose gigantic body lay upon the beach "waiting to be carved". Although she could not be described as an 'expressionist', in the true sense of the word, her work does have a very subtle emotional content.

I would agree with Anne Crookshank when she says that a "sense of tranquility seems to emanate from most of Souter's work." (4) Certainly most of her landscapes are more about a type of weather - mist, drizzle and dampness - than stormy scenes of dramatic activity. Her meat and fish paintings are of dead animals, they are still-life studies. Not all are so motionless though; the circus paintings did involve movement.

It has been said of Couter that she is not interested in painting figures. This is not so; some of her landscapes, particularly those concerned with haymaking, have human presences, and the circus paintings also included people. She has painted scenes of dancers, which use a perspective somewhat reminiscent of Degas.

Her use of paint has been described by Anne Crookshank as being "so luscious you could eat it as it dribbles in thick coloured strands across the paper." (5) The colours he uses, icecream pinks, mint greens and soft white probably have more to do with the appetizing appearance than the actual technique! Camille Souter has had more reason than most artists for respecting her materials. During the Fifties she was very poor and used anything from newspaper to bicycle paint with which to work. This was however, in keeping with modern art trends of the time, when American artists were using household and commercial products as part of their work. Although Souter was not using them for the very same reasons, her work did not suffer by consequence.

Considering that she is so involved with light and its effects, one might expect her to use watercolour. The transparent qualities of this medium make it a suitable choice for artists who share in this conviction. Turner, for instance, produced some of his most successful works in watercolour. But no, she prefers to use oil. "I love oil ... As far as I can see there's nothing that can be used so well. It's more endless, there's more variety." She does not like working on canvas though; "I don't like the feel of it. I prefer paper." Kate Robinson described her use of oil on paper as follows; "Her paint, when applied to paper, causes shrinkage which creates the texturing in the work, implying an extra depth and substance." (6) Certainly texture is an important element in Souter's work. She dribbles the paint, applies it with a knife in thick layers, sometimes over a thin collage of paper. The aluminium paint warps the ground creating a slightly bulging surface. One can be certain that she enjoys using the paint, that she can become absorbed in the activity of painting.

(4)12

(5)12

(6)N.R.33

It has been suggested that Souter has been influenced by Abstract Expressionism. I would agree that she shares some affinities with Jackson Pollock. Her painting entitled "The Early Evening" is very close to some of his work. The different layers of dribbled paint creating a grid effect, the ambiguous space created by the interaction of these layers, seem to be a direct influence, coincidental though it may be. The major difference is obviously in scale. Souter's work is minute compared to Pollock's huge murals!

Her approach to painting could also be compared to that of the Abstract Expressionists. For instance, she never plans a painting or works from preparatory sketches; it is a totally spontaneous activity. She talks about a stage when the painting begins to "take over" and it suggests to her which colours to use and how it should be painted. However, Dorothy Walker suggests that Tachisme may have been a stronger influence than Abstract Expressionism. She argues that the American scale had not been experienced at first hand in Ireland and that it was European rather than American artists who were invited to exhibit at the Living Arts Exhibitions.(7)

Souter generally works on a small intimate scale. Although this choice may have been influenced by the artistic climate of her formative years, there is also a practical reason. She likes to be able to move freely from one place to another at a moment's notice. Therefore, working on a large scale would interfere with this freedom. This is another reason why she dislikes using canvas; it is too cumbersome.

The work which Camille Souter produced in the Fifties is quite different to that of the following decades. This was the early part of her career, one which was spent in a somewhat experimental manner. She tried different techniques which consequently resulted in different images. For instance, "On the Edge" (1958), is composed of geometric shapes, flat areas of colour and thin black lines. "Figures in Embryo" was similarly made of geometric areas of colour which made an informal pattern. "The Early Evening" is a fine example of how she dribbled the paint. "Achill 1960" is painted with aluminium paint and black enamel on paper.

In the 1960's she painted many landscapes of Achill and Calary. She had fallen in love with the dramatic scenery in Achill and many of these paintings contained rocks, pools and reflections. Her paintings became more tranquil and as Dorothy Walker put it "...a quasi-Impressionist mode of landscape painting" emerged. (8) About 1965 she did a series of dead shark paintings in oil on paper. These were painted very quickly and unlike her previous work, she left much of the surface unpainted, using the colour of the ground instead. She also produced a number of circus scenes in lively gay colours.

In 1971 her husband Frank Morris died, and it was after this that she began working on paintings of slaughtered animals and joints of meat. "It doesn't take a psychiatrist to explain that when something happens like Frank's sudden death in 1971, you will try to seek out beauty, even in death." (9) She also took an interest in buildings; for instance she painted Odlum's Mills at Sallins, and city scenes from Belfast. In 1975 it was the Docks in Dublin which called her and she also painted canal scenes. In 1975 she painted Poolbeg Power Station. Her love for organic forms did not disappear. During the mid-Seventies she produced a beautiful series of fish paintings. This time it was the smaller type, those found at the fish market; poll-ock, ray, cod, whiting and kippers. These works are so delicately executed. The colours almost glisten like that of the slippery fish. The asymmetrical composition and soft brushstrokes are very Japanese in character. "Gutted Pollock" (1976) not only renders the colour mutations but also, the curvilinear qualities of the fish's body. The heads of the fish seem to be of most interest to her and are often the focal point of the picture.

Throughout the Seventies her interest in landscape was retained. She painted many scenes of Dublin parks, most notably Fairview Park and Stephen's Green. The vertical shapes in these parks appear to have intrigued her, like the trees and the goalposts.

