

GEORGE CAMPBELL RHA



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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

George Campbell belonged to a small group of Northern painters who brought new life and excitement to the arts in Ireland in the post-war years. With the exception of Jack B. Yeats, Ireland had clung desperately to the conventions of the old school of art thus falling behind their European counterparts in coming to terms with the advent of Modern Art in all its manifestations. But it was artists like the three Northerners, George Campbell, Gerard Dillon and Dan O'Neill who, through their perseverance and consistent hard work, helped to bridge the gap between the Living Art and the RHA.

George Campbell, like Dillon and O'Neill, was virtually a self-taught artist. He did not begin to paint until he was twenty-four, yet he took his position remarkably quickly among the front ranks of Irish artists and maintained that position until his sudden death in 1979. In this thesis I shall examine the life and work of George Campbell and discuss him in terms of what was happening in Ireland during his time, the influences on his work and the changes and development in his painting.

To understand Campbell's work we must look at his environment. Growing up in wartime Belfast - the devastating scenes of destruction etched on his brain and compelling him to convey his thoughts and emotions through paint for the first time. He broke away from Belfast to go to the West of Ireland and then later to Spain and then both these locations were to be the sources of inspiration for the majority of his paintings, be they landscape, townscape or figures. He returned once more to Belfast during the late sixties where war was once again rampant, this time among its own people.

Campbell's paintings are a reflection of his own personality - his love of music, his love of people and conversation, his

delight in the rugged, barren landscapes of the two poles of his life, Connemara and Andalucia, and then his disgust with the destruction of his home town of Belfast, for though he spent less and less time in Belfast, as the years went by, the city still meant much to him with all its diverse and old-fashioned ways. For Campbell there was no border, only the people mattered with their rich customs and love of life.

## CHAPTER 2 THE BEGINNING OF CAMPBELL'S PAINTING CAREER

George Frederick Campbell was born in 1917 in Arklow, Co. Wicklow. He began his education in Dublin but his father, a successful businessman, could not settle there, so in 1921 the family moved to Belfast to start a catering business. Campbell was born into a family of individualists where expression of opinion was encouraged and readiness of words expected and he was no exception. Stocky and dark in features, he was a quick-witted conversationalist who loved nothing better than to sit in a pub among his friends and discuss music and sport. His friendly, easy-going nature made him many friendships that lasted until his death.

There was plenty of artistic talent already in Campbell's family. His grandfather had been an amateur woodcarver. His brother Arthur had already established himself as the artist of the family and his mother, Gretta Bowen, was much later to establish herself as a fine primitive painter. Three weeks before her seventieth birthday she had been tidying her son, Arthur's room and had come across little saucers of paint lying around the place. Rather than waste them she started to paint to use them up. That commenced her painting career and she was still painting on her one hundredth birthday, having appeared in such exhibitions as the Irish Exhibition of Living Art, The Royal Hibernian Academy and the Oireachtas. She also held one woman shows in the David Hendriks Gallery and the Tom Caldwell Gallery. Her primitive style paintings were usually rendered in chalks, wax crayons, gouache or oil paints, never mixing her



paints but using them straight from the tube. Her subjects were usually of happy, carefree childhood memories.

Campbell at this stage had no inclination of becoming an artist. Except for the usual childhood drawings his interests lay far from painting. He loved music, boxing, cricket and rugby and did three complete tours of Ireland on a bicycle. He had several jobs including working as a wages clerk. He met Madge, his wife to be, while working together on the wages sheets. He was a diligent worker but hated being given orders. He worked far better when he was working under his own steam. One day he got so fed up with being told what to do that he gave in his notice. It was wartime in Ulster and being without a job made living very tough. But Madge managed to get him a job in the aircraft factory belonging to the same firm. This he much preferred because he met up with some musicians and together they used to have sessions at lunchtime.

Two years after Campbell married Madge they were both still working to earn enough money to scrape out a living. One weekend while visiting Madge's family in the Glen of Antrim, Campbell was pottering around looking for something to do. Madge's younger sister had a little box of watercolours which he decided to borrow. In a jotter he began putting down images of the devastation of Belfast resulting from the Blitz. He began in watercolour and quickly moved to oils. His first good oils were of his personal reaction to the Blitz. He painted the tragedy of human mortality with shadowy figures a mere hint of their form showing, requiring the viewer's imagination to fill in the rest. He painted "...all the burst girders and crashed about street..".

Campbell now realised that he wished to dedicate his life to painting. Through art he felt he could express and give permanence to his own personal vision. His decision to break from commercial life was a tough one for he was no Bohemian,



Fig. 1 Slack Day Smithfield (1944)

he knew what he was getting himself into. Painting was a tough vocation to have in Belfast, indeed in Ireland at this time. Artists were regarded as somewhat alien and having no useful function in life. Those that did survive tended to work safely within the older conventions of painting. While the rest of Continental Europe was less conservative in its attitude and acceptance of Modern Art, Irish buyers still preferred the old school of painting. Those Irish collectors who did enjoy Modern Art tended to buy from abroad rather than support home grown art. It was only with the arrival of artists like Jack B. Yeats, Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone that there was a sense of departure from the conventional. It was Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone who helped to establish the Irish Exhibition of Living Art in 1943 which opened the way for young experimentalists who were being rejected by the RHA. The coming of the War also benefitted young Irish artists as the collector began to purchase Irish paintings because the War put an end to foreign importations.

After Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone came artists like George Campbell, Patrick Collins, Gerard Dillon, Louis Le Broquy, Norah McGuinness and Dan O'Neill who continued to break through the barriers of acceptable, conformist art in Ireland and through their consistency and quality of work they assured a doubting public to give way to Modern Art in all its varied forms.

After painting for only seven months, Campbell held his first exhibition with his brother Arthur in the Mol Gallery in Belfast in 1944. It was quite successful in terms of sales. Exhibited were paintings like "Slack Day, Smithfield" (1944) (See Fig. 1), an oil painting of the covered variety market in the centre of Belfast that was later destroyed by fire. In it we get the feeling of the drabness of the place with the decayed and mouldy goods for sale. The colours are dull and heavy, black lines dominate, building the picture up into a series of shapes and patterns. In most of his early

work the linear element predominates. Never having had any formal art education he used the paintbrush more like a pencil to outline and define the subject.

Campbell felt that he did not need the discipline of art college. He was twenty-four when he first took up a paintbrush and he knew he was mature and self-disciplined enough to learn by himself. He also felt that painting was such a personal thing that if he had gone to art college he might have picked up mannerisms from other artists and would never have developed his own unique style. At first he drew and painted incessantly as he knew he had several years of work to catch up on. He felt he had a "forest of ideas" inside him that he wanted to capture on canvas. In his early exhibitions the critics expressed the opinion that they were more like group exhibitions as opposed to one man shows because of their diversity of subject, medium and technique. But this was due to the fact that he was a relentless experimentalist and because of his lack of formal art education meant that during this early period he was developing his style as he painted.

