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A SELECTIVE VIEW

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INTRODUCTION

A conflicting idea appears in the discussion of Irish art, the actual Irishness of it, the introspective woven path. Brian O'Doherty has defined Irishness as a "restless fix on the unimportant, an atmospheric mode"¹ Anne Crookshank and the Knight of Alan, have notice a preoccupation or preponderance of animal decoration in Irish art.

What is Irish art? Is there an Irish culture? Is it visible? What meets the eye on returning to Ireland from elsewhere, People whose faces read 'Occupied' rather than 'Vacant' even if the occupied force is often destructive. People who always look wind blown untidy, with inhabited faces. It is difficult to abstract an Irish culture from the most persistent fact of Irish life; the climate. The fact that the Irish climate changes hourly throughout the year has bred a habit of uncertainty and distrust a reluctance to be involved in planning and organisation a reliance on, even preference for the ad-hoc solution to problems, a gift for improvisation, paradoxically linked to extreme conservatism in social and commercial mores.

One wonders why there is no sense of cultural security in the visual arts as yet. A very important factor is its geographical location. Ireland is not connected to mainland Europe, this stops the flow of ideas so when they eventually reach Ireland they are out of date and diluted. Irish artists instead take on any introverted perspective and never ending soul-searching with the hope of coming to terms with the Irishness of Irish art and the constant opposition to international art.

In the visual arts a curious squint develops in the eye of the beholder, beauty must only be Irish and 'Irish' must only signify a particular style, neither abstract not figurative but a state of blurred purgatory in between. It is said to portray a particular poetic imagination which I am in agreement with. However, I also believe that multiple international influences can be seen. Mainie Jellett (1897 - 1944) and Evie Hore (1894 - 1955) both developed their artistic style from late Cubism under Albert Gleizes during their studies in France.

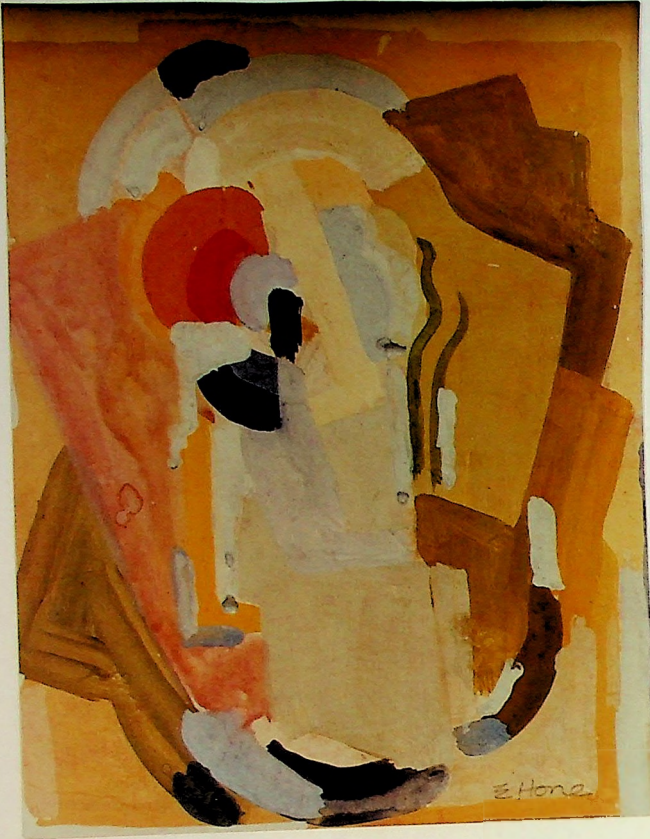
The imagery of modern Ireland developed in an interesting way. Irish painters and sculptors, as well as coming to terms with the varieties of abstraction in the early years of the century, felt the responsibility of articulating a ".....national consciousness.....".² European artists on the other hand were not concerned with problems of cultural identity. This aspect of its character distinguishes modern Irish art from that produced in Western Europe. To be an artist born and brought up in Ireland, is to be part of a certain culture which cannot be thrown aside suddenly. Irish artists were very aware of their Irish roots. It is very difficult to disregard ones roots. It may seem odd, to claim as Irish an artist who spent most or all of their working life abroad and adapted him/herself to the manner of life and the artistic style of the people with where he/she lived.

Forced by circumstance to emigrate, the achievements of these artists testify to the presence of artistic talents in Ireland.

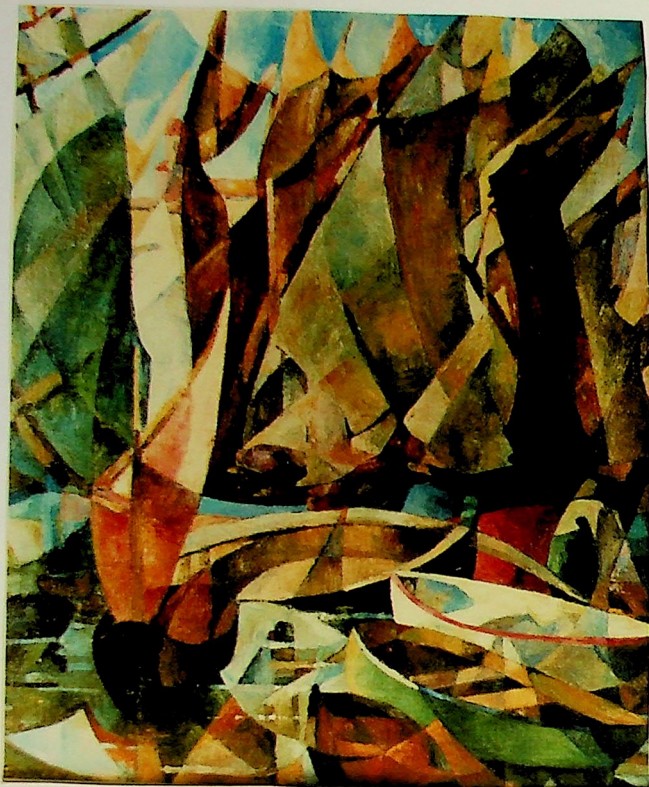
They would not have gone abroad to develop their talents, if they had not displayed these talents in Ireland first. It works the other way also; if they had stayed in this country they would not have become the artists they did. Artists of merit have to depart to win credit for other countries, while many, without the merit or enterprise to do this, have to abandon all hope of being any more than amateurs.

Ireland alone had to come to terms with itself at the same time as significantly contributing to European modernism. It became accepted that your Irish painters must travel abroad in pursuit of their craft training. Artists like Sarah Purser; Mary Swanzy, Evie Hone and Mainie Jellett travelled to France where they participated in Group shows with contemporary European artists of the time i.e. Picasso, Barague, Gleizes. To some extent, their heritage had to be confronted and subdued before the modern vision could emerge, in paintings like 'Scene of Boats & Sails' (Fig 1) and 'Young Woman with Flowers' (Fig 2) by Mary Swanzy; and Evie Hone's 'Composition' (Fig 3) which show beginnings of change in Irish art. Here French influences can be seen, and although both artists were outside the civilized 'hedonism' of French painting in general, these are paintings in the style of Lake Cubists like Delauray.

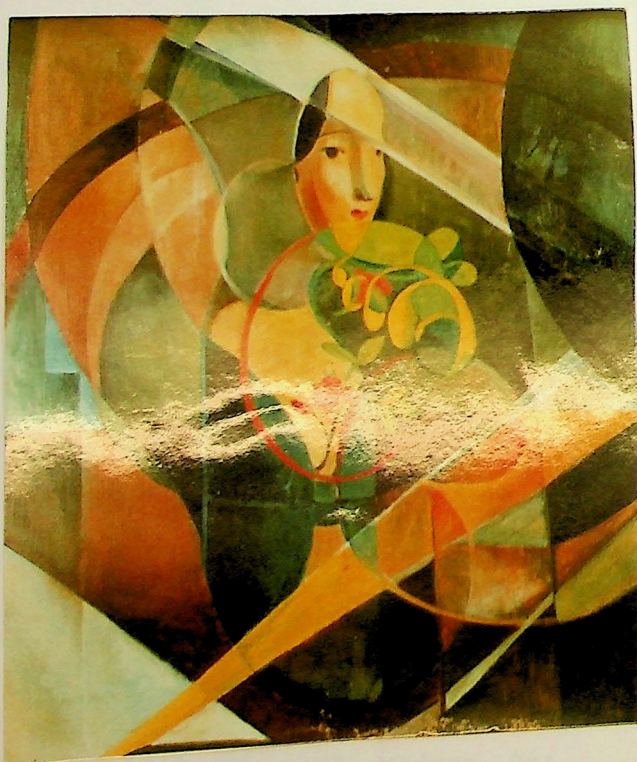
In the development of the visual arts in Ireland in this time women appear prominent in two contexts. As artists they introduced new styles and perfected older ones, playing an important role in the active ferment of artistic progress. As the initiators and organisers of groups and societies they also contributed substantially, making possible creative activity by others.