Souter never paints a landscape directly. She will walk for hours in the countryside absorbing the visual stimuli around her. She may even make a quick sketch of something and scribble some barely legible notes randomly around it. The images sink into her subconscious where they are refined and distilled. Later, perhaps years later, these images will manifest themselves in a painting. It is her method of working which makes her landscapes so different from those of other artists who either paint on location or directly from sketches made on location. Her images are taken one step further; there is an intermediary stage between seeing and painting and it is this which gives her landscapes that beautifully distilled quality.

Many of her landscapes are about a certain type of weather. Her Calary paintings, for instance, are often about misty days of drizzle and soft rain. Some are also concerned with a particular time of year, hence such titles as "Before the Haymaking", "Winter Came", "Soon After the Winter". These paintings are painted at times, in rich impasto, creating an interesting textural and reflective surface. But she has also employed the use of tissue paper in an attempt to convey the obscure effects of mist; her pair of paintings entitled "Winter", are examples of this.

Although Souter does not go out looking for a particular motif in the landscape, the shapes and linear aspects of it are often the most prominent features of these works. She uses the composition of the fields to break up the surface area of her paintings. Sometimes these divisions are explicitly defined with thin lines, others are vague as areas of colour overlap and fade into each other. The colour range may be soft and pastel; for example in "Last of the Radicio" (1964) and "Forgotten Island" (1964) she uses pale pinks, fawny browns and creams. In "Red Brick and It's Not a Game" (1973), and "Runway" (1979) she uses red in a dramatic way. In "Red Brick and It's Not a Game" the colour blazes like a huge fire, and in "Runway" it creates a bold pattern which leads the eye diagonally downwards through the painting, following the same course as the aeroplane. In both of these paintings she sets the colour against its complimentary, green, thus strengthening its impact.

Souter's recent paintings of Shannon Airport are somewhat different to her previous work. The composition is kept simple and at times quite severe. Obviously this has much to do with the subject matter itself; the long straight runways narrowing towards the horizon and the curious bird-like shapes of the aeroplanes will dictate the kind of imagery produced. By taking flying lessons she has had the opportunity to survey the land from the air, which explains why the perspective of some of the works has been tipped up to give an aerial view of the plains. The patterns created by the lights which line the runways have also been used to form the composition of some paintings, as in "Runway", mentioned above. And of course, one could not discuss this series without referring to the sky. As I mentioned earlier, Souter was astounded by the sky at Shannon. Because of the flatness of the land so much more could be seen and observed. In many of the Shannon paintings the sky is painted in a deep sombre grey which is usually a foreboding of heavy torrential rain. She rarely leaves the sky empty. Aeroplanes often occupy it or huge clouds, as in "Training - Five Souls Aboard" (1979). There is almost a childlike simplicity in some of these paintings, for example, in the positioning of the clouds and the side-views of the aeroplanes. They contain that same restful quality that her landscapes and still-lives possess.

An airport is usually the scene of hustle and bustle, with people travelling to far away destinations; suitcases, anxiety, excitement, reunions, partings, and movement, continuous movement of people and escalators. But this is not where Souter's interest lies. It is the flat land, low horizons, the great expanse of sky, the curious lights and the stationary or moving aeroplanes which call her.

CHAPTER TWO

BARRIE COOKE

BIOGRAPHY:

Barrie Cooke was born in Cheshire, in 1931. He spent much of his childhood in Jamaica and was educated in Harvard. He came to live in Ireland in 1954. He spent many years in the Burren, Co. Clare; a place which inspired many of his early paintings. At present he is living in Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny.

He describes his art training as being very "spasmodic". He studied Art History at university and qualified with a Degree; "not through my own wish, but because my parents would pay for me to go to university and wouldn't pay for me to go to art school." At the time he resented it, "but now I don't regret it at all, because I did things at university which I wouldn't have been able to do at art school, and I painted all the time anyway." He attended night drawing classes and attended a Summer school in America for two successive Summers. Here he met students on scholarships from all over America. "There was a tremendously high standard and you worked terrifically hard for three months."

In 1955 Cooke had the opportunity to work with Kokoschka, an artist for whom he had a great admiration. Contrary to what many have been lead to believe, this was not a scholarship. A student whom Cooke had met at the Summer school sent him a postcard one day telling him that Kokoschka had opened a school in Austria. "I went there when the school was only starting, it had only been going for a year before that ... I hitch-hiked to Munich, where these friends of mine were; then I got a bicycle and cycled from Munich to Salzburg in Austria. I had only enough money to pay for the course, and then I had to live and eat for about three weeks." Kokoschka, realizing his plight, allowed him to follow the course for free and also provided him with living accomodation. "Kokoschka knew, I suppose, that I was appallingly serious, and he couldn't say no!" A year later scholarships were officially created.

EXHIBITIONS:

In 1954 Cooke had his first one-man show in Ireland, in Dublin. In 1962 he won a prize at the Open Painting Exhibition, Belfast. He represented Ireland at the Paris Biennale in 1963. In 1971 he had a joint exhibition with Camille Souter (the collection of Sir Basil Goulding) in Dublin and Belfast. He has been exhibiting bi-annually at the David Hendricks Gallery, Dublin, since 1963. He is currently preparing for another exhibition there in April.

"My concern over the last 25 years has been entirely about growth. This has meant often metamorphosis - of water into weed, of weed into fish, fish into stone. It involved human beings; later - two human beings, their conjunction and disjunction and the metaphor that arose between a spread of blue eating or fortifying a spread of red - in fact a true biological "joint"."