CHAPTER 3 THE COMING TOGETHER OF THE TRIO, CAMPBELL, DILLON  
AND O'NEILL

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One of the first paintings Campbell ever exhibited was at the Feis in Belfast. At the opening of the exhibition, Gerard Dillon came up and introduced himself to Campbell. Dillon was already established as a fine artist and was very impressed with Campbell's painting. Campbell in turn was eager to ask "an expert" on the purchase of art materials and methods of using them. He felt he was totally green in all aspects of art. He once said, at this stage he "...didn't know a Picasso from a hole in the ground..". Throughout his life though, he was opposed to reproductions of paintings and books on art. He felt that reproductions did not show the texture and depth of the painting and that art books with all their technical jargon



Fig. 2 Birth (1952)

meant nothing. A painting was meant to be seen first hand and be visually stimulating to the viewer and was not meant to be explained in words.

Dillon and Campbell soon struck up a friendship that lasted until Dillon's death in 1971. Dillon, in turn, introduced Campbell to Dan O'Neill. The three young Northerners formed a group which brought an infusion of new blood into Ireland during the mid Forties. Although their personalities and work were completely different they came together and worked coherently as a group. They did have several things in common though. They were all virtually self-taught, never having gone to art college. When they first began painting they all had menial jobs. Campbell had worked in a factory, O'Neill worked by night as an electrician in the City Transport Department and painted by day, while Dillon was a house painter by trade.

Their's was a social art. Unlike painters such as Colin Middleton who sought their inspiration in the psychological, Campbell, Dillon and O'Neill took their inspiration from the life at hand. While Campbell and O'Neill continued to paint the people and their environment Dillon later went away from this and moved more into the world of fantasy. Dan O'Neill painted many scenes of the West of Ireland and also painted memories of his childhood. In O'Neill's painting "Birth" (1952) (See Fig. 2) we are brought back to the Thirties when O'Neill was a small boy. He stands looking at the basins and clothes on the table, while his mother, worn out by child birth lies in her bed as her new born baby is brought to her.

It was Belfast during the war that dominated Campbell's work during the first few years. In his early paintings of the Blitz he shows a deep concern and understanding of people and their situation and this is evident throughout all his work.



Fig. 3 Ulster in Black and White (1944)

In 1943 when Campbell had just started painting he brought out a book, in conjunction with his brother Arthur, entitled "Now in Ulster". The book was a collection of contemporary short stories, poems, photographs, sketches and paintings of Ulster during the Forties. Campbell included a painting called "Dead Street" a dark and shadowy view of Belfast. In one of the articles entitled "Under 40 Some Ulster Artists" John Hewitt wrote that:

"Campbell is so easily moved that he runs the risk of not being able to rest from his reactions, he must be ever leaping to a new impression of some event or experience that has rushed in on the heels of its predecessor"

Throughout all his work Campbell acts as a vivid commentator on situations and events. He was never interested in ordinary people or places. In an exhibition with Dillon and O'Neill shortly after the War, Campbell included a series of paintings entitled "Home Fit For Heroes?" which showed the backstreets of Belfast, the aftermath of the War, the bombed and burnt out buildings to which the soldiers were returning.

On a lighter note, in a book "Ulster in Black and White" (See Fig. 3) published in 1944, Campbell included a series of lighthearted sketches and cartoons of American soldiers and sailors, a common sight in the streets and pubs of wartime Belfast. During Campbell's first few years of painting, Belfast was his complete source of inspiration. But after his "Home Fit For Heroes?" series Belfast would no longer appear in his paintings until nearly thirty years later when once more Belfast was at war, this time among its own people.





Fig. 4 Claddagh Duff, Connemara (1947)

CHAPTER 4 THE WEST OF IRELAND

Towards the end of the Forties, Campbell left Belfast to paint the West of Ireland. His first visit to Connemara opened his eyes to its natural beauty, in stark contrast to the drabness of Belfast. Like so many other artists such as Paul Henry, Humbert Craig and Sean Keating, the harsh grey/green landscape and the dark, rugged people, so much as one with their environment, supplied Campbell with an unending source of inspiration. Dillon too was inspired by Connemara and painted there for many years.

Campbell and Dillon would make several expeditions to the West during the following years and no sooner would they arrive than the pencils and paper would come out and notes and sketches would be made. Campbell never painted on the spot but would make literally hundreds of visual notes on little squares of card with pencils, ink and watercolours, of the vegetation, the rocks, the textures and the light. Then when he returned home he would work in his studio, using the notes he had made, to build up his paintings. Sometimes he would not use notes until years later when he felt his mood was right to use them.

In his early landscapes like "Claddagh Duff, Connemara" (1947) (See Fig. 4) he still uses his paintbrush like a pencil, outlining everything in strong black lines and then highlighting them to give them structure and dimension. James White said of Campbell's early paintings in a monograph entitled "George Campbell RHA":

"In general, the landscapes in which Campbell first began to make pictorial statements depended largely on his recognition of form in the scene rather than its general contours".

He is already aware of the textures and patterns described by the landscape. As Campbell said himself of "Claddagh Duff, Connemara" (See Fig. 4):

"I painted it because I like the build up of textures and shapes, it's difficult to say precisely but the whole thing is a nice unit"

It is not until several years later though, that he loses the static hard lines and his paintings become a cohesive structure of colour and pattern.

#### CHAPTER 5 CAMPBELL IN LONDON

Times were tough for Campbell. Though he painted incessantly the few paintings he did sell did not provide enough to make a living. Campbell and Dillon held an exhibition of sixty paintings in a gallery in Portadown belonging to James Lamb but little or none were sold. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland would not give Campbell any assistance and so, with reluctance, he left Ireland and moved to London. Gerard Dillon followed shortly and together they looked and learned and continued to paint. In London they exhibited at the Picadilly Gallery and the Sauvage Gallery and held several one man shows.

While he was in London, Campbell was offered a full-time job in a big London Newspaper as he had already done some commercial work in Belfast in the form of drawings of motorcycles and cars for the Belfast Telegraph. He was offered an annual salary of £3,000 which was a considerable sum then and which would have made life a lot easier for himself and his wife. But he felt he would be tied down with little or no outlet for his artistic expression and would likely have to give up painting. He decided that his painting came first and so he declined the offer.

One of the problems for emerging artists in Ireland at this time was that there was little or no commercial outlet for their work. In Dublin there were only two commercial galleries, both with very limited wall space, and they only exhibited work for the conservative taste dealing mainly in old masters, reproductions and bric-a-brac. In Northern Ireland there was a similar lack of venues. This was remedied, though by the setting up in 1943 of the CEMA - The Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts. So up until Victor Waddington opened his gallery in Dublin, the CEMA situated in 55A Donegall Street, Belfast was the only outlet for emerging Modern Artists. It was in fact George Campbell, his brother Arthur, Geard Dillon, James McIntyre, Leslie Zuker and Thomas McCreaner who dominated the CEMA during the Forties and Fifties.