3. COMPOSITION



1. 'SCENES OF BOATS & SAILS'



2. 'YOUNG WOMAN WITH FLOWERS'

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The women artists who emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, Mary Swanzey, Evie Hone, Norah McGuinness (1903 - 1980); tended to come from upper-class families. They continued a tradition of travelling to Europe to complete their artistic training, as I have already mentioned. The ground work was laid at this time for the growth and development of many visual arts institutions. Sarah Purser for example; is important not only for her painting skills which were direct and vigorous as her personality way, and throughout 1890's was the most highly regarded portraitist in Ireland; but for her involvement in the foundation of the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, and for setting up her stained glass studio in which younger artists were trained in this medium. Lady Holding a Rattle (Fig 4) and Le Petit Dejeuner (Fig. 5) are examples of highly regarded portraits.

In this essay, I am primarily interested in the development and introduction of new styles in painting by seven Irish women painters, whom I believe have contributed through their varied activities, to the development of Irish culture and Irish women painters in the international context. Those artists are Sarah Purser (1848 - 1943); Mary Swanzey (1882 - 1979); Mainie Jellett (1897 - 1944); Evie Hone (1894 - 1955); Norah McGuinness (1903 - 1980); Nano Reid (1905 - 1982); Camille Souter (1929 - .)

Each of these artists contribute significantly to the history of the state of the arts in Ireland today. I shall be looking at Sarah Purser's education, her involvement in the foundation of the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art. Another project



4. 'LADY HOLDING A RATTLE'



5. 'LE PETIT DEJENEUR'

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undertaken by her was the foundation of a studio for production of stained glass, also her career as a painter. Evie Hone and Mainie Jellett were important in the light of the first major breaking point in Irish painting, having been introduced to Cubism at the Academy of Andre Lhote in Paris. Mary Swanzy was a fashionable portrait painter who again adopted Cubist strategies in her paintings but never fully accepted the 'ism'. Then the generation of artists who succeeded Hone and Jellett were subject to the impact of Ireland's isolation in the years after the Second World War; Norah McGuinness bridges the gap between the style of Reid and Souter and the earlier styles influenced by Cubism. Norah McGuinness's preoccupation with landscape was to be fashionable for the next 'poetic genre' of Nano Reid and Camille Souter.

FOOTNOTES

1. Brian O'Doherty, Circa 1979, page 27

CHAPTER I

1.a. Sarah Purser (1848 - 1943)

sarah was born on 22nd March 1848, the eight child of Benjamin purser and Anne Mallet. Her parents family were well established since the previous century in Dublin business circles, the Purser's in the brewing industry, the Mallet's as metal founders and engineers.

At the age of thirteen, Sarah was sent to school in Switzerland for two years. There she learned fluent French, studied Italian and music, and bought herself a supply of paints and brushes. However, nothing is known of her work as a painter until 1872, when four of her paintings were hung in the annual exhibition of the Royal Hibernian Academy. Soon after that her father's business began to fail and Sarah was faced with earning her own living. Her choice of career may have been influenced by the example of her mother's relative, Sir Fredrick William Burton (1816 - 1900) who was a highly successful artist at that time. Sarah left Dungarvan in Co Waterford in the Summer of 1873 to train for her chosen profession.

It is not clear where Sarah began her studies, though it was probably in Dublin at the Kildare Street Art School. She was certainly living in Dublin when next she had pictures exhibited at the R.H.A. in 1878. The following Winter she went to Paris and spent six months attending the Academy Julian. Instruction there was limited, and took no account of the brilliant work then being produced by the Impressionists. But the training was a vast improvement on that available

in Dublin. Sarah was working with girls of all nationalities, French, English, Scandanavian, Swiss, Spanish. Among her fellow students was the Swiss girl Louise Breslan (1854 - 1927) with whom she shared an apartment. Sarah was older than most of the students and was not a rich girl, living for six months on thirty pounds which her brother had given her. Drawing from memory or studying from nature in the open-air were unusual. Sarah's training was conventional but sound, and this is what she required for her future career. In 1879, from Paris she sent two pictures to the R.H.A. exhibition, one represented a cheerful barefooted boy in ragged clothes, with a hank of onions, before a background of palings. This sort of genre painting was popular in Sarah's Parisian circle. It drew favourable comment from the art critics of two of the three Dublin daily newspapers. Sarah was launched.

In the Spring of 1880 both the R.H.A. and the Irish Fine Arts Society exhibited Sarah's work. She showed a variety of pictures; genre, flower-pieces, and portraits. The three Dublin critics were enthusiastic. They applied the words 'easy', 'natural', and 'graceful' to her paintings, but above all were impressed with the 'vigorous' expressive brush work¹ and the 'crisp' and 'decisive' use of the palette knife. This chorus of praise was to continue throughout the 1880s during which decade Sarah received favourable mention in at least seventy press reviews. What attracted the reviewers to Sarah's work was its modernity. It may have been only relatively modern by Parisian standards, but in Ireland it was absolutely comtemporary in subject, arrangement, and handling.

In fact by 1881 Sarah was in full stride as an artist. At the R.H.A. that Spring she exhibited her first real masterpiece, a pastel portrait of her nephew Hugh Geoghegan (Fig. 6). Commission and sale of portraits gave Sarah the means to make a visit to Paris soon after 1881. She stayed with Louise Breslan, and painted another picture, a portrait in oils of their Italian friend Marie Feller, a professional singer, entitled *Le Petite Dejeneur* (Fig. 5).

Sarah's career continued to be marked by success. During 1883, she had more than twenty pictures hung in Dublin exhibitions and one of them was hailed by the *Daily Express* as the portrait of the year in the R.H.A. show. John Butler Yeats (1839 - 1922) who later painted some of the finest Irish portraits, wrote to her that Summer commenting that she had more vitality in her character than he. In 1844, she executed a charming group portrait in pastel of four children as part of a commission from an English patron; *Children of Sir Robert Sheffield, Bart* (Fig. 7), another picture was hung in the Royal Academy in London in 1885.

Throughout the 1880's, Sarah was the most highly regarded portraitist in Ireland. John Yeats was in England, where he was to remain until Sarah herself rescued him from obscurity. Her younger relative, Sir Walter Osborne, a painter of exquisite genre pictures, began to accept portrait commissions on a serious basis in the early nineties. Even he was not considered of Sarah's calibre. By the late 1890's, Sarah was justly renowned amongst her compatriots as an artist



6. 'HUGH GEOGHEGAN'



7. 'CHILDREN OF SIR ROBERT SHEFFIELD, BART'

at the very top of her profession. Further, her modernity, vigour, initiative and intelligence were all acknowledged. Both as an artist and a person, Sarah had earned high standing in the Irish art world as the turn of the century approached.

This was emphasised in 1899 when she was the only woman on the organising committee of the Art Loan Exhibition, which introduced the Dublin public to the work of Courbet, Corot, Manet, Monet, Degas and many other modern painters. The quality of this exhibition was high, several of the paintings shown are now in the public collections of Dublin and London. Sarah's involvement in such an enterprise was in keeping with her nature and outlook. Having achieved high standing in the community by talent, hard work, and intelligence, she used her position to good effect.

Her first undertaking was another exhibition, held in 1901. This time the painters represented were John Yeats and Nathaniel Hone (1831 - 1917), though Yeats was then sixty-two and Hone seventy, neither had yet received the recognition which Sarah considered was their due. Realising that neither of them would take the initiative to correct this injustice, Sarah stepped in. She rented a gallery and filled it with pictures which she extracted from the artists or borrowed from their few patrons. She had a catalogue printed and wrote a foreward for it herself with warm and perceptive appreciation of the two painters' qualities. The final sentence expressed one of her cherished hopes: 'If we are ever to have a distinctive Irish school, it may, perhaps, find its source in these large-hearted works.' ²

Meanwhile, Sarah was planning her next project, the foundation of a studio factory for the production of stained glass. As an artist who had had to make her own way in the world, Sarah also resented the fact that most of the bad material was imported, while artists here were under employed. Stained glass was the area of church decoration which had particularly interested Sarah, as it bore some relation to her own art of painting. She wished to raise the standard of the windows being erected in Irish churches by having them designed and executed by people, who would be both artists and craftsmen, and she wished to ensure that these artistic craftsmen were Irish too. Being Sarah, she did not merely wish; she saw an opportunity, and she took action.

As always, her actions were inspired by the desire to benefit art itself, her fellow artists, and her native land, and as always, her actions were both altruistic and commonsense. She named her foundation An Tur Gloine in keeping with its nationalist outlook. She financed it, and she administered it without recompense from its opening in 1903 until her death forty years later.