This is how Barrie Cooke explained part of his philosophy in 1973, in the catalogue for his exhibition in the Galerie 'Inart', Amsterdam. His concern ten years later is still the same. On the wall of his studio is a maxim from Heroclitus: "Ilatva pei" - everything flows. According to Cooke, this not only expresses his work but his life too.⁽¹⁾ His close friend and poet John Montague describes this interest in the flux of nature as the "constant in his obsession with the inconstant, the rush of life as shaped by its interruptions, body or tree-trunk, boulder or bone."⁽²⁾

Cooke's subject matter has included water, meat, bones, fish, portraits, nudes, equatorial forests and Irish landscapes. One might wonder why it is so diversified but to Cooke there is little difference between a landscape and a portrait. "They're all painting and they're all me; and so, in that sense I don't see the great separation between them ... The separations are more in things like thin paint and thick paint, or bright and dark colour. For instance, I was painting some lake paintings a few years ago and for the first time in about ten years I did two portraits. And it turned out that in colour those two portraits were very similar to the landscape and lake paintings I was doing. So they were actually closer together than any of the other paintings of that time."

He sees further links between the land and the human body. "We have a skeleton inside us and it's exactly the same as the structure of a tree. It grows the same way as a tree does, a bone starts off soft and then it gradually hardens just like a branch, and finally it becomes brittle like a branch." Hence, he considers the bone boxes which he has produced over the years to hold much in common with his landscapes.

His involvement with nature is quite primeval. He observes it, analyses it, learns from it. He is a keen fisherman and hunter, and it is this close contact with nature which inspires most of his paintings and sculptures. Fishing has a replenishing effect on him which is almost mystical. "I think fishing is probably the source of all my painting. When I am fishing my whole mind is focused on fishing and in a sense on being a fish. A good fisherman has to be able to feel how a fish is thinking. In that way I'm totally unthinking of myself and of my own reactions. It's almost like meditation. I become more open to what my eyes are seeing than I ever would be by looking."⁽³⁾

(1)&(3) N.R.22

(2) 14 p.52

"Fishermen care more about pure water, even if they never caught a fish, than most other people do." Perhaps this explains why Cooke has been so obsessed with painting water throughout his career. And of course, water gives life, it is at the centre of all growth. Growth is one common factor which links all of his subject matter - water, plant, fish, animal, human, bone, earth - into one continuous cycle of organic life.

Like many artists, similar themes and shapes re-occur in Cooke's painting. In the early Sixties he painted water rushing over rocks and falling into swirling pools. The weirs and waterfall series are examples of this. About three years ago he painted water again, but this time it was dark and mysterious. Some of the shapes in the water are similar to those in the nude and bone paintings. Interlocking shapes also appear frequently. Cooke accepts this and refuses to question why these elements intrigue him.

Cooke paints in a very painterly, spontaneous manner. His brushstrokes are fluid and full of verve. He has been described as a "voluptuous painter, sensuously taking pleasure in his medium." (4) Certainly Cooke can convey sensuality in his painting, particularly in his nude studies and Borneo paintings. He frequently employs an impasto technique which gives his work this luscious, sensuous quality. In some paintings, he builds up the image with thin, transparent washes which cause the paint to dribble and run, as in "The Lough Derg Pike" and "Nude and Nightfall". Cooke uses oil paint and watercolour but both have separate functions. "A watercolour tends to be one aspect of a subject; it might be a certain greenness, a certain contour of something, it might be the certain sharp relationship between this and that. But it's not often going to be several of those things ... You can do nearly everything in oil that you can do with watercolour if you thin it down. But you can also do other things ... Oil is simply a richer medium."

Cooke's oil paintings are often painted over a period of two to three years, resulting in images which are very complex. He does not confine these paintings to one aspect of the subject; instead they contain different layers of meaning, offering a richer rendition to the spectator. He rarely employs a strong focal point in his compositions; instead one's eye is lead all over the painting in a continuous movement. When he described the "ultra-baroque" in Hindu art, in the catalogue of his "Rain Forest" Exhibition, 1976, he could just as easily have been describing his own: "... Its lack of a straight line, an angle, a point of construction, a stilled reference point. Its snake-ness; its ripeness which never stops. It never stops curving and so never completes a form. It goes on and on ..."

"I try to work as freely as I can." Keeping a painting spontaneous over a long period of time is quite challenging, a challenge which I believe Cooke usually overcomes. While he is working on a painting he will make many changes to it, "so that it's alive in every part." He claims that "you've got to be surprised by what you make, if you're not there's no point in making it." He never makes preparatory sketches for a painting; "If you know what you are going to do completely and utterly then what's the point of doing it?" Cooke believes that a painting should be an act of discovery. "You don't know what you see until you've painted it. The painting is a process of letting you see how you feel about something. It's not self-revelation for other people but revelation to yourself, it's how you understand the outside world and if someone else shares it, that's splendid."(5)

Scale is something which Cooke treats intuitively. " ... Some paintings simply demand more space ... and while I was doing some very large paintings, about three years ago, I was doing some very tiny ones, but I never blew the little ones into big ones and likewise, I never made little ones of the big paintings. They just seemed to be different - two different feelings perhaps." Personally, I prefer his larger works. Their scale requires so much physical involvement during the act of painting that they consequently project a more energetic image.