Campbell spent six years in London only returning occasionally to exhibit in the CEMA or the new gallery in Dublin - The Victor Waddington Gallery. He had his first one man show there in 1946. Of the forty-six paintings, exhibited, thirty-seven were sold. Indeed, Victor Waddington, in his clear sightedness, opened the door for many artists in Ireland until his retirement in 1955. This left only two galleries in Dublin - The Dawson Gallery and the Dublin Painters Gallery. There was a need for another one. So in 1956, David Hendriks opened his gallery, The Richie Hendriks Gallery as it was known then. George Campbell became one of the few regular exhibitors with this new Gallery which gave Ireland a chance to see a vast range of modern paintings and sculpture including many foreign exhibitions. Campbell had some eleven one man shows and was included in several group exhibitions there between 1957 and 1973. In 1973 he, along with Arthur Armstrong who also exhibited regularly with David Hendriks, ceased to show with him because of a disagreement over policy.

CHAPTER 6    CHURCH ART

At the beginning of the Fifties after six years of living in London, Campbell decided to return to Ireland. It was a case of "make it or break it" here. When visiting the West of Ireland once again he got his first commission. While touring around he had come across a little church in Ballynahinch. It had originally been a Protestant Church but because of the lack of Protestants in the area it had been decided to turn it into a Catholic Church. Campbell got talking to the Parish Priest who was thinking of importing reproduction Stations of the Cross from Italy. Campbell told him that if he agreed Campbell himself would paint The Stations of the Cross and donate them to the Church.

It was Archbishop Walsh who blessed the church and he was so impressed with The Stations of the Cross that he asked Campbell that if commissioned, would he do the Stations of the Cross for another church, St. Patrick's Church, Clonfad, Ballyhaunis. Campbell agreed to do them for £900. When completed he brought them along to the church only to discover that instead of being a brand new, modern church as he expected, it was an old renovated church. George decided that his Stations of the Cross were unsuited to their surroundings so he took them back and started from scratch again. The second Stations of the Cross were so good that they were exhibited in Dublin where they won the Sacred Art Award and were later exhibited in Munich where they won a special award.

While working on the Stations of the Cross he got to know the Abbey Studios, which was a stained glass studio. They asked to design a stained glass window showing "The Sower of the Seed" for a church in Gort, Co. Galway and after that he was asked to submit designs for the new Cathedral being built in Galway City. His proposals were accepted but while they were being constructed the Bishop in charge decided he did not like them.



Fig. 5 Spanish Town

But Campbell took him aside and with his wit and charm, persuaded the Bishop, through a short art lesson, to accept them. It was the American Cardinal Cushing who dedicated the Cathedral and he was so impressed with the Rose Windows that he donated the money for one of them.

Campbell's next big commission was for a modern Dominican Church in Athy. There he was given a free hand to do the Stations of the Cross and the glass work as he pleased. He loved working in stained glass. One newspaper at the time commentated on the Athy window that the "gem-like" areas of pure colour convey a sense of freshness and adventure. Indeed even when one looks at his paintings, principally his abstracts from this period they are reminiscent of his stained glass with their bright pure colours outlined in heavy black paint. A Spanish painting of this period "Spanish Town" (See Fig. 5) appears totally abstract at first but then one notices a little white-washed church with a round window and cross on top. Soon the little squares of abstract colour become a town set high on an Andalucian mountain. The soft patterning of reds, yellows and browns are intensified by the dark outlines of black paint giving the viewer the impression that the light source is coming from behind the picture, like sunlight through coloured glass. The areas of colour are painted with a thick brush on a single plane and it is the black lines which are painted afterwards that give the picture definition and dimension.

#### CHAPTER 7 CAMPBELL'S SPANISH AND WEST OF IRELAND LANDSCAPES

During the Forties, Campbell was dividing his time between Belfast and Connemara. In 1950, he took a trip to France and the following year he went to Spain for the first time. His first contact with Spain had been while he was in London. There he had seen some Flamenco dancers on stage. He was so captured with their colour and fire that he went backstage to draw them. Since his first trip to Spain, which was still under Franco's rule, he continued to spend the six winter months there and

the summer months in Ireland. He could not explain why Spain meant so much to him, all he knew was that he felt at home there. As a child he used to cut out every available picture of Spain from magazines and stick them in scrapbooks.

To Campbell, Spain was as much home to him as Ireland. He felt an affinity with the people, quickly learning the language and chatting endlessly with the Spaniards in the cafes, pubs and open squares. The music of Spain cast its spell over Campbell. He loved the fast, rhythmic sounds of the Flamenco guitar which seemed to be the very pulse of the people. Music was one of Campbell's main passions. When asked if he were reborn what would he like to be, Campbell replied that he would love to be a conductor. He decided to learn the Flamenco guitar, which is extremely difficult as there is no sheet music for it. He was learning for about six months before he realised that he was playing the tune wrong. But he persevered and became as accomplished as any Spaniard.

Because of his knowledge of the country and its people, Campbell has hosted several chat shows on B.B.C. radio about Spain. Indeed he contributed so much to Spain that in 1978, a year before he died, the Spanish government awarded him the Insignia of the Order of Civil Merit (Encomienda del Merito Civil) to the degree of Commander, a special decoration for foreigners who have contributed to strengthening human and artistic links with Spain.

It is Spain that provides the inspiration for many of his most exciting paintings. He loved the noises and the smells, the little white washed houses with their colourful tiles and flowers on little black balconies, the thrill of the bullfight and the nights of Flamenco. He loved their great artists like Goya and Valasquez. From the moment he started painting in Spain his work improved. His Spanish scenes were full of light





Fig. 6 Connemara

and vitality. Even his Connemara scenes became more delicate and complicated. As it is said, the knowledge of another country is apt to enrich the consciousness of one's own.

Spain and Connemara became the basis for all his landscapes and townscapes. Indeed, there are many similarities between the two countries, the people, the poverty, their history of political trouble and the hard, unrelenting landscapes of the two countries. But there is no mistaking the two countries in his paintings. In his Spanish landscapes his colours are smouldering hot reds and oranges, a sharp contrast to the bleached greens and greys of his Connemara landscapes.

In Campbell's earlier landscapes like "Claddagh Duff, Connemara" (See Fig. 4) he "draws" the image with the paintbrush, the hard outlines of the buildings and walls giving the painting a dull and static quality. In his later Irish landscapes the linear element gives way to a misty, atmospheric and subtly coloured play of shapes and tones. "Connemara" (See Fig. 6) is an example of one of these later landscapes. Campbell uses a wide paintbrush to put down the paint in large patches of colour that merge together on a fluid palette. Darker areas of colour are applied with a dry brush which gives depth and texture to the painting.