Despite her long involvement with the industry, Sarah only carried out a single window herself. Appropriately for the person who pioneered the venture, it is the first window seen by those who visit Saint Brendan's Cathedral, and represents the Saint himself on his legendary voyage. Sarah quickly decided that she was not a stained glass worker, and just as was magnanimous in donating the enterprise to the artists, she also did not take a share of the commission which An Túr attracted. For her own artistic satisfaction, she still had her own work as a painter to rely on.

sarah's output of painting continued. Although the volume of her work was curtailed because of the amount of time devoted to other projects, the artistic quality of the work did not suffer, if anything, it rose.

Within the next few years she displayed the range of her talents with canvases as diverse as her sensitive rendering of, her moving and rugged portrayal of her old frield Michael Davitt, on his deathbed, and several quite beautiful paintings of young women.

In 1908, Sarah, still full of life, threw her weight behind Hugh Lane's efforts to secure a permanent gallery of modern art in Dublin. In 1914, her position of eminence was endorsed when she was appointed to the Board of the National Gallery. There she served, diligently through the difficult years of the War of Independence. When the Irish Government took control in 1921, her presence on the Board was a decided asset to the Gallery, because for more than twenty years she had been a close friend of the new head of Government, Arthur Griffith.

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May 1923 saw the opening of an exhibition of her work acclaimed by all the critics, the catalogue appropriately bore the title 'Pictures Old and New'. Sarah was Eighty when she closed her career as an artist.

Sarah's pastel of Maud Gonne (Fig. 8) painted in 1898 shows a mass of auburn hair which strikes one as very warm. Maud had earlier posed as model for one of Sarah's subject-pictures,



8. 'MAUDE GONNE'

but like most representations of Maud, that painting gave no real idea of Maud's 'Beauty like a tightened Bow' to quote W.B. Yeats the poet.³ She had a European reputation as a beauty, not so with this painting. But the pastel portrait shows the classical features, flashing glance, queenly bearing, and above all else the vital magnetism which dazzled men and woman alike. Sarah's brilliant analysis of Maud's appearance and personality is equalled by her technique, masterly in its economy and freshness.

Maud's portrait was done during the Summer of 1898, when she stayed with Sarah while recuperating from a fractured arm. One of their visitors was W.B. Yeats, son of Sarah's old friend, John, and an ardent admirer of Maud, who inspired some of his finest poetry. Sarah began a portrait of W.B. to match Maud's and although only the head is finished, it captures the poet's character with perception. The face is sensitive and sensual, eager but reserved, consciously poetic with raven locks and pince-nez, but with real inner vision in those skilled eyes. Not even his father portrayed him as well as this, for his beautiful portrait of W.B. is outrageously flattering. Sarah was by nature incapable of flattery. She paid the poet a worthier tribute than that; she did him justice. William Butler Years (Fig. 9).

Justice should be done to Sarah who worked hard, long and generously for every aspect of the visual arts in Ireland, and achieved important results as a patron and promoter of art and artists. But all this was merely an extension of her own dedication to painting. As a painter, she had very



9. 'WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS'

real talent, a keen eye and a perceptive mind for observation
a strong and skilful hand for execution, as this brief review
of a segment of her work reveals.

Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine, Vol. 21 - 2 - 1928; Irish Times 21 - 2 - 1928; Daily Express 12 - 2 - 1928.

2. George Bernard Shaw's catalogue forwarded; John Yeste, Nathaniel
Shaw, 1901.

3. Raymond Conwell, W.B. Yeats, literature in perspective;
Wm. Brothers Limited, London, 1909.

FOOTNOTES

1. Dr. O'Grady; Sarah Purser; Galway University Freeman's Journal 18th - 2 - 1880; Irish Times 21 - 2 - 1880; Daily Express 16 - 3 - 1880.
2. Sahara Purser catalogue forward; John Yeats, Nathaniel Hone, 1901.
3. Raymond Conwell, W.B. Years, literature in perspective; Evans Brothers Limited, London, 1969.

CHAPTER

I.b. The basis of modern art

Two young women, whose careers form the ~~basiss~~ basis of modern Irish art, are Mainie Jellett (1897 - 1944) and Evie Hone (1894 - 1955). Both came from prominent Anglo-Irish families. Mainie Jellett received her first painting lessons from Elizabeth Yeats. She first met her life long friend and fellow worker, Evie Hone, when she was twenty and studying under Walter Sickert at the Westminster Technical Institute in London. Together they travelled to Paris in 1921 to study at the Academy of Andre Lhote, where they learned the fundamentals of Cubism.

At the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin where Mainie was a full time student at the age of seventeen, Willian Orphen was a visiting teacher. He was in charge of the life drawing classes. After two years she went to London to Westminster School where her teacher was Walter Sickert. Here "..... for the first time drawing and composition came alive to me, and with Sickert's help, I began to understand the work of the old Masters. Sickert being in the direct line of French Impressionist painting was an excellent stepping stone to my next revolution, Paris¹ and L'hote's Studio. "

In Paris, Cubism the new aesthetic had entered on its second phase. Twelve years before when the first paintings in this style were exhibited, they created such a force that angry protests were heard in the Council Municipal of Paris and questions were asked in the Chambre des Deputes.

yet the Cubist theory of art was no more than a call to order, an attempt to restore painting to its patrimony. Since the Renaissance preoccupation with the "subject" - naturalistic representation of landscape, portraiture, still-life, genre - had absorbed the attention of painter and patron. Its chief reaction was to incite sentimentality to the detriment of technical skill, in a word, of painting itself.

It was a recall to the essential principles of classical art at a time when classical art was dissolving into slap-dash, though striking formlessness. This was the most obvious feature of the Cubist movement. The geometrical forms of natural objects, of landscape, of human figure were analysed, according to the "inner laws of the thing observed", in the process of bringing back an aesthetic order to painting. It had been the practice of the Old Masters to mark out the fundamental geometrical basis of the natural forms on their canvas and of the over-all plan of the picture.

In Lhote's studio Mainie Jellett was introduced to modified version of Cubist theory based on realistic form. To her it seemed a compromise. She worked out these lines but she was not going as far as she wanted towards the full understanding of now-representational art. After two sessions, she left l'Academie Lhote.

Just then, Albert Gleizes had returned to Paris from New York, where his work had been acclaimed. In the Studio at Puteaux, Mainie worked with Albert, who was

one of the original members of the first Cubist group. Gleizes had already begun research for a method by which to regain, plastically, in line and colour, the lyrical and spiritual qualities lost through the materialism of the grandiose manner, the outward appearance and virtuosity.

Mainie Jellett collaborated with her Master in working out experiments in painting - without subject. The theory of Translation and Rotation was the first discovery. By this means nobility and rhythm were established. The living movement of the sight was attracted and drawn into the painting through the melodic line making it a visual art for the delight of the eye and the enchantment of the mind.

In 'Homage to Mainie Jellett' Albert Gleizes wrote: 'It was 1921, I was far from teaching anyone other than myself. The first manifestations of Cubism were already ten years old'² Gleizes was now at the point where he was about to eliminate the subject totally from his canvas. He describes how Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone came to his studio and insisted on working under his guidance. They began working together everyday and experimented in paint without subject. The initial period was difficult as Gleizes sought to articulate his ideas. As time progressed, however the task became easier; Gleizes continues "...In 1922, I wrote 'Peinture et ses Lois, Ce Qui Devait Sortir de Cubism', an imperfect study in many ways and certainly incomplete, but nevertheless, it its general structure

and outline incontrovertible. I owe it to Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone and even today, my feeling of gratitude shows no signs of leaving me....."³

Mainie Jellett's work was for sometime severely non-representational and experimental. Gradually, she gained a wider and more emotional power of expression in the new manner. The study of colour-harmony following concentration on two-dimensional form laid the first foundations for her work. Jellett's collaboration in these experiments during the twenties left a strong impression on her mind and on her art. Their aim was, she wrote, "....to delve deeply into the inner rhythms and constructions of natural forms to create on their pattern, to make a work of art a natural creation complete in itself like a flower or any natural organism, based on the eternal laws of harmony, balance and ordered movement (rhythm). We sought the inner principle and not the outward appearance....."⁴

Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone returned to paris every year until 1930, to work with Gleizes. By eliminating the primary of subject from the canvas, they experimented with form and colour to create spatial relationships. Their use of colour was energetic and the forms were juxtaposed to create movement and depth within the picture plane.

In 1924, they held their first joint exhibition in Dublin. The critics reacted with disbelief and hostility, but the two artists remained undaunted by this. As they

developed, their activities diverged: Jellett continued to work in oil and water colour. Hone continued to exhibit in group shows and on her own, but her development took her away from painting into stained glass, this interest in glass grew further through visits to French Cathedrals. In spite of a physical handicap, the lack of understanding of her artistic principles on the part of Sarah Purser, Evie Hone joined An Tur Gloine in about 1932, and with the help of Michael Healy established herself as one of the most prominent and successful religious artists, executing commissions abroad as well as in Ireland.