So far, Barrie Cooke's style has undergone two distinct changes. During the late Sixties he became distrustful of his handling of paint; "Too many people had told me that I was a beautiful painter, sensuous, painterly - all those things. So I tried to obliterate all painterliness from my painting ... Not only did I feel it was dangerous but I was beginning to do something too well. It no longer had the sense of discovery perhaps." For about four years he forced himself to paint in flat, bright colours. The paintings in Trinity College, Dublin are examples of this period, also "Interior Diptych", (1970) and "Joint Regional Anatomy", (1970). When first encountered, most of these paintings appear to be formal colour studies of interesting composition. They have a planned, calculated look about them which is not a usual feature of Cooke's painting. In fact, none of these paintings are abstract, they are mostly about bones and their conjunction. Despite the difference in technique the shapes in these paintings are not dissimilar to those he has always used. This is not a period with which Cooke is particularly pleased, although he does agree that some of the paintings, for instance those in Trinity College, did work. Perhaps the reason for this unhappiness lies in the fact that he was restraining himself and therefore was not as 'free' as he might wish to be.

He broke out of this straight jacket on return from Borneo. "It was such a totally overwhelming experience, that I had no possible way of planning what I was going to do. So the only thing I could do was simply to work blindly, as directly as I could, and that turned out to be in a very painterly way." By restricting himself earlier he learned that he had been relying too much on painterliness and he feels that when he returned to a freer form of expression he brought with him "some of the hardness, the structure, which had not been present in the very earliest paintings." "Slow Dance, Forest Floor", is a combination of free, loose painting and tight structure; the highly structured part is contained in the perspex box beneath the painting.

Cooke always carries a sketchbook with him to jot down any idea he may have or to record something he sees. For the last fifteen years he has been using a very small one, "so there's never any temptation to exhibit the drawings." If he has a thought about something it might take the form of a scribble, a dot of watercolour, or it might be something written. They are very personal accounts which probably would not make very much sense to anyone but himself.

Cooke's drawings show sensitivity and draughtsmanship. They are often quick and sketchy but always to the point. He uses drawing as a means of focus. When he wants to look at something really hard he will do so by drawing it and if he does not have any drawing material with him at that time he will draw with his fingernail on the palm of the hand; "because by the process you can imagine yourself making marks and that's almost as good as making them." In "Bone 27" (1972) he focuses on the linkage of the bones and in "Bone 24" (1972) he concerns himself with one joining. Both of these drawings convey a sense of form and structure as well as an interest in contrasting areas of tone.

At the Sir Basil Goulding exhibition in the David Hendrick's Gallery in December 1982, three of Cooke's animal drawings were exhibited; "Cat", "Raven" and "Goose". In each of these studies the animal is engaged in some activity but despite the rapidity of their movements he manages to freeze the action with the utmost simplicity. The drawings illustrate Cooke's keen perception of movement and his skillful ability to translate it directly into line. He used ink which does not facilitate correction and a minimum amount of lines. It is here that I find he shares affinities with Kokoschka, who also drew in this way. Perhaps it was while he was attending Kokoschka's "school of seeing", sketching models in motion, that Cooke acquired this sensitive skill.

Although Barrie Cooke disagrees that his style has changed very much over the years, it is possible to trace a development. In the early years his painting style was greatly influenced by Kokoschka and this is particularly evident in some nude paintings from this period. "Nude Recumbant", which was painted around that time, is one example. He painted this nude with daubs of colour, employing retinal mixing. He used complimentary colours to strengthen the impact of the flesh tones. There is a strong sense of form in the curves of the body. The brushstrokes have been made with such vigour that when combined with the strong pinks and reds they give the painting a slightly aggressive undertone.

This interest in the female nude lead to a series of paintings of "Síle na Gig". He used mixed media in these works and the female figure was made in clay. This appears to be a period of experimentation, as some paintings from this period are painted in thin washes causing the colours to dribble and soak into one another, while others are painted in impasto. Perhaps this was the beginning of letting the painting dictate how it should be painted.

The development of Cooke's work can almost be linked to a particular series of paintings. He does not see himself as a series painter though, because he never intentionally sets out to do one. The reason why a series often emerges has more to do with his method of working than his intentions. Cooke has an exhibition every second year in the David Hendricks Gallery, Dublin. He prefers not to have one every year as it is too disruptive. It happens therefore, that his studio is gradually filling with work and as he never parts with it until an exhibition, it creates an environment in which one painting gives birth to another. "It's not a case of saying, 'I've painted this in orange now let's paint it in green'; it's not at all like that. You make something in one painting and you say 'ah, this may be the clue to get what I really mean about something else.' You might destroy the first one because it really doesn't come anywhere near it, but then it may have something else." For Barrie Cooke a series is a way of discovering exactly what his feelings are for a subject. He stops painting a subject when the element of surprise ceases to exist.

The Síle na Gig series was inspired by Cooke's interest in fertility and mythology. During the Fifties when he was living in a very isolated part of the Burren, his nearest neighbour was one of these figures on a church a few hundred yards away from his home. He was intrigued by this figure and as little was known about it he began to research the myth in libraries and discovered that these figures were all over the country. He modelled the figures in clay so that they stood out in relief from the canvas. This was when he first became interested in working in a three dimensional format.

In 1952 Barrie Cooke spent some time working in an abbatoir at Martineque. Some years later he painted a number of carcass paintings in which he explored their shapes and colours. "Sheep Carcass Floating" is one example from this period. Cooke describes his first encounter with the disembowelling of a sheep as follows; "Out of this incision made down the tight drum of the belly, flowed this enormous quantity of entrails. My first sensation was shock and the second one had to be of stunning beauty, of these beiges, lavenders, pinks, creams and blues - extraordinary! It was like a rose opening up in slow motion in front of me." Through his paintings he tried to convey what he saw in these carcasses. He was not making any emotional statement or did not wish to shock anyone by these images.