The sky never features very much in Campbell's landscapes. As in "Connemara" it is the land that dominates his paintings as it recedes far back into the distance giving the feeling of the desolation and vast spaces in the landscape. The horizon seems to flow and merge into the sky which is built up into a series of washes until the top right hand corner becomes a thundery blue/black that is reflected in the dark areas of the land. Throughout the rest of the sky lyrical patches of light permeates through the clouds and reflects on the rocks and fields and little ruined houses, the upturned "V" of their gables only remaining. The vibrant white

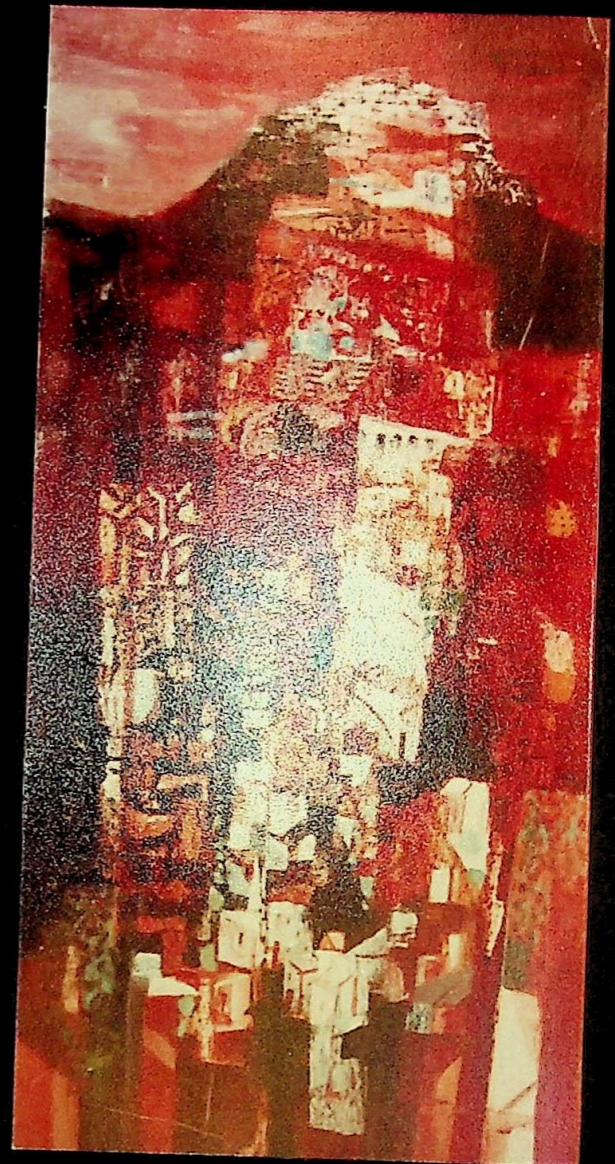


Fig. 7 Two Towns, Andalusia



Fig. 8 Still Life with Candle and Bowl of Flowers

highlights contrast dramatically with the dark patterns of blues, blacks and browns.

If one looks at "Claddagh Duff, Connemara" the colours appear dull and murky compared to the dazzling contrasts of dark and light in "Connemara". In "Claddagh Duff, Connemara" everything has a solid, weighty feeling. The rocks and walls are painted, highlighted and given shape with heavy black lines whereas in "Connemara" all the elements are woven into a moist and fluid pattern of colour.

In contrast to his Connemara landscapes, the strong light of the Andalucian sun brings more colour and angular hardness to his Spanish paintings. In these paintings we can sense the coming together of earth, wind and fire to create a fiery, pulsating structure reflecting the mid-day sun. In his townscapes like "Two Towns, Andalucia" (See Fig. 7) we see two towns in which individual buildings seem merged and unified into semi-crystalline shapes. In this elongated painting (measuring 40in. X 24in.) we sense the towering height of the town climbing up the mountainside, like so many Spanish towns, while higher still another town perches on top of the mountain, the white houses blurred by height and distance. His paintings now are an amalgam of the essential shapes he saw and which he used in a fluid summary of the subject.

#### CHAPTER 8 CAMPBELL'S STILL LIFE PAINTINGS

Campbell's paintings during the sixties show the influences of Picasso and Braque, the two great Cubist painters. In his still life paintings such as "Still Life with Candle and Bowl of Flowers" (See Fig. 8) and "Still Life" (1960) (See Fig. 9) we are strongly reminded of Braque's work, the table almost vertical in the picture and the flattened space with the objects almost lying on, rather than standing on the table. Though



Fig. 9 Still Life (1960)

Campbell's work is like Braque's style he never actually constructed his painting according to Cubist theory.

In "Still Life" (See Fig. 9) we see a table set against an open window in Campbell's apartment in Spain. A gentle breeze blows the transparent curtains across the table in contrast to the hardness of the window's edge. The painting is made up of a series of vertical black lines, the edge of the window almost merging into the hard fold of the tablecloth, the vase of thorny branches merging into its own reflection, the legs of the table and then the line of the shutter softened by the wispy curtain. The strong vertical lines of the table and the wooden slats of the shutters. Cool browns, beiges and creams dominate in the interior while the blue of the sky and buildings is reflected in the tablecloth. It is a formal composition with good treatment of space and light.

Picasso was very much interested in the primitive symbols of power and magic found in African shields, spears and statues. They reminded him that an artist must aim to capture, through paint or clay, the underlying energy of his subject. He felt that the Impressionists had become so obsessed with translating colours into areas of light that sometimes their subject matter became of no consequence to them. Though the Impressionists' paintings are a beautiful construction of light some of their work tends toward the banal in composition. Picasso realised this and reminded artists that a painting or sculpture must be charged with the power of the subject for it to have lasting appeal.

Campbell too was drawn to the savage beauty of these non-Western forms. He entered one such painting called "African Objects" in an open competition organized by the CEMA in 1962. The painting won first prize of £500 and the



Fig. 10 African Warriors





Fig. 11 Azcelt

CEMA also purchased it for their permanent collection. But sadly it was destroyed by fire a few years later. In another similar painting entitled "African Warriors" (See Fig. 10) we are reminded of Picasso in the way in which the warriors and their shields are flattened into overlapping areas of colour. The figures of warriors are painted in earthy browns, reds and yellow ochre which reminds us of the colours used by primitive man in the cave paintings. The head-dresses, faces and bodies of the warriors are broken into small, faceted areas of colour that are outlined and defined by dark, slashing strokes of black paint. The Warriors are painted in elongated blocks, one on top of the other, sometimes mingling, sometimes separating, to create an overall patchwork of colour and texture.

Another series of primitive paintings were his "Azcelt" (See Fig. 11 series). These were brought about by Campbell's belief that there were great similarities in the ancient art of the Aztecs and Celts, hence the combination of the two names into "Azcelt". To give these paintings a lively and vibrant quality many of them were done with oil bound crayons and ink. Campbell first drew everything with the crayons except for the areas of black and areas of tone. Then with a large brush he applied the black ink which did not adhere to the crayons but ran into the gaps. Then he scraped some of the crayon back to the crayon-stained paper. This gave him the required brilliant effect that reminds us once again of his stained glass.

Campbell was always aware of using the right technique for his paintings and always chose the one suggested by the subject rather than forcing it on unsuitable material. Campbell was continually experimenting and used a broad range of techniques. The majority of his painting was done in oils but he has used watercolour, gouache, chalk, inks, crayons, indeed anything



Fig. 12 Blind Flamenco Guitarist (1961)

that would lend itself to his painting. He did not go quite as far as Gerard Dillon though, who cut up and used leather handbags, shoes or indeed anything that would give him the right texture in his paintings.