Her early training in abstract Cubist art was of value in the new medium to which she applied herself. The potentials of stained glass contained elements which she had been searching for; depth of tone and colour and dualism of design arising from the requirements of the technique in which the colour pieces must be joined by lead strips. The fact that Evie moved on from Academy of André Lhote to Gleizes and the purity of form and colour, is significant in her dealings with stained glass. In her turn, however, she returned in style to a severely representational art under the very strong influence of Ronald. This influence was absorbed and modified during her last and greatest period of work, and many influences and images in her art were synthesized into some magnificent works, including the 'Deposition' in the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art in Dublin, and the great Eton College window (Fig. 10).

When the co-operative An Túr Gloine was dissolved in the



10. 'ETON COLLEGE WINDOW'



11. 'SNOW AT MARLEY'

1940's Evie Hone established a workshop at Marley, Rathfarnham. In her leisurely hours, she clearly enjoyed painting works like the small oil Snow at Marley (Fig. 11). The colouring may seem strange but in fact it is a true description of tones visible at Marley in Winter.

Meanwhile, Mainie Jellett combined the practice of painting with the roles of teacher, critic and an advocate of stylistic change. She made broadcastings on art on Radio Eireann, lectured and published essays. She had a clear vision of artists role in society; instead of being a recluse, the artist should, through creativity be a contributor to all aspects of society.

Despite Mainie Jellett's and Evie Hone enormous influences, Cubism was never fully accepted in Ireland. Artists who were influenced such as Mary Swanzy (1882 - 1979) and May Guinness (1863 - 1955) went on to develop their own personal styles.

FOOTNOTES

1. Eilean Ni Chuilleanain; Irish Women Images and Achievements, Arlen House (The Womens Press 1985)
2. Ibid:
3. Ibid:
4. Eileen McCarvill, Mainie Jellett, Catalogue.

CHAPTER I

I.C. Cubism never fully accepted.

Mary Swanzy was a remarkable painter with a razor sharp mind, virtually a legend in her own time. Her father was Sir Henry Swanzy a leading occultist in Dublin. She was born in Merrion Square in 1882, and had as she said herself "....the great privilege of growing up in a completely Georgian city. Everything was in proportion, the size of the square related to the width of the street and the height of the house, even to the balustrades and the door. Everything was in complete proportion"¹

"It was a wonderful education, living in a world of art all the time, you absorbed it continually. The people of today do not know what it was like to be brought up in time like that, it was one of the most beautiful cities in the world. I am quite sure that being brought up here laid the foundations of my feeling of structure in everything of discipline.² But that Dublin is gone now".

She started to draw and paint as a child. She went to classes run by a Miss Underwood who taught her to paint watercolour and then to a class run by a Miss Webb and by a Miss Manning. She wanted to know how to draw, that was her first interest. Miss Manning had sent students of an earlier generation to Paris and encouraged Mary to go. So Mary Swanzy visited Paris twice in about 1905 and 1906 and entered the Studio of La Grandara where she studied under Délécluse. She also worked at La Grande Chaumiere and at Colarossis Studios with an international atmosphere as at Julians. She studied at

the Louvre, especially on Sunday's when it was free, and became more aware of developments in French painting of that time. In retrospect she remembers this as an exciting time in Paris when French painting can be seen at a stage between Impressionism and Cubism. She liked Renoir, the 'poetic' Impressionist (by whom Evie Hone bought a painting).

She came back to Dublin and her father thought she should follow in the steps of Miss Sarah Purser, but Mary says she was not able. She opened a little studio of her own and tried to teach for a while, but did not like it. Her mother was dead and when her father died three years later, Mary Swanzy decided to see as much of the world as she could. With an interruption of four years for the first World War, she travelled far afield - to the Scandwich Islands, to the United States and Honolulu, and continued to travel as much as possible throughout her life. In the twenties, she set up house with her sister in London in Blackheath. She used to rent her flat and go off on her travels again which brought her to Italy to France, Germany and Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia.

In 1906, after her term finished in Julians, Mary Swanzy attended an informal two week course at a studio in the Valle de Grasse given by 'all the great men'. At first, she did not feel sympathetic towards them, but these painters some of whom later became Cubists, revealed to her what painting really meant and what older artists had forgotten. They led her appreciate Cézanne and reconsider the art of the past, for example Giotto and the early Italians. She developed

an interest in the structure of objects and geometric forms a contrast to the emphasis on detailed development in her style; the influence of Cubism left its mark on her.

Dermot O'Brien describes a visit 1906 (perhaps immediately after her return from Paris)" Went to call on Mary Swanzy, she has been trying experiments in black and white with a view to getting some illustration work to do. She has rather a pleasant fancy of Hubrey Beardeley style - but draws badly, for which I rate her, so that her attempt in a less fantastic style are rather indecorous and sometimes down right bad. I should say that she is a good woman of some character, and if she threw herself seriously into her work might do something with it".³

O'Brien's words are surprising in view of Mary Swanzy's subsequent development. But there is an illustrational quality even in her Inter painting. From her early days she had intended to learn how to draw, in Dublin and Paris. She realised the difficulty, but importance, of drawing well.

Mary Swanzy's early contact with 'Avant - Garde ' French painters is unusual among Irish artists. Despite the development in her style the influence of Cubism did leave its mark on her work. She absorbed Cubist strategies in her paintings, though they became with her decorative elements which were dropped or reintroduced as her career progressed. This is not the place to discuss her painting in detail; however, it is important to mention the French influences upon her work. Her colour was limpid, warm and sweet though

not nauseatingly so, but much in the manner of Delannay, with whom as well as Gleizes and others she exhibited in the Salone des Independants in 1918. It is likely that she was the first Irish Cubist - although Hone and Jellett studied with Lhote also.

Her earlier sketches of sailing boats and harbour scenes as in 'Docks, Co Kerry' (Fig. 12) are naturalist studies, the forms are simplified into solid planes and painted in bright sunny colours, showing the influence of Cezanne. McGreevy suggests that Swanzy was probably the first Irish painter to reflect the influence of Cezanne. The next stage in her development was in a Cubist style in the 1920 Scenes of Boats and Sails (Fig. 1) show the late Cubism of Delanny Villon and Gleizes, with its bright colours and lines that spiral around a central axis (rather than the early colours of early cubism) and it. profoundly influenced her work for several years. She heightens the cheerful colours of the painted wooden boats and sails and makes a geometric construction of lines, arcs, geometric shapes and overlapping planes, applying thick paint to the canvas. Swanzy had earlier painted boats in Ireland, rather in the manner of Evie Hone, but this is probably one of the number of schemes of fishing boats, painted at St. Tropez.

Young Women with Flowers (Fig. 2) one of the Swanzy's most serene images. Its main abstract formulations stem from the head and shoulders three quarters view of a girl in Breton? headdress. The lines derived from these shapes are elaborated



12. 'DOCKS, CO KERRY'

through foreground floral motifs. This segmentation of the canvas is traversed by dramatic diagonal rays of light which, in one instance, illuminate the girl's forehead. Generally, these do not fracture or disrupt the calm of Swanzys portrayal of a young girl meditating. The mood of the picture, rather than its style is suggestive of Gaugin's work, and it may be that it should be dated close to Swanzys Samoan paintings, which made obvious use of the French masters subject matter. The dating however, remains unresolved, Swanzys contact with the cubists was in the early days of the formation of the style when she was briefly admitted to the circle of Gertude Stein. It appears, however, that only after the Great War did she take on some of the more, radical aspects of modernism. 'Young Woman with Flower', could not have been painted prior to the evaluation of a composite cubo-futurist language that distilled most clearly in purism and orphism.

In the context of Irish painting, Mary Swanzys must be regarded as a remarkable loner who produced a considerable volume of work spanning almost a whole century, and yet who never lost the freshness and integrity of her original vision. Though she moved through a variety of styles from Victorian portraiture to Impressionism to Cubism and so forth, she did so with an authority and honest conviction that was historically logical and entirely in accordance with her life experience.

FOOTNOTES

1. Una Lehane; Irish Times, 29th March 1974.
2. Ibid.
3. Dermot O'Brian interview 1906.

CHAPTER II

11a. (a) Preoccupation with landscape

The generation of artists who succeeded Hone and Jellett was subject to the impact of Ireland's isolation, political, cultural and in the years of the Second World War, military. A distinct style in art developed, which has been as a 'poetic genre' evasive and introspective, influenced by the Irish landscape and soft light. These qualities permeate the work of women artists such as Nano Reid and Camille Souter. But before discussing their painting, I shall consider Norah McGuinness (1903 - 1980) whose work forms a bridge between this style and the earlier one influenced by Cubism.