Cooke has always been interested in what other artists have done with similar themes and this lead him to examine the carcass paintings of Rembrandt and Soutine. It is interesting to note that Soutine did likewise in his life; some of his fish and meat paintings are direct references to similar studies done by Rembrandt and Chardin. Cooke is not ashamed to admit that he has been influenced by other people; "No painting is made entirely on its own ... and in fact, one of the nice things is to feel yourself part of a long tradition."

Later Cooke became interested in the conjunction and disjunction of two people; he was trying to get two colours to merge and become one. This notion of conjunction developed into a fascination with interlocking bones. He asked his local butcher to get him the live swivelling socket of a bullock, "which is quite different to a dead bone," and from this he made hundreds of watercolours. Every week the butcher gave him more until he had the four huge sections of a bullock's leg. In these paintings he explored the shapes and their relation to each other and most importantly, how they interlocked.

He became so intrigued by bones that he wanted to make them more physical than the drawings and paintings. He began to experiment with clay, modelling it to the shapes of the bones. He then had to find somewhere to put them so he developed the idea of putting them into a perspex box. This had the dual purpose of protecting them as well as creating their own isolated space. These bone boxes were met with much criticism and were strongly disliked. One show which consisted entirely of these boxes was a financial flop. "They meant death to people, but they simply don't mean that to me; when they're white and dry maybe, but they're nothing to do with death, they're as much alive in our bodies as our flesh is."

There has always been a close relationship between the boxes and Cooke's paintings; he continually goes from one to the other.

He believes that some of the boxes have been more specifically about landscape than his paintings. "They've been about specific places like the Burren and Wicklow." In some of these boxes he has used clay, peat and sand, which probably explains why some people saw a connection with death; clay has been associated with burial as well as growth and life.

The bone sculptures have not been cast from porcelain, as some have suggested, but have been modelled from a clay which fires white. They are fired at about 900° "so it is still possible to sand them as well as shaping them in the hand. Then some of them are fired again for durability's sake." Sometimes he applies twenty to thirty films of acrylic paint, "in order to get that glowing, translucent effect."

Like the paintings, most of these sculptures are concerned with the joining of two or more bones, for instance, a ball and socket. At times however, Cooke leaves a gap at the point of conjunction, thus creating a sense of tension. An example of this can be seen in "Bone Box", illustration number 30.

I see nothing offensive in these bone sculptures. The elegant shapes and streaky colours of the bones in "Bone Box" (illustration number 27) are quite beautiful. Perhaps it is the perspex boxes which have caused some people to take unpleasant meanings from them. Frances Ruane has suggested that the boxes look like "hermetically sealed museum boxes"⁽⁶⁾ which contain relics and precious objects of an antique nature. These associative elements are particularly poignant with the peat boxes. Contrary to the great freedom and spontaneity with which his paintings are executed, the boxes are carefully planned. The rigidity and exactitude of the perspex boxes reinforce this tightness. Cooke however, enjoys this balance of control and looseness; "I'm having my cake and eating it now."

In April 1976, Barrie Cooke had an exhibition of a different kind. There were no bone boxes, no paintings of flat, controlled colour; instead the walls of the gallery were covered in paintings of dense, lush vegetation which evoked all the wildness and savagery of the jungle. Dorothy Walker claimed that the "technique of drip painting was never more appropriate."⁽⁷⁾ This was of course, the exhibition of paintings he had done on return from a three-month stay in the equatorial forests of Malaya and Borneo. He financed the trip by asking businessmen and art collectors to sponsor him in return for paintings, and to his astonishment, they did. During his stay, Cooke lived with the natives, travelling from village to village. He described the place in the exhibition catalogue, as "the most intense, diverse and complex ecological system remaining on this earth. Nowhere else is there such heat, such rain, such sun, such dark. All forming; all adjusting; all competing; all supporting."⁽⁸⁾ It was surely a most unforgettable experience for

(6) 13p.78,79

(7) N.R.4

(8) 15

one who is so obsessed with nature.

It seems that any conceptions which Cooke formerly had of nature were turned upside-down in this place of contradictions. "Rain Forest is a state of the world where Form as we normally sense it, jelled and realizable, hardly exists." He had to find a 'new' way of painting such unique subject matter and this explains why he worked "blindly", as directly as he could, as I mentioned earlier. What else could he do but let the painting take over in an effort to manifest his subconscious responses. Another reason why these paintings were so successful may lie in the fact that he had until then been restraining himself, so the new burst of inspiration was coupled with a release from restriction.

His interest in water surfaced again in the late Seventies when he began painting dark, brooding pictures. "They started, a lot of them, in part of my mind from a very particular place where I was fishing one year at night." Like most of his oils there were other levels of meaning in these works. "There was also a certain peaty brown which I wanted to achieve, and that was an abstract sensation which was also part of that place. Then there began to be feelings of sky in the water ..." Some of these paintings were concerned with the effect of light and water on a lake at night. The horizontal shapes in these paintings have much in common with those of some Burren paintings, particularly "Mullach Mór", and are also suggestive of flat rocks and boulders.