#### CHAPTER 9 CAMPBELL'S PORTRAITS

Some of Campbell's best and most compelling paintings are his portraits in which we sense great power and emotion. With his love of people and deep understanding of character he could transmit to canvas the very soul of the person. He rarely had a model to pose for him but took his subjects from life at hand - the farmers in the pubs of the West of Ireland or the Flamenco Players of Spain. He was a brilliant draughtsman and could convey the personality of the person he was sketching with a few lines. Again, as with his landscapes, he could draw the same person for several years before making one painting of him.

Campbell generally repeats the same theme many times in his work but each time finding new variations in them like a skilled musician will find new variations in a piece of music. One such recurring theme is musicians. Because of his love of music Campbell sought to find its equivalence in painting. Campbell said of his painting in an interview with Ciaran Carty of the Sunday Independent Newspaper:

"It's like how you play a guitar by way of a series of inventions based on chords. You invent within the framework of certain rhythmic shapes"

"Blind Flamenco Guitarist" (1961) (See Fig. 12) is one of Campbell's most powerful portraits. In it he uses strong contrasts of light and dark. The musician's face with his



Fig. 13 Women Singing, Malaga



Fig. 14 Two Men Waiting (1963)

dark glasses and straining neck are contrasted sharply by the dazzling bright highlight behind him. Campbell uses dark slashing strokes - so typical of much of his work - that animate the guitarist. One almost expects the hand to move across the guitar and the Moorish song to emerge from his mouth. The musician with his head held back and his mouth open in song is a fleeting second of a man's life caught perpetually in time giving the painting a haunting quality that compels the viewer to return to it again and again.

In "Women Singing, Malaga" (See Fig. 13) the light source is the candles held in the hands of the women. Their bright halos of light, highlighting the women's clothing and faces, is in contrast to their dark surroundings. The paint is applied thickly and then scratched into with a needle on the faces and scarves of the women, fast, slashing strokes that blur the faces, remind us of a photograph that is blurred because the subject has suddenly moved.

Campbell believed that none of his paintings should be dated by objects in them such as cars or motorcycles but rather they should represent people of all time. In his paintings many of the faces are blurred or even absent so that they are not reduced to particular people but instead stand for all musicians, all singers, all women. The figures are painted in decorative shapes of colour often merging with their background, like "Two Men Waiting" (1963) (See Fig. 14) and "Two Men Digging, Galway" (1963) (See Fig. 15). The texture of the background rarely varies with the texture of the figures so one is urged to look into the painting and search for its subject not unlike that children's game where you have to look into a seemingly innocent picture and search for objects that have been cleverly disguised in a knot of wood or the leaves and branches of a bush. When you do find the objects they become so startlingly crisp and clear that you wonder why you did not see them



Fig. 15 Two Men Digging, Galway (1963)





Fig. 16A Coco and Friend

immediately.

Campbell's paintings convey the same idea. In "Two Men Digging, Galway" (See Fig. 15) at first all we see is a patchwork of line and tone. Then we look again and we see that the dark lines outline a man, his head bent low, his left arm raised holding a long stick. Further back another man appears in the left hand corner his back bent in toil. Campbell compels us to look at his paintings again and again and each time we can pick out something new we had not noticed before. As Campbell said himself in the article he wrote for "Artists International" entitled "George Campbell Writes About His Approach to Painting, Part 1":

"I hope that things emerge rather than stick out. Things that stick out too much tend to bore after a short while. I like a longer time element - possibly because music is my first love."

Musicians are not his only interest and another recurring theme in his paintings are clowns. He loved the Circus and all its performers (here we recall Picasso as he too loved the circus and painted it again and again in his early work). Campbell felt that the Circus was the only democracy in the world where fat people, thin people, small people, black and white people worked together side by side. He loved the clowns especially and was a good friend of the famous Coco (See Fig. 16A), whom he has painted several times both with and without his make-up on. He felt that we all want to be clowns to escape ourselves by changing our identity.

In the B.B.C. Television production "Triptych", Campbell talks about his infatuation with the Circus and its semblance to a microcosm of mankind. He said that he saw his friend Coco,

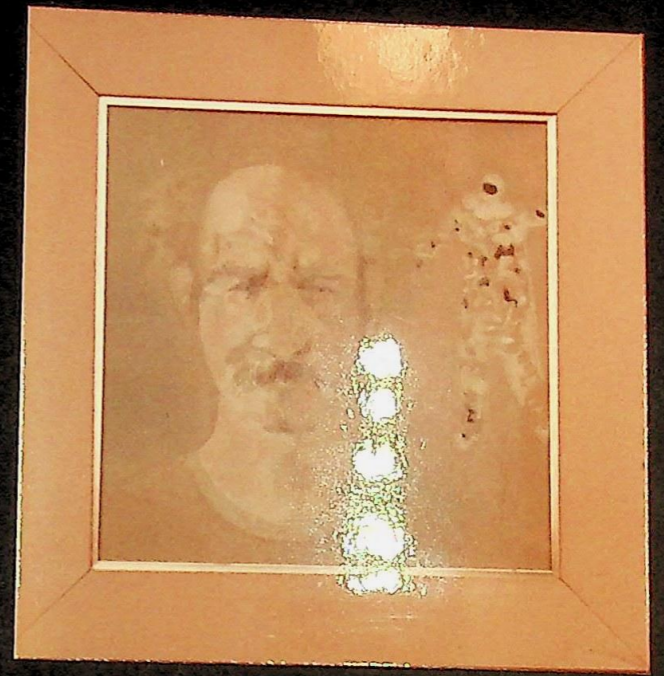


Fig. 168 Gerard Dillon, Painter (1968)



Fig. 17 The Brothers

with and without make-up so many times that he would forget which was Coco and which was Bertrand Mills and he felt it was the same with people, after a while one cannot distinguish the mask from reality.

Another painting he did was of his friend Gerard Dillon entitled "Gerard Dillon, Painter" (1968) (See Fig. 16). It is a picture of the head and shoulders of Dillon but on the right hand side a Pierrot stands, his face replaced by a black mask. The clown is a recurring theme in Dillon's work. Dillon's most powerful and best remembered paintings are those concerning the clown, the pierrot and the harlequin. Like Campbell, he saw the two sides of the clown, the mask and the man under the mask. The clown was symbolic of two different moods, the laughter and the sorrow. Many of Dillon's clowns are reflections of his own moods - sometimes funny, sometimes sad and sometimes preoccupied with death. In the 1960's Dillon removed the clowns faces and replaced them with black masks so that their face can display no emotion except for their bodies. One of his darkest and most powerful paintings of this series is "The Brothers" (See Fig. 17) in which three grinning skeletons lie in coffins one on top of the other. On the surface a pierrot is curled up, on the fertile, tilled soil, wracked with grief. In the painting Dillon conveys his own personal statement on the theme of Man's mortality. Man must live and die in order that others may live.