Born in Derry in 1903, she was the daughter of a coal merchant and ship owner. She went to the Victoria High School in Derry, then run by Misses McKillop, who were noted for their advanced views on education. She also knew what career she intended to follow; she always painted and wanted to become an artist. While still at school she attended life classes at the Derry Technical School but her real artistic training began when she came to Dublin in 1921 and became a student at the College of Art, then known as the Metropolitan School of Art. A year later she won a teaching scholarship which enabled her to stay at the college for several years. The main influence in her college days was Harry Clarke. She was clearly one of his best pupils and her earliest illustrations show considerable influence of his work, though this influence was short lived. It was through Clarke that she had her first commission, which was to illustrate Sterne's 'Sentimental Journey'. The drawings were done largely after her marriage

in 1925 to the poet Geoffrey Phibbs, who is now better known as Geoffrey Taylor.

During one of her visits to London in 1923 or 1924, she saw an exhibition of French Impressionists which excited her enormously and made her feel she had to leave Dublin to study elsewhere even if it were only for a short time. In fact she went to Chelsea Polytechnic for four or five months in 1924 and though she had no definite recollections of what she saw and did then, it must have been during this period that she saw and absorbed the great changes that followed on Impressionism, particularly the simplifications of Cubism which are so apparent in her work in the late twenties.

She went to live in Wicklow and there she completed the Sterve drawings. These were a great success and were reviewed very extensively and well when the book was published in 1926. They still hark back to Harry Clarke; their decorative quality, delicacy and grace are all to some extent dependent on him, though they have more simplicity and more open sense of pattern. After her marriage, she became involved in the exciting literary and theatrical world of Dublin which in the twenties seems to have used the Arts Club as its meeting ground. She knew all the famous figures of the period including W.B. Yeats, Lennox Robinson, who got her husband his job as Carnegie Librarian in Wicklow, and Frank O'Connor who was her husband's assistant. Not surprisingly she became involved in theatrical designing doing the sets and occasionally the costumes for a number of plays including 'The Only Jealousy of Emer' and 'Deirdre' by Yeats and 'From Morn to Midnight' by George

kaiser. The latter which was produced by Denis Johnston for the opening of the Peacock Theatre in 1927 was very well reviewed in the Irish Statesman where the critic says of the sets, 'The Third Scene was notably imaginative, and the fourth a joy'. He also speaks of 'her vivid, appropriate colour!' It is these sets which indicate how much Norah McGuinness had learned on her London visit. They, with the pictures she was painting at the same period (Geoffrey in the Garden) show her knowledge of Cubism. Her asymmetric, jerky lines must have seemed very new and exciting.

Her work for the Yeats plays had also been much praised despite her use of Eastern more than Irish images. Yeats asked her to illustrate his 'Stories of Red Hanrahan and The Secret Rose' which came out in 1927. She had developed a long way from the 'Sentimental Journey' as the 'Red Hanrahan' illustrations are very simple, bold and even stark. Yeats was delighted with them, he says in a letter from Italy, 'they have been a great pleasure to me and are I think exactly right'. Later he adds, 'I like their powerful simplicity'. It is interesting that she uses modern dress for 'Red Hanrahan' and that this is wholly successful. So often it merely looks embarrassing after forty years, but the figures are sufficiently stylised and simplified for the effect to be largely gained through gesture and expressive line. The introductory poem by Yeats, *Sailing to Byzantium* (Fig. 13) is dedicated to Norah McGuinness.

In 1929 her marriage broke up and she decided to go to Paris to study. Mainie Jellett whom she now knew, advised her to go to André Lhote. She spent nearly two years in Paris

13. 'SAILING TO BYZANTIUM'

working under Lhote during which time her style changed considerably. Colour became steadily more important to her and as her favourite mediums in the thirties were watercolours and gouche, line became less vital. She was thinking more in blocks of tone values than in outline. Norah McGuinness went to Paris as an artist with several years of work behind her. She seems therefore to have been less immediately affected by her teacher than one might expect and instead one finds in different drawings a great variety of influences. One cannot say that at any time she was dominated by any one artist and certainly by the time she is exhibiting in London, from 1932 onwards, her own personal style has been involved. Norah McGuinness never became an abstract painter. Instead she turned almost exclusively to landscape painting, which was to be the predominant concern of Irish painters throughout the 1940's and 1950's.

In 1931, she paid a visit of some five months to India to stay with her sister. She returned briefly to Paris, and then to London where she made her home in Hammersmith until 1937. She lived in a flat overlooking the Thames and travelled much in the Home Counties, to North France and every Summer to Donegal where she had a cottage in Rathmullen. Her work was now concentrated on landscape, though she also painted some still lives. Her expressive use of colour and her frequently arbitrary handling of space put a gulf between her work and the academic realist tradition in which she had first studied. But she never seemed to have been tempted by abstraction though many of her London friends turned to it in the mid-thirties, including, John Piper, whose early works has much in common with that of Norah McGuinness.

she showed in Paris at the Galerie Zac and in 1933, had her first one woman show in London at the Wertheim Gallery. Later she showed at Zwemmer's and in mixed shows in the Leicester Galleries and with the London Group. Her work varied at this time from deep brownish hued landscape and still lifes painted with a free vigorous brush, to clear wash drawings giving a simple direct statement. She has little interest in recession and frequently builds her composition up from a prominent motif in the foreground. Her paintings were well reviewed and on the whole, well bought but she still had to make her living designing book jackets and similar commercial work. In 1931 her illustrations to Marie Edgeworth's 'The Most Unfortunate Day of My Life' had more effectively captured the wit and solemnity of the stories but she does not seem to have done any more book illustration til 1951, when she illustrated 'The Shelbourne' for Elizabeth Bowe. Her most recent book illustrations are those for Elizabeth Hamilton's 'An Irish Childhood'. Her qualities as an illustrator lie in her ability to change her style to bring out the work of the author. There is a world of difference between the grandeur of 'The Shelbourne' and the naive charm of 'An Irish Childhood'. In 1936, she designed two frontcloths and Scenes VII for Denis Johnston's production of his own play 'A Bride for the Unicorn' at the Westminster Theatre in London.

Late in 1937, she went to America for the opening in January 1938, of a mixed show by Irish artists in the gallery of Mrs Cornelius J. Sullivan. The other artists were Jack Yeats, Nano Reid, Nathaniel Hone and surprisingly, Edith Somerville. She stayed on in America till 1939 and had a second show,

this time with the Paul Reintart Gallery. From the point of view of Ireland, the most important result of this trip is rather surprising. She became interested in shop window designs, which she had seen in New York attempted by Dali and other famous artists. Later when she had returned to Ireland, she persuaded Brown Thomas to employ her. She returned to live in Ireland permanently in 1939 and though she travels regularly, she has now become a Dubliner through and through.

When she returned to Ireland, though she had been abroad for ten years, her work was well-known as she had exhibited frequently in mixed shows and from 1936, she had had regular one-woman shows at the Gallery in No. 7, St. Stephen's Green. She had kept in touch with her friends. Michael MacLiammour opened her Dublin show in 1939 and Padraic Colum wrote the introduction to the Reinhart Gallery exhibition in New York in the same year. He said that her pictures 'give us both mas and movement'. The most important event of the forties was when she became President of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art, a position she held until 1970 when she and the entire committee resigned voluntarily in order to make way for a younger group of artists, an action indicating her broadmindedness and vision and her dislike of the idea of becoming part of an 'academic establishment'.

In 1950 with Nano Reid, she represented Ireland at the Venice Biennale and one would very much like to see her have a second show there as her work has developed so much in recent years. She continues to have regular one woman shows in London at Leicester and Mercury Galleries, and has been included by

the Arts Council in exhibitions of Irish artists which have been sent abroad. In 1957, Norah McGuinness was further honoured by being elected as Honourary Member of the Royal Hibernian Academy.

During the forties, one senses in much of her work, a romantic decorativeness which in her oils is not always very effective. At times there is a melancholy about her Dublin views, which is very compelling but it is since she gave up watercolour and gouache as mediums for finished paintings, as opposed to sketches that her landscapes have taken on a new importance. In her early days, she used frequently to paint on site. But then turned to making rough chalk sketches with little colour notes in the margin and she has worked these up into oil paintings in her studio. During the fifties, one sees development away from romantic colours into a period of sunlit landscapes of great joyousness which are enormously evocative of the Irish scenery she was painting. At the same time as the predominant colours change, the descriptive quality of the post war landscape alters and Norah McGuinness becomes more preoccupied with describing only the essential features and details of any scene. Gradually, this leads to a simplification and the surface patterning seems to be disappearing. Her forms are less acutely outlined and she now uses a very free, bold brush work which suggests rather than describes the objects in her picture. She has always been a fine colourist and in the latest work she uses colour with greater courage and vigour than ever before. In no sense of the word is she a traditional Irish landscape painter, neither is she specifically interested in country people or

folk culture, but with a few fresh strokes, she evokes a sense of natural objects, sounds, colours and atmosphere and there by creating a landscape art which is far more enduring alive and Irish than all the cottages and turf stacks.