"The Lough Derg Pike" (1980) combines Cooke's painting and sculpture. It is a painting of a huge pike caught over 100 years ago with antique tackle. Along the lower end of the canvas, Cooke has included seven wooden boxes or compartments containing this antique fishing tackle. The brown wooden boxes each containing an object remind me of the work of Joseph Cornell, and of course they may be linked to the perspex boxes. In this painting Cooke makes use of gold lettering which is partly concealed beneath drips of green paint. The fish is stretched out to its full length, its round body reflecting the light. Looking at this painting, I cannot help feeling that Cooke painted it in homage to the great fish and to the fisherman who caught it, as though he is seeing the fish in the same manner as a fisherman taking pride in such a catch. There are also mythological meanings in this painting, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

During his last exhibition in the Hendricks Gallery (1981) he included some portraits and a nude. Although different in subject matter, they were very close in technique and style to the lake paintings. Ciaran Carty claimed that the portraits had the "unfixed look of reflections in water," and I certainly agree. Take for instance the portrait of his friend, the poet

Seamus Heaney; it was painted in such a fluid manner that the image has the appearance of melting wax, it almost disintegrates before one's eyes. Yet there is expression in the face; "His father used to go to cattle fairs and I think I've caught in Seamus something of that shrewd look of a man sizing up an animal." (9) The background is vague and almost looks like part of the lake paintings. Perhaps it is the fondness for wet places that both he and Heaney share which prompted him to paint this portrait in such a fluid manner.

His portraits have not changed very much over the years. For example, the portrait of Lady Goulding, painted about fifteen years ago, and the more recent one of his wife, Sonja Landweer, have much in common. Both paintings employ a diagonal composition and the subjects are painted from the same angle. The 'unfixed' look of his portraits and the slight contortion of the features are reminiscent of Kokoschka. Their use of colour however, separates them. Kokoschka uses bright striking colours which are thickly applied in an extremely expressionist manner. Cooke's colours are generally more subdued and filmy.

Cooke admires de Kooning's work; "there's not one inch of a good de Kooning which isn't alive." Cooke's portraits and nudes have very active surfaces but do not share the same amount of aggressive energy as de Kooning's work. Cooke's nudes do not contain the almost Freudian neurotic aggression towards the female which is detectable in many of de Kooning's nude paintings. Instead, his sensuous nudes are closer to the fleshy erotic females of Rubens, particularly the very early ones, painted about 1955. The reclining posture of many of his nudes is quite traditional and may be seen in the work of Boucher and Vouet. In the late Sixties he treated the nude in the same manner as the paintings in T.C.D. One of those appeared in the Sir Basil Goulding Exhibition, December 1982. In this painting, entitled "Grey and Orange", he reduced the figure to a selection of abstract shapes which he painted in bright vivid colours. The shapes were linked together in the same manner as the joints in the bone paintings. The effect was quite different to his earlier nudes. The sensuality did not lie in the flesh tones and rich paint but in the cool enjoyment of strong summery colours. The nude in his last exhibition, "Nude and Nightfall", shows a return to the more traditional pose of his earlier paintings, but this time employing the same watery, fluid brushwork seen in the lake paintings and portraits of that show.

While I was interviewing Barrie Cooke I asked him to explain to me what his present work is about; "I'm doing paintings, not sculpture, at the moment. They're very large and very dark, and I'm not quite sure what they're about. I suspect they're possibly about something underground, roots of some form. I'm not sure yet and I'm not asking questions."

CHAPTER THREE"GUTTED COD"

Camille Souter, 1976

In this painting Souter focuses on the structural qualities of a gutted cod.

The figure is very frontal and isolated on the page. The background is not painted, but the crinkled nature of the paper creates tonal variations, which means that the background is not altogether 'empty'. This effect is achieved by using oil on tissue paper; as the paint dries the paper shrinks in places.

The paint is applied in two ways; a thin diluted wash to give the basic tone (this can be seen on the head), and over this, a drier, tacky consistency of paint which greatly imparts the texture of the fish. This technique is particularly suitable for the tail, as the fuzzy edges created by the brush convey a sense of transparency.

The composition of the picture is simple and direct. It could be divided roughly into quarters, three of which are active, one of which is not. Souter links the two large shapes, the head and tail, with a curved, elongated spine. The empty space beneath the head acts as another connection, a negative one, as our eye is lead from one to the other in a continuous circular movement. The focal point of the composition is the head; the spots of red blood about it further emphasise this. The circular movement reinforces the curved spine, which gives a tremendous sense of flexibility, so typical of fish.

The light in this painting is very sharp and this is achieved through the extensive use of white, both as a ground and a pigment. She uses white on the sharp protruding bones to describe their reflective character and she also uses it on the skin for the same reason. The deep crimson and dark blues intensify this whiteness by their strong contrast.

"THE LOUGH DERG PIKE"

Barrie Cooke, 1980

Cooke has said that "there is something very mythic about the pike, very primeval and mysterious."

In my opinion, Cooke is trying to express these associations in this painting. The whole work is like a tribute to the great brute caught over one hundred years ago. The pike is stretched out to its full size like a prizewinner. The boxes beneath the painting contain the antique fishing tackle with which the fish was caught. They are laid carefully and precisely in place like precious relics. The gold lettering has an important function; it helps to evoke these primeval feelings. Gold has symbolized wealth and preciousness to man for thousands of years; it also has ritualistic connotations.

The composition of the painting is entirely horizontal. The horizontal line of the pike's body is echoed in the lettering and the row of wooden boxes.

The background is painted in a mixture of different greens. The colours are applied in washes which drip and run into each other creating subtle colour changes and interesting hues. The colours on the pike's body merge from a dark green to a golden green, and finally into white. They create a soothing mood. The gold lettering is partially covered by drips of green, and this adds to the feeling of mystery in the painting.

Comparisons between "THE LOUGH DERG PIKE", by Barrie Cooke and "GUTTED COD", by Camille Souter.

"Gutted Cod" is a more intimate, simple study of a fish than "The Lough Derg Pike". It does not attempt to glorify the fish in any way. The interest lies chiefly in the shapes and movement within the fish's body. Souter's approach is that of an artist; it is an intuitive response to shape and form embodied in the fish. Cooke's response is both that of the painter and fisherman. He understands the pride of a "great catch", and the beauty of the pike. He associates feelings of mysticism and primevalism with the pike and tries to convey this in the painting.