In 1974 George Campbell held an exhibition in the Tom Caldwell Galleries entitled "Friends and Acquaintances 1944 - '74". In it was a collection of some sixty paintings showing a complete cross-section of his friends and interests from The Sheepfarmer, Paddy Bolton with his homespun appearance to the dramatically dark and foreboding face of Beethoven. We would have seen boxers and bullfighters, his friends Dan O'Neill and Gerard Dillon and his wife Madge. Other paintings included



Fig. 18 Water Seller

writers and fishermen, actors and travellers, paper sellers, old men and young boys, which were all part of the rich tapestry that made up his life. He loved meeting new people and one of his great qualities was the manner in which he helped younger painters and encouraged all artistic endeavour. He has written many articles for magazines, in particular a series for "Artists International", and has done both radio and television work about art including "Triptych", which was made just before he died. It consisted of three programmes, the first on Spain, the second on Ireland and the third on his painting. These three films give a deep insight into his character as he talks about his art and his life.

During the Sixties George Campbell was a familiar name in the newspapers, art reviews and social magazines at home and abroad. His paintings were much sought after and the newspapers report the rush on the opening day of his exhibitions to secure paintings. His paintings can be found in collections all over Ireland and many were also sold abroad particularly in England, America and Spain. It was difficult to resist his haunting scenes of Connemara or the sensual impact of his paintings of everyday Spain - the old Spain he knew before the "Costa del Living" set moved in. Some of his paintings like the "Water Seller" (See Fig. 18) recalls a Spain none of us will ever see. The regal woman dressed in the black of widowhood is in stark contrast to the whites and yellows of the background. Beside her two ceramic waterjars are outlined in white. She sits deep in thought, patiently waiting for her next customer. But today the majesty and intrigue of this woman is replaced by supermarkets selling large plastic containers of water.

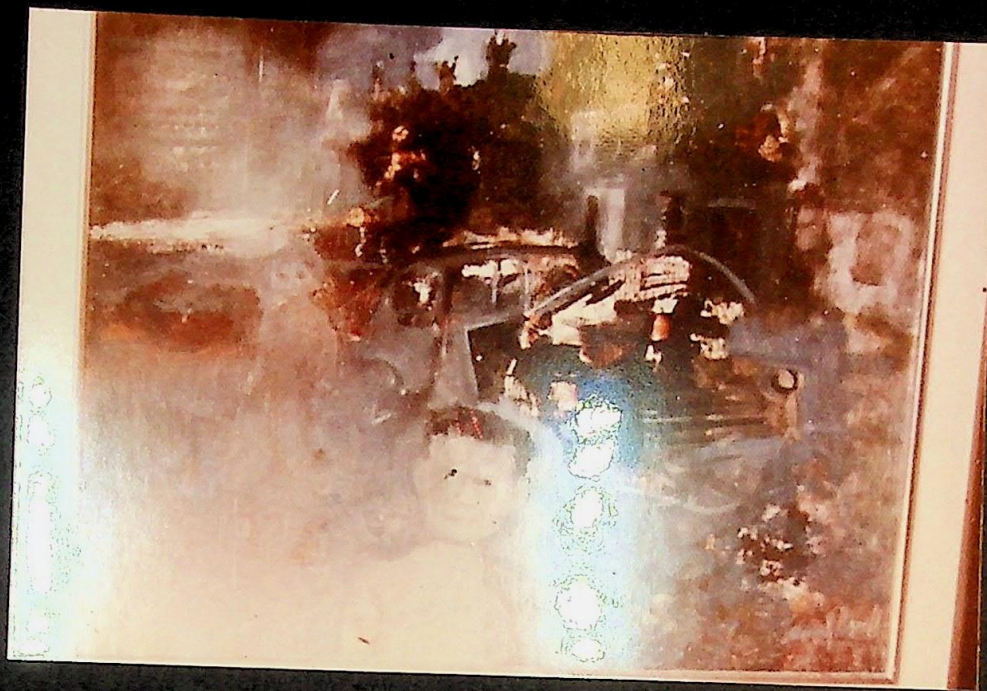


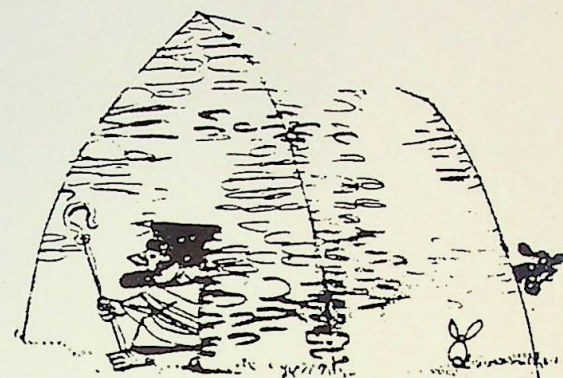
Fig. 19 Burnt Out Car (1971)



CHAPTER 10 CAMPBELL'S PAINTINGS OF NORTHERN VIOLENCE

Towards the end of the Sixties, Campbell was once more reminded of the days of the Blitz. The destruction of his home town of Belfast that first compelled him to express himself through paint and paper, was vividly re-enacted for him when Ulster became locked in internal conflict. Campbell was now living in Dublin permanently but this senseless violence made him look at Belfast once more and he was moved to do a series of dark paintings capturing like the freeze-frames of a newsreel, the horrors and atrocities of the war. He painted the bombed and burnt out street, shops and cars, the bodies of dead men covered by blankets, the red stain of their blood smearing the dark paint, the cripples and the innocent faces of the children whose whole lives were turned upside down in a war that some of them in turn would fight. He painted the people who were the cause of all this terror, their faces covered by visors with only their eyes glinting through. This made them appear all the more terrifying as they become inhuman without the recognisable features of their faces. They were robots wound up and programmed to kill. Campbell was probably the first artist to catch a sense of the mindless futility of all that was happening in the North of Ireland.

In "Burnt Out Car" (1971) (See Fig. 19) the colour black predominates relieved only by the misty, billowing smoke that envelops the houses and burning car. The smoke creates a circular movement which starts at the top right hand corner of the painting and sweeps down and around the car and up once more towards the houses leaving the car framed in smoke. In contrast to their surrounding destruction two shadowy figures of children emerge out of the smoke. They are like ghosts with the mere hint of their form showing. They stand staring straight out at the viewer with their dark, questioning eyes.



MAP 6 A-C 18/19  
OS  $\frac{1}{2}$ " 20  
See map, Fig. 35

**Gallarus (66) Oratory and Inscribed Stone**

*Access: Along path for 100 yards. Signposted*

The most perfectly preserved of the boat-shaped oratories in Co. Kerry. It has a flat-headed doorway, inside which are stones from which a door or curtain hung, and a small round-headed east window. In shape it resembles an upturned boat, and all its walls slope inwards towards the top. Nearby is a cross-inscribed stone.