Her 1937 painting of Thames (Fig. 14) is primarily concerned with the simplification of forms, using a very large brush marks to creat blocks of colour. This is inclined to be seen as a decorative pattern making but is an important element on the picture plane. Hard Winter (Fig. 15) painted in 1961 is a much later stage in Norah McGuinness's work, but the same basic approach to application of paint still applies. The background of Hard Winter (Fig. 15) shows influences by the Cubists, large geometric shapes with line to emphasise contours indicate a highly personal adaptation of Lhote and his school of teaching. Very little linear perspective exists in this painting and the blackbird in the foreground is typical of how she deals with the figure in her work very sharply outlined. The most important element being the pattern of the picture plane.



14. 'THAMES'



15. 'HARD WINTER'

CHAPTER II

Ib. Poetic Visionary

As Norah McGuinness (1903 - 1980) was to be predominantly concerned with landscape Nano Reid (1905 - 1982) had the same preoccupation with landscape, though she also painted portraits. Sean O'Falain describes her thus '.....poetic visionary, writing in code things behind the seen surface, an imagination nurtured in the Boyne Valley whose rich uplands and ancient stones murmur ancestral memories..... She never describes she indicates, hints, suggests, but once we get the hand of her private code, she is just as lucid as painters who speak openly through things made recognisable at a glance.'

Thomas McGrevy, writing in The Irish Times in 1942 mentions other aspects of her work '.....had varied richness of invention, especially in the matter of colour, is balanced by an unusual economy in the means employed to express it. With a few strokes of her brush, she can make boats at rest, seem funny and beautiful at oncea vivacious and touching poetry of effect which recalls the art of Raoul Dufy, though there is no trace of any debt to the distinguished Frenchman; Miss Reid's work is more solid than his.'

Nano Reid was born in Drogheda, Co Louth in 1905. In the nineteen twenties she won a scholarship to the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin where she spent four or five years. Like Norah McGuinness, she was influenced by Harry Clark, Patrick Tuohy, Leo Whelan and John Keating who were teachers there. But it was, she said, Harry Clarke who impressed her most. "It was a joy to watch him work". Like so many of

her contemporaries, her early works were illustrations in the Clarke manner such as those shown when she first exhibited at the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1925, pictures with titles like 'The Poets Song by Tennyson' or 'An Enchanted Nightingale Sits' by Heine. A joint exhibition she had with two fellow students about 1927 would have included work in the same vein.

About 1927 she went to Paris to study, accompanied by three friends from the school of Art in Dublin, Doreen Dickie, Kathleen Cox and Molly Maguire. She worked at Le Grande Chaumiere, but did not find the teaching there very helpful, since the master who came round occasionally, offered his advice in French. She believed it would have been better to work under a particular painter as Mainie Jellett had done. She did benefit however from the contact with young artists from other countries; 'She can still get enthusiastic, when she remembers how her Latin and South American fellow students lashed their glowing paint onto the canvas with a free and easy recklessness'.² She was also impressed by her encounter with Argentinian painter, Artonio Berni, whom she met at the studio of a friend.

After about nine months in Paris, she moved to London. She studied first at the Central School of Art, Southampton Row, where Bernard Monisky told her that she had strength, and gave her encouragement which she found heartening. In the Autumn of 1929 and Spring of 1930, she was a student of Chelsea Polytechnic. The conditions which the French and English Art schools offered were a lot better than those in Ireland could. As I have already mentioned these artists whom I

have discussed so far were forced by circumstance to emigrate but the achievement of these artists testify to the presence of artistic talent in Ireland.

In 1930, Nano Reid finally settled in Dublin and in May 1933, her first one woman show was opened at the Gallery, Stephen's Green. From the beginning she was good at drawing, and her flexible and fluid sense of line is apparent in her oils. The colours in her paintings are muted, almost flat, and her first concern was in composition. This took away from her paintings some of the depth and perspective, but gave them a kind of woven texture, rich in illusion. Her subjects were domestic and immediate, and her treatment simple. 'Cats in the Kitchen' is an example of what was hung in this exhibition. From the title on the paintings it was obvious that she had already embarked on an involvement with the wilder Irish countryside; Donegal, Achill, Connemara; and especially her native Boyne Valley, which has been haunting her ever since.

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Nano considered this first exhibition to have been premature. It was not until late June of the same year (1933) that the Belgium painter, Marie Howett had an exhibition of paintings in the Gresham Hotel in Dublin, which was to have a profound effect on Nano Reid's attitude to paint. Marie Howett, she said, was a marvellous painter, whose work gave her a new lease of life - it was like having a veil torn from her eyes. Not that she began to paint like Marie Howett, she was already too mature an artist for that. The Belgium painter showed her the possibilities of a free expressive use of paint. In the 1930s, her work included portraits done in a style full of strength and personality, which some sitters found

unflattering; one asked for his money back. After this, she did less portraiture, though she continued to paint her friends, and began to concentrate on landscape painting.

Her second one woman show was held in Daniel Egan's Gallery, Stephen's Green late in 1936, and was later moved to Drogheda at the request of the Mayor. She showed twenty three oils and fifty three watercolours; at this period, and into the forties, she worked a great deal in water colours, and these often outnumber her oils. They were singled out for notice by the critics. 'In water colours, she is particularly happy, they are bold and direct colour³ful statements clearly and unhaltingly expressed'.

In November 1939, Liam O'Flaherty opened another one woman show at the Egan's Gallery and praised what he called the quality of liveliness in her work. She held exhibitions at the same gallery in 1941 and 1942, in both of which pastels and drawings and water colours predominate over oils

With the 1942 exhibition, her reputation among the intelligent and perceptive, if not among the public at large, was firmly established. The critics who reviewed the exhibition in The Irish Times (it was apparently, no less a person than Thomas McCreevy) concluded his review with the following words: 'There seems to be no help for it, this young artist from Drogheda has to be saluted as a genius'⁴

His analysis of the essential qualities of her work still holds good. 'For her varied richness of invention, especially in the matter of colour, is balanced by an unusual economy in the means employed to express it. With a few strokes of her brush, she can make boats at rest...

seem funny and beautiful at once - a vivacious and touching poetry of effect which recalls the art of Raoul Duffy, though there is no trace of any debt to the distinguished Frenchman. Miss Reid's work is more sold than his'⁵

Her mature style with its rich and carefully controlled colour, and symbolic references to objects; is already apparent in paintings such as *West Cork Mountain* (Fig. 16) painted in 1945; *Friday Fair* (Fig. 17) a still life with fish in which the objects are defined (or rather summed up) in vivid outline, and the colour applied in bright patches.

There are more lyrical qualities in the work of Nano Reid. In *A Wild Day* (Fig. 18) (*An Chomhairle Ealaíon*) of 1959, one can see rich subtle colour and the texture of paint is evidence that she turned away from straight forward representation. Here too colours are reminiscent of England, and the figures of a woman and a man, enclosed within fields like shapes emerge through the richly sensuous brush strokes. This lyrical painterly, and near abstract approach to landscape can be seen in the work of Camille Souter; whom I shall be discussing the next section of Chapter II; in such paintings as *'Calary Bog'* (Fig. 19) of 1962 of *'Pregnant Woman'* (Fig. 20) of 1969.

Anyone looking at Nano Reid's work is struck by her attachment to certain themes, she is for example fascinated by water which appears in her work in an infinite variety of forms; rivers, lakes, currents, pools, waterfalls and tides. Another characteristic theme is Celtic identity, especially as inspired by the pre-Christian and monastic sites of the Boyne Valley.



16. 'WEST CORK MOUNTAIN'



17. 'FRIDAY FAIR'



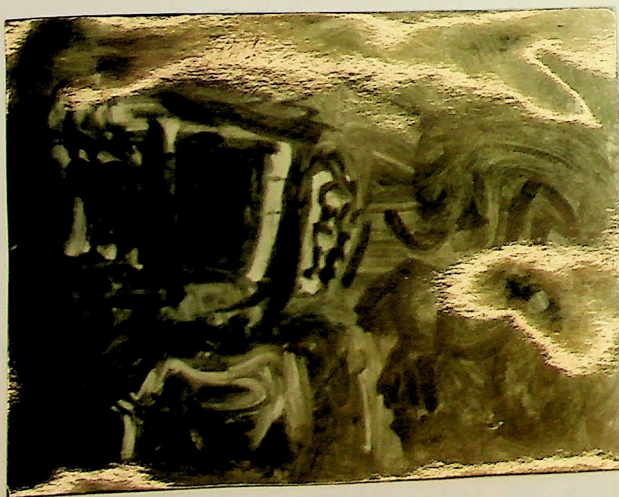
18. 'A WILD DAY'



19. 'CALARY BOG'



20. 'PREGNANT WOMAN'



21. 'CAVES OF THE FIREBOLG'

'I do not paint the Boyne Valley any more somehow the place is not the same since they started all that excavating. To me, the mounds were interesting, when you did not know what was inside them.....'