The scale of "The Lough Derg Pike" is life-size and impressive. "Gutted Cod" is a much smaller painting, measuring 37.2 x 50cm, quite typical of Souter's intimate, domestic scale.

"The Lough Derg Pike" does not contain the same sense of isolation as "Gutted Cod". Cooke establishes a relationship between the fish and the background through colour. The fluid, watery colours suggest an aquatic environment. Souter does not attempt to create this link; instead the ground is left unpainted.

"The Lough Derg Pike" is a more fully worked painting than "Gutted Cod". However, I do not wish to imply that it is a superior painting because of this. Both paintings were painted for separate reasons. "Gutted Cod" is a study of one aspect of a fish; "The Lough Derg Pike" incorporates many different levels of meaning. They must therefore be judged in relation to their objective and the degree of success with which the artist has managed to fulfill this objective.



No. 18 "GUTTED COD"
Camille Souter



No. 19 "THE LOUGH DERG PIKE"
Barrie Cooke

"THE SLAUGHTERED COW, TEN MINUTES DEAD." Camille Souter, 1973

This painting is one of Souter's strongest, in my opinion. It is certainly one of her most emotional paintings. It was painted as a 'once-off', about three months after she had completed the meat series.

The painting is quite large, unusually so for Souter; it measures 76cm x 58cm. The composition is based on a simple breakup of space which is quite angular and reminiscent of her early Fifties work. As in "Gutted Cod", she balances the active areas in the painting with less active ones. The suspended shapes at the top of the painting relate to the two strong verticals of the composition. The lower part consists of horizontal shapes, ie. the body of the cow and the table on which it is laid.

In some areas Souter applies the paint in thick undiluted brushstrokes, namely on the cow and the area beneath the body. The other areas are painted in pale washes and the framework from which the meat is hung, is delicately outlined.

The shape of the cow's body is round and heavy looking; it is slumped across the table. The cow's eye is open but it has a blank, drawn expression which is quite pitiful. It is the eye which gives the painting such a strong emotive impact. It reminds me of the eyes of Christ depicted in some Baroque paintings. The drop of blood on the pupil makes the feeling of pathos particularly poignant. It is as though Souter captured that moment between life and death, that moment of transition; even the title suggests this. The warm blood is still spurting from the wounds in splashes about the body. The ground on which the body is spread is soaking up the blood and becoming quite red. We are waiting for the flow to cease and for the stillness of death to set in ...

I feel that with this painting Souter found it difficult to be as objective as she had been in former meat studies. For instance, the body of the cow is quite recognisable for what it is; it has not been abstracted to the same degree as that of the meat studies, ie. "Pale Shapes". It must be easier to be objective when painting joints of meat than it is when painting the actual animal from which the joints are cut. Souter does admit that towards the end of the meat series the slaughter began to effect her, and that her last painting (this one) did contain horror. I agree.

"SHEEP CARCASS FLOATING"

Barrie Cooke, 1961

In this painting Cooke imparts a very strong image of the entrails of a sheep's stomach. The composition is unusual because the sheep is not shown suspended from the wall of an abattoir or a butcher's shop; instead, it is half-submerged in water.

The image is quite gruelling on one level, especially the skull, but on another level the shapes and colours are quite beautiful. The pale creamy pinks of the body are set against the dark reds of the exposed inner parts. As in "Nude Recumbant", Cooke uses the complimentary colour of red to heighten the intensity of the blood and flesh tones.

This painting was painted in the early Sixties when Cooke was painting meat. Looking at this painting I recall what Cooke said about his first encounter with a disembowelled sheep. He described the incision made down the "tight drum of the belly, and out flowed this enormous quantity of entrails. My first sensation was shock and the second one had to be of stunning beauty; of these beiges, lavenders, pinks, creams, blues, extraordinary!" It was obviously this experience of awe which inspired this painting.

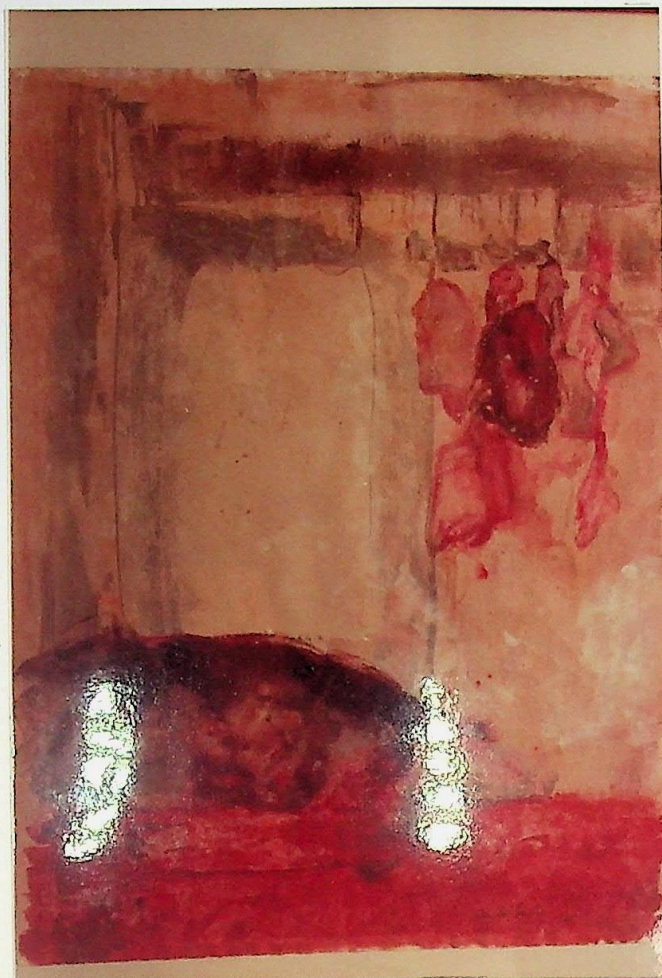
The background of the painting is painted in quick fluid brushstrokes which barely cover the canvas ground. The body is treated differently; here Cooke uses thick impasted paint which gives the painting a great textural quality. This texture is very evocative of blood and entrails, because Cooke has raised areas in thin streaks which form a shiny skin on the surface of the paint. Around these raised areas he has used a very dark red to give the impression of deep wounds and coagulating blood.