JRSAI 27, 1897, 297; Leask, Churches I. 21

Fig. 20 A Guide to the National Monuments of Ireland

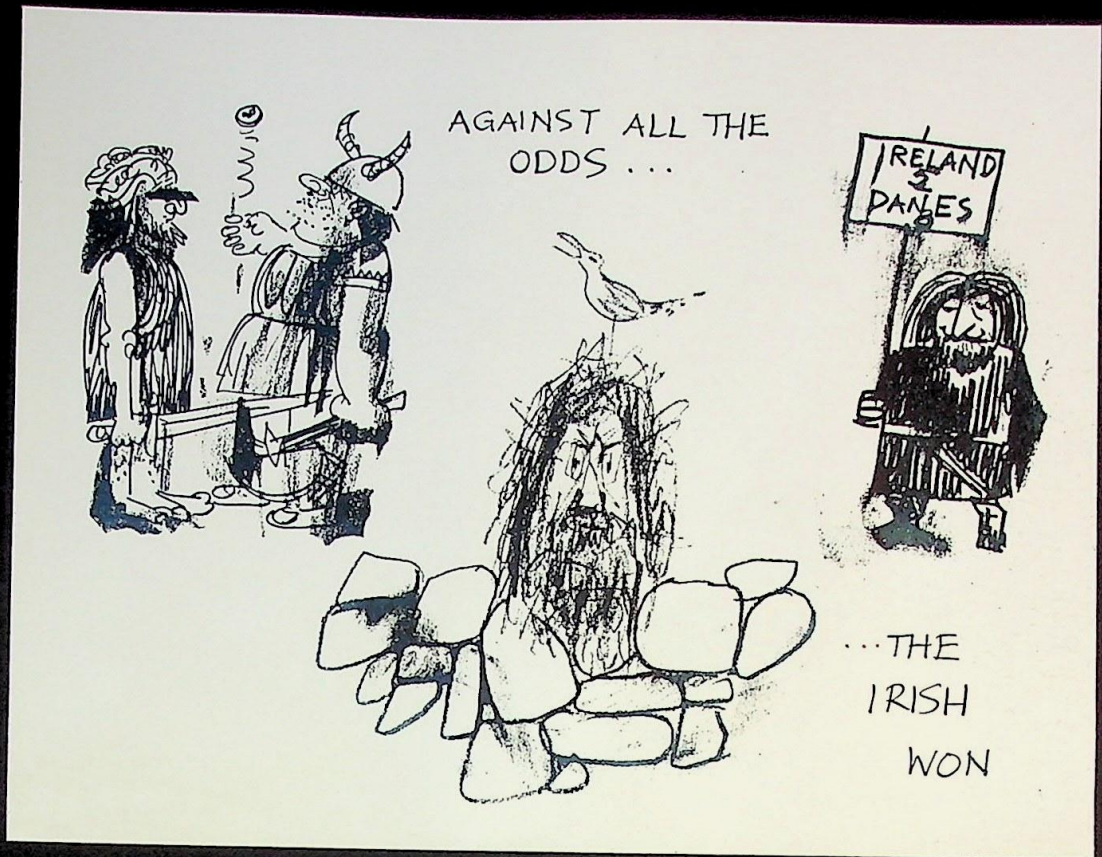


Fig. 21 Eyeful of Ireland

Christianity broke  
out at several  
dates depending  
on which St.  
Patrick arrived  
first.



CHAPTER 11 CAMPBELL'S ILLUSTRATIONS

Besides painting Campbell has also produced cartoons and sketches for many books. His published cartoons go back as far as 1944 when he jointly produced a book with his brother Arthur, Maurice C. Wilks and Patricia Webb. The book was entitled "Ulster in Black and White" (See Fig. 3) and was an attempt to show, through drawings and cartoons, something of life in Ulster during the war without actually putting stress on the fight itself but rather on the people and the ordinary events that were occurring.

Patricia Webb drew magazine type drawings of children, playing and staring into sweetshop windows, Maurice Wilks contributed two portraits, "Seafaring Men" and "A Countryman", and Arthur Campbell had some landscape drawings, from around Ulster. George Campbell's contribution was a series of cartoons of the American soldiers and sailors (See Fig. 3) that were a common sight in the wartime streets and pubs of Belfast. He also pokes fun at the strange clothing and dancing of the civilian Americans.

After this first book he has produced sketches for several others including "Out of Season" (1978), a collection of poems by William J. Hogan and "The Irish Red Cross Junior Annual" in which he included a short article on the appreciation of Modern Art. In 1970 a book was brought out, entitled "A Guide to the National Monuments of Ireland" (See Fig. 20) by Peter Harbison which Campbell enlivened with many, cartoons of Vikings, Normans and Monks. They are simple, quick, line drawings done in both pencil or ink, smudged to give a wash effect. Their witty interpretations of Irish history cannot fail to amuse. Along a similar line is his "Eyeful of Ireland" (Fig. 21),

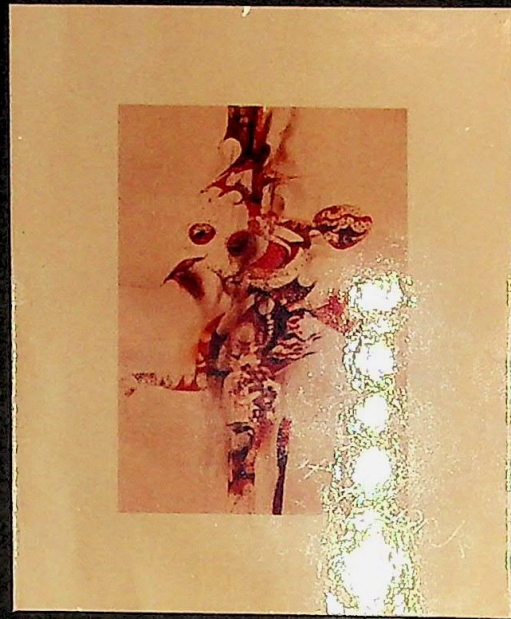


Fig. 22 Shifting Forms (1972)

which is totally written and illustrated by Campbell and was published by Allen Figgis and Company in 1973. In fifty-six short pages Campbell recaps the course of Irish history from the first human settler in 6000 B.C. to the present day. It is full of amusing sketches and reworked photographs with a sharp-witted commentary.

#### CHAPTER 12 CAMPBELL'S ABSTRACTS

When Campbell first began to paint his work was quite realistic in approach. (See Fig. 1, 4) But over the years he made a steady progression towards abstraction. He gradually moved away from just painting what he saw until in later work he made a mental abstraction of the textures, the light and colour and composed them into a series of complicated patterns and shapes (See Fig. 6).

Sometimes Campbell has turned towards total abstraction. These paintings are probably his least successful as they tend to be rather cold and mechanical in appeal. Perhaps if he had not responded so vividly to the people, music and towns of Spain and Connemara he might have become purely an abstract painter. Nevertheless it was necessary for Campbell, like a musician practising his scales, to experiment and exercise in form, texture and pure colour.