Animals occur throughout her work, comic and interesting and touching. Cats expecially, of which she is very fond, they dominate pictures like 'Cats in the Kitchen' or creep along in corners like the little black horse in Case of the Firebolg (Fig. 21) or Horses Galloping (Fig. 22). Birds too are a frequent theme especially in conjunction with water. Her attitude to them is reminiscent of the American painter, Morris Graves, whose work interests her.

There is a distinct element of hidden or obscure inexplicable matter in the paintings of Nano Reid. Her painting is a far cry from Harry Clarke's; yet one wonders whether this obscurity, her fondness for half-concealing images so that they only emerge as one looks at a picture, even her mastery of line and delight in rich colour, were effected by her pleasure as a student in watching Clarke at work. Her approach to a canvas is energetic like that of an action painter. In other painters, she herself admires similar qualities, she found the cool intellectual attitude of someone like Mainie Jellett unsympathetic. For the same reason she considers modern hard edge painting too impersonal.

Nano is one of the most interesting Irish painters of the generation which came to maturity before the firstWorld War. Her work is extremely varied in charming watercolours or lyrical evocations of the countryside; or oils, whose colour



22. 'HORSES GALLOPING'



23. 'THE BATHER'

is rich and subtle, and whose themes unfold as one studies them. Here is the kind of work with which it is rewarding to live, the more one looks at her paintings, the more one discovers in it. She is a poetic visionary, writing in code about things behind the seen surface, an imagination nurtured in the Boyne Valley whose rich uplands and ancient stones silently murmur memories. That she has been part poet part painter is not surprising.

When she was younger, she did describe as in her early portrait. The Bather (Fig. 23) Gradually she cut off every mode that might remind one of a painter but Reid. Her work is autobiographical; and of course technically too, how her palette develops, the blue bloom, the cheek flush, the faded flattened fogay - greens so pleasantly lyrical in, Neglected Farm, became by the seventies the passionate blend of, Case of Firebolg, (Fig. 21), deep bruise blue, hard rust, hot rose, the darkness of old yews in rain. Her work becomes still more tender, more delicate subtle in her later mature picture palette. She has no formula; she has gone on and on with (wide-eyed) search, her purely instinctive exploration of her inmost possibilities. This furious hit and miss part of the exploration is here too: the paintings which scatter in all directions like mower or pigeon to the sound of gunshot - colour, line, form, detail. This shows how an artist of the first rank will have the courage to take every risk in order to achieve full reward as in Quayside Strollers (Fig. 24).

Nano could have been a solid recluse; look at the most effecting little picture 'West Cork Mountain' (Fig. 16). So many Irish



24. 'QUAYSIDE STROLLERS'

Irish painters have conquered those peaks, but not in her way. The wild splash of sulphurous yellow above the almost impossible blue of the hills is the signature of a wilful woman always. In Browning's phrase, talking to her gods, or perhaps not so much taking as raging at their cryptic oracles that, to our delight, she has triumphantly matched and solved with her own.

FOOTNOTES

1. Thomas McGreevy, Irish Times, November 1942
2. Elizabeth Carran, The Bell - November 1941.
3. E.A. McGuire, The Studio, 1936.
4. Thomas McGreevy, Irish Times, 27th November 1942.
5. Ibid.
6. Harriet Cooke, Irish Times, 14 April 1969.

CHAPTER II

II Landscape a magical effect

Camille Souter was born in Betty Pamela Holmes in Northampton in 1929. Her parents were English, but had business connections in Ireland. When she was a year old in 1930, she came with them to Ireland where in due course, she went to school in Glenagara Park School, Dunlaoghaire. She passed the Cambridge Certificate but failed the leaving certificate, while getting honours in art - it was clear even then where her main interest lay.

However in 1948, she went to London to study as a trainee nurse at Guy's Hospital. While studying she visited Italy on a holiday and became ill. The illness was diagnosed as tuberculosis and she went to the Isle of Wight for a year to recuperate. While there, she had much time for reading, and she took up painting again. She finished her nursing course in 1950 and practiced as a private nurse for six months, living in a painting studio in the Old Kent Road. She frequented the coffee house in Soho (a novelty in those days) and continued painting. It was in Soho that she met the Old Vic actor Gordon Souter and in 1951, they were married. Less Uhre had christened her Camille because of her illness, and thus she became Camille Souter.

A child was born, Camille went with the child to paint in Italy, with no money, pushing the child and all her belongings on a bicycle to Trieste, Magia, Milan and Malignoaono. She sold paintings for the equivalent of the then price of 1/6.... She worked as a child minder but also in Bill Fagan's studio.

she met Hilary Heron and they became close friends.

Until 1958, she lived in various parts of Dublin, Rathgar, Charlemont Street, Upper Fitzwilliam Street, Upper Mount Street, where she had as neighbours Hilary Heron, Anne yeats, Patrick Pye and Pat Hickey. Her children, by now she had three, had sometimes to sleep in gilt picture frames. In 1958 she won an Italian Government Scholarship which gave her four months in Italy but she stayed on living on a farm near Chioggia, for nine months. She visited Rome and sold some pictures there. This Italian trip was a great adventure since she went with her four children all on bicycles. They clearly had a super time as the pictures are so happy and direct, reflecting both the children's attitude as well as their mother's, simplicity of approach. Basically, they look like collages because of the way the paint is applied in strips as in *Cycling to Chioggia* (Fig. 25) the wheels and lines are added over the painted area. Masses of turning bicycle wheels that seem to be precariously balanced on long delicate black stems. This painting has a child like simplicity about it, capturing all the fun they obviously had travelling about on farm produced carrier bicycles with large baskets for and aft in which the children's materials and belongings were carried.

In 1959 Camille was back in Ireland, this time she travelled to Achill, and stayed for two years. She was desperately poor, living with her four children on one pound a week and paying 11/- of that on rent. Here she was forced to use all kinds of cheap materials including bicycle aluminium paint



25. 'CYCLING TO CHIOGGIA'

and enamel, in her paintings, but the paintings were none the worse for that. In 1960, she married Frank Morris in London and returned briefly to Achill. She returned to Co Dublin staying for a time in Bill Fagan's cottage at Leixlip and had much help from Hilary Heron and Anne Yeats. At this time, she also stayed in Donal Davis's gate lodge, Charleville, Enniskerry. Meanwhile, she was going back and forth to Italy.

Eventually in 1962, she and Frank Morris settled down on a farm in Calary Bog which they bought for six hundred pounds. It was during the bad winter of 1962 that she painted Calary, also still-lives and later circuses. Her paintings then were completely realistic, her landscapes were changing and becoming more spacious. 'Calary Bog' (Fig. 19) painted in 1962, does not concentrate so much on fragmentation as her work did before then, but instead looks down from an aerial view point. The perspective is tipped up so that one's eye takes in the background with as much detail as that seen in the foreground. In Clown Acting (Fig. 26) 1961, there is a suggestion of a clown by the objects a clown would use, rather than his appearance in person. The colour use is vivid, bright oranges and sandy beiges, which makes the painting alive and happy. After Camille had painted Calary she wanted to move to the Shannon and in the meantime, she went back and forth to Achill. Living near Shannon, she painted several views both from the air and from the ground.

In 1971, her husband, Frank Morris, died and she began painting slaughter houses and meat. This meat series are gorgeous for their shades of red and the strange shapes the joints

make on the page. The Slaughtered Cow Ten Minutes Dead (Fig. 32) is very vivid, almost gorey, with fluid brush work. From 1972, she began to paint ports, docks and canals, which she says was one of the happiest times in her life. In 1975, she won the gainly award of two thousand pounds, from the American Cultural Institute, in 1976 she began painting her first fish series Cutted Cod (Fig. 28) and Pollock (Fig. 29) portray the liquid forms of fish, these paintings are very realistic in comparison to both her meat series and most of her landscapes. It would not be true to say that you could tell the species of fish from looking at the pictures, but while the eccentricities of the shapes of the joints are accentuated, Camille was obviously fascinated by the actual appearance of the fish.

In 1977, she won the Grand Prix International d'art competition de Monte-Carlo, for a 'landscape of Achill'. In the following years she won and no less pleased to do so, the prize at the Claremorris National Art Competition and in 1979 she was awarded an Arts Council Bursary.