Comparisons between "SLAUGHTERED COW, TEN MINUTES DEAD", by Camille Souter and "SHEEP CARCASS FLOATING", by Barrie Cooke.

In both of these paintings the artists are concerned with the slaughtered animal. The image of exposed flesh and blood is conveyed through impasto.

In both paintings the colour red is used extensively, particularly in "Slaughtered Cow, Ten Minutes Dead." I think that Souter comes very close to overindulgence in her use of this colour, but the balance is maintained by the pale background colours. Red, in this painting has an emotive charge, but this is not so in "Sheep Carcass Floating". Compared with "Slaughtered Cow", this painting seems less horrific. The carcass is seen in isolation; it is not associated with an abattoir, as is the dead cow.

There is a passive quality in "Sheep Carcass Floating", which is not present in "Slaughtered Cow, Ten Minutes Dead". Cooke places the sheep carcass in a simple, flowing surrounding. Souter places the cow on a low horizontal plane, which seems to emphasize the weight of the huge body. There are twisted shapes hanging from a frame. In "Sheep Carcass Floating" there is an assurance that the sheep is dead, which makes the image more acceptable. In "Slaughtered Cow, Ten Minutes Dead" the animal does not appear to fully dead. There is still movement from the body and the eye stares out in a disturbing way. There is an uncomfortable tendency to become involved in the animal's agony, instead of being able to appreciate the more aesthetic elements of the painting. The interesting shapes of the suspended joints offer a temporary distraction.



No. 20 "THE SLAUGHTERED COW - TEN MINUTES DEAD"
Camille Souter



No. 21 "SHEEP CARCASS FLOATING"
Barrie Cooke

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Both Barrie Cooke and Camille Souter share a strong feeling of identification with the land. Although Cooke would not describe himself as a landscape painter the land does provide a source of inspiration for his work. Cooke is interested in the structural, organic elements of the land; rock formations, soil, roots. His peat boxes exemplify this. What goes on beneath the ground is of as much interest to him as that above it. His lake paintings are not only concerned with the surface of the water but also with the layers beneath that surface. Cooke is not satisfied with a superficial acquaintance with his subject matter, he must explore it until he has uncovered its fundamentality.

Souter's approach to landscape is very different. Although she does not set out to look for motifs in the land, her paintings are very often concerned with the patterns and lineaments found there, as in her landscapes of the Sixties and more recently, her Shannon Airport paintings. Souter is also very sensitive to the atmosphere of a place and she sees it as a very integral element of it.

Despite the similarities in their work there are many strong differences. Take for example a landscape painting by each artist; "Mullach Mór", by Barrie Cooke and "Runway", by Camille Souter. Cooke's shapes are bold and strong. The edges are clearly defined. The rocks have a feeling of solidity and form. Although the shapes in Souter's painting are rather geometric, she softens the edges, thus reducing their harshness. In so doing, she eliminates their descriptiveness almost to the point of abstraction. We are left without any clues to the identification of the objects, we can only speculate about them.

Cooke's landscape paintings are often dramatic. The unusual rock formations in "Mullach Mór" provide an exciting formula for the composition of the picture. "Water and Rocks" is another example of how Cooke uses the flow of water to produce a dramatic image. By contrast, Souter's paintings are very tranquil. Her landscape paintings are usually about a certain type of weather like mist, drizzle, soft rain. Her still-lives have a timeless quality. These moods are conveyed through her simple uncomplicated compositions and her soft colours.

Without wishing to appear sexist, I feel that Souter's work has a very feminine quality, which is expressed through her sensitivity and choice of subject matter. Her paintings are usually of a small scale which suggests intimacy. Cooke's paintings are generally much larger than Souter's and therefore require more physical strength for their execution. Cooke transmits this energy through the brushwork; we encounter long fluid strokes spanning a wide area of the canvas, employing the use of the

whole arm. They also differ in their colour preferences. Souter tends to have a preference for subdued tones of similar intensity. Cooke sometimes appears to use colour for the sheer enjoyment of it, resulting in very untraditional combinations. His "Nude and Nightfall", on close examination, reveals a multitude of colours ranging from pastel pinks and purples to earthy browns.

Neither Cooke nor Souter have experienced dramatic changes of style throughout their careers, there is a consistency in their development. They remain loyal to their own personal convictions unaffected by changing art trends.

I could never hope to fully explain what these artists have expressed in their work. To undertake such a venture would be exhaustive and fruitless. The work is there to be seen and experienced at first hand and can only be fully appreciated in that way. Yet, I hope that in this thesis I have thrown some light on Camille Souter and Barrie Cooke as two distinct Irish artists who deserve the recognition and respect which is given to them.

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