In "Shifting Forms" (1972) (See Fig 22) Campbell used his good sense of design. The painting has a vertical thrust with the viewers eye being carried down through the spiralling, Kaleidoscopic movement of colour. Coloured inks are used in areas of dots and lines, some curvilinear and others straight that move down throughout the painting. The downward movement is counter balanced by meandering



Fig. 23 Still Life at my Window, Malaga

lines of dots which fade out towards the right and left hand side of the picture. He then drew a wet brush over his picture which caused the existing ink to flow with the brush creating a softening effect about the composition.

Another abstract painting "Still Life at my Window, Malaga" (1961) (See Fig. 23) is very similar in composition to "Still Life" (See Fig. 9) painted a year earlier. Both paintings are a composition of several objects - an easel and a table with a bowl of flowers and vegetables on top. A light breeze blows a transparent curtain into the room. They are both made up of a series of vertical shapes and lines as are many of his paintings during the sixties.

Of the two, "Still Life" has more definition of subject whereas "Still Life at my Window, Malaga" is more abstract in composition yet the viewer can still discern the shape of white in the background as a window and the easel which appears transparent as it echoes the window's edge and bright exterior and then blends into the dark background of the top right hand corner. One is somehow reminded of Rene Magritte's painting "The Human Condition 1" where the canvas placed at the window becomes the scene he is painting. In "The Human Condition 1", Magritte tries to formulate the contradiction between three dimensional space which objects occupy in reality and the two dimensional space that the canvas represents.

Campbell too is interested in the dimensional relationship between the subject and the canvas and represents this through placing the foreground and background on a single plane, binding the two together by using similar colours and tonal values as in "Connemara" (See Fig. 6) where the dark blue of the sky is echoed in the landscape. Campbell builds



up his paintings in a series of complicated patterns, like building blocks one on top of the other which completely dissipates distance and dimension.

A good friend of George Campbell who uses a similar approach is Arthur Armstrong. Armstrong is a landscape painter who has worked considerably in the West of Ireland as well as accompanying Campbell to Spain several times. Armstrong's main source of inspiration are the naturally complicated patterns, textures and forms found in Connemara. Like Campbell he saw the endless variations in them that are ideal for translation to canvas.

One has to see Armstrong's paintings in the flesh as they do not lend themselves to slide or photograph. Armstrong builds up his paintings into a series of patterns bringing out certain areas in relief. Textured rocks and fields are built up in blocks of muted browns, greens and greys giving his paintings a weighty rhythmic quality.

#### CHAPTER 13 CAMPBELL'S USE OF COLOUR, LIGHT AND MOVEMENT

The colours Campbell used varied considerably with his subject matter. From the cool blues and greys of his Connemara landscapes (See Fig. 6) to the fiery reds and oranges of his Spanish scenes (See Fig. 7). In his early paintings like "Slack Day Smithfield" (See Fig. 1) and "Claddagh Duff, Connemara" (See Fig. 4) where he first began to use oil paints his colours tended to be dull and murky with no great contrast of light and dark. As his painting skills developed he began also to travel to Spain where he became more aware of colour and light. His later paintings like "Blind Flamenco Guitarist" (See Fig. 12)

became a dazzling contrast of dark and light.

Many of his paintings use this dramatic contrast of colour. "Still Life at my Window, Malaga" (See Fig. 23) and "Holy Week Procession" (1978) (See Fig. 24) were painted with nearly twenty years between them yet they are quite similar in colour and tone. Both use night shades of deep purple and black with bright highlights of white so that the paintings become a play of negative and positive shapes.

One noticeable difference between Campbell's paintings of the sixties and seventies is the shape and movement within them. In his early paintings (See Fig. 9, 12) the composition is built up in a series of strong vertical shapes and lines. He used a thick paintbrush in a downward thrust to apply the paint in large squares of colour. When he had finished the colour he then delineated the subject with heavy outlines. He used fast, nervous lines roughly applied in thick strokes of dark paint. This can be seen in paintings like "Blind Flamenco Guitarist" (See Fig. 12) and "Still Life" (See Fig. 9).

In another picture "Women Singing, Malaga" (Fig. 13) Campbell applied the paint in thick heavy strokes. The light source is the candles held by the women which throw bright highlights on the women's clothing and faces, a sharp contrast to their dark background. The contrast between dark and light is relieved by swift, vibrant lines that are scratched into the painting with a needle.

In Campbell's paintings during the seventies the vertical and angular hardness is replaced by a more circular and flowing movement. In "Burnt Out Car" (See Fig. 19) the



Fig. 24 Holy Week Procession

smoke creates a swirling motion around the car. There is a similar movement in "Holy Week Procession" (See Fig. 24). The viewers eyes is directed in from the right of the picture. The crowds lined along the road make a curving progression toward the centre of the painting being continued by the musicians and the row of houses. Eventually the eye is directed around and out to the right again. As in "Burnt Out Car" the circular motion forms a frame for the focal point of the picture in this case the statue of the Virgin Mary.

### CHAPTER 13 CONCLUSION

In his thirty years of work George Campbell has produced many fine paintings. Campbell started painting during the Blitz at the age of twenty-four. His development came when he discovered the West of Ireland with its wild expanse of mountain, sky, lake and barren outcrops of rock. In his first Connemara landscapes he tended to outline and define each object in his painting to give them shape and dimension (See Fig. 1, 4). As the years went by he began to loose the hard edges of line and instead of each little field and building being individually structured he began to summarise the landscape into an amalgam of shape and colour. He used thick brushes to apply the paint in large patterned forms.

Campbell loved using strong contrasts of colour. In his figurative (See Fig. 12) and landscape paintings (See Fig. 4) his colours range from dazzling white highlights to jet black with soft blues and greens intermingling. He loved to paint the dramatic changes in the weather, the dark thundery clouds parting to allow patches of brilliant sunlight through and reflecting on the landscape.

The use of lines are very important in Campbell's paintings. In his Still Life paintings (See Fig. 8, 9) and figurative painting (See Fig. 12, 14) he uses large areas of colour which he later outlines in bold, heavy brushstrokes. Campbell builds up the scene on the canvas with a series of patterns and textures, the tone and pattern of the background being echoed in the foreground giving a two-dimensional patchwork of colour and light.

During the seventies he loses the angular hardness and becomes more concerned with circular motion in his paintings as in "Holy Week Procession", "Dun Aengus" and his paintings of the "Troubles" in the North.

Some of his best paintings are his portraits. He had a good understanding of humanity and he was concerned with appearances as in his images of the clown, the mask and the man behind the mask. He was an excellent draughtsman which comes through in his portraits. He could, with the use of a few deft lines, describe the man and his surroundings as in "Two Men Digging, Galway" (See Fig. 15)

George Campbell died on 19th May 1979 and was buried in Larragh near his town of birth, Arklow, Co. Wicklow. He was still painting many fine paintings up until his death such as "Holy Week Procession" (See Fig. 24).

In the context of Irish Painting Campbell's personal application of modern European movements contributed to the introduction of a less conventional method and style. His work complimented that of his Northern Contemporaries and together they brought about a fresh approach to Irish artistic endeavour.

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