It is no use to look for a steady developemnt in Camille's work as she uses whatever form suits her subject, and frequently paints work, which at first glance seems to be out of context. For isntance, her superb pair of pictures entitled Winter (Fig. 30, 31) painted in 1963 go back to her earlier dribbled paint. They are painted behind tissue paper and their veiled appearance is intensely evocative of cold and mist with the pink of bare twigs seen against the snow, making them almost tangibly icy. These are among her most sensitive creations,



26. 'CLOWN ACTING'



27. 'SLAUGHTERED COW TEN MINUTES DEAD'



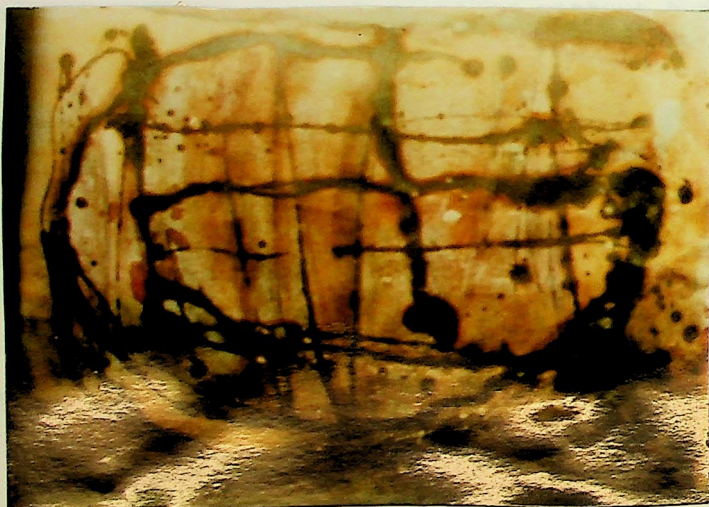
28. 'GUTTED COD'



29. 'POLLOCK'



30. 'WINTER'

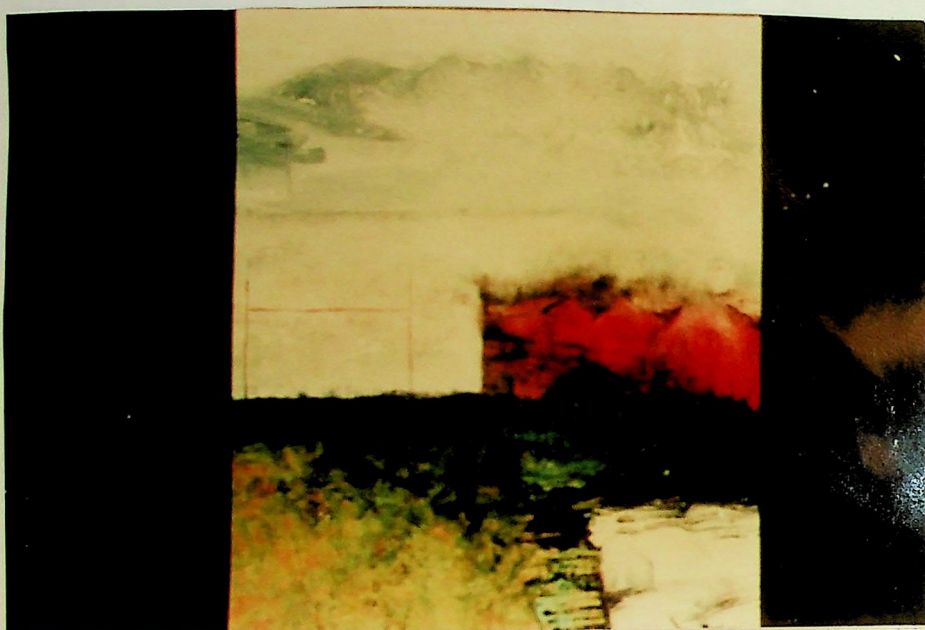


31. 'WINTER'

layers of gentle colour seen through, rather than on paper. The wind does not blow her trees and she does not see her landscapes in storms. Still sunshine, quiet rain, mists or the silence of winter cold are her chosen subjects.

One of the only paintings in which Camille feels she has made a social political comment is in the Belfast view 'Red Bricks and its not a Game' (Fig. 32) painted in 1972. 'I really do not feel it is the job of a painter to make a political comment, except when it intrudes on the subject matter which it did here'. The full title of the painting which has never been used is supposed to imply that there are two opposing sides, symbolized by the two different kinds of red bricks used in buildings in Protestant and Catholic areas in Belfast. It is a stark painting without human presence and the image is one of isolation and loneliness combined with a kind of lyricism, broken only by the dense industrial atmosphere. Compositionally it is one of the few geometric paintings Camille has done. 'Belfast is dotted with pitches and the area of discontent are so small, really, that they are like football pitches. I wish I could pen them all off² and let them play it out as a game'.

Camille is a painter of rarity, a mistress of subtlety shown through her colour range. Her paintings contain the freshness of spontaneity, she does not believe in planning a painting. She is obsessed with nature and her response to it is intuitive. She paints a subject as she perceives it. Her paintings often contain a hidden or inexplicable matter in them which is also akin to the painting of Nano Reid. Camille's passion



32. 'RED BRICK AND ITS NOT A GAME'

for painting concern has been directed with equal intensity at all things, be it bicycle wheels, sketches of landscape, pregnant women. Her subjects have been reduced in and by her eyes to the fragmentation of understanding, and then are transformed into paintings that always have an appealing quality. She is philosophical about her vocation as a painter, honesty is very important to her. Camille is by no means a revolutionary painter of the twentieth century, yet there remains an element to her work, both landscapes and other subjects which resists description.

FOOTNOTE

1. Damar Roche; Camille Souther N.C.A.D. Thesis, 276.

1. Ibid.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The first four painters I have discussed Sarah Purser (1848 - 1943); Mainie Jellett (1897 - 1944); Evie Hone (1894 - 1955); Mary Swanzy all came from well to do families and lived before the II World War, or at least established themselves before the social and intellectual isolation which hit Ireland after the War. Sarah Purser was privileged as a child, being educated in Switzerland where she learned to speak French. Both Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone came from predominantly Anglo-Irish families, which gave both of them the opportunity to travel to and from Ireland to England with little difficulty. Mary Swanzy's father was a Sir Henry Swanzy, a leading occultist in Dublin at the time. She grew up in a Georgian City which she believes was a privilege for her. She was sent to private art classes as extra curricular education which is more than the middle class families could afford for their children. The four artists had all the opportunity of travelling to Paris to further their education. Sarah Purser was in Paris during the time of Impressionism and was able to bring back her 'modernity' as the critics viewed her painting, to Ireland. Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone studied at L'hote's Studio in Paris where they were influenced by Cubist theories studying under Albert Gleizes. They held a joint exhibition in Dublin in 1924, but were received with hostility and disbelief by the critics. Mary Swanzy was in Paris at La Grande Chamiere studying under Délechse, during the change in the art movement from Impressionism to Cubism, her early contact with the Avant-Garde is unusual for an Irish artist.

In 1881, after her travels to Paris, Sarah Purser began to draw and paint portraits and was the most highly regarded portraitist in Ireland. She was the only woman on an organising committee for a loan exhibition introducing the Dublin art public to the work of Courbet, Corot, Manet etc. Her first solo undertaking was in 1901, when she organised another exhibition which represented the work of John Yeats and Nathaniel Hone. She had a catalogue printed and wrote a forward to it herself. Her next project was to benefit art itself and her fellow artists and craftsmen of Ireland; in the foundation of a studio factory for the production of stained glass; An Túr Gloine. Evie Hone was to join this foundation in 1932. Sarah Purser threw her full weight behind Hugh Lane's efforts to secure a permanent gallery of modern art in Dublin. Justice should be done to Sarah who worked hard long and generously for every aspect of the visual arts in Ireland and achieved important results as a patron and promoter of art and artists.

As Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone developed as artists, their activities took them apart. Hone's development took her away from painting and into stained glass, she joined An Túr Gloine as I have already mentioned, and established herself as the most prominent and successful religious artist executing commissions abroad as well as in Ireland. When in the 1940s, An Túr Gloine was dissolved. Evie established a workshop at Marley, Rathfarnham and began to paint again. Meanwhile, Mainie combined the practice of painting with role of teacher critic and an advocate of stylistic change. Despite Mainie's and Evie's influence, Cubism was never fully accepted in Ireland.

Mary Swanzy, after her mother and father's death decided to see as much of the world as she could. She travelled far afield to the Scandwich Islands, to U.S.A. and Honolulu, Italy, Germany, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. There were french influences upon her work, but she remains a remarkable loner producing a variety of work spanning a whole century. People either like her work or dislike it, with firm conviction, but those who dismiss it as eccentric and old fashioned for its time should reflect on the fact that she was also a comtemporary of such eminent European female artists as Katie Kolwitz, Paula Moderston Becker and Gwen John at the beginning of this century and outlived them all. Further comparison may well reveal that she was more Avant- Farde than any one of them, and just as good a painter, when at her best.

The generation of artists who succeeded Mary Swanzy, Evie Hone, Mainie Jellett were subject to the impact of Ireland's isolation, political and cultural during and after the II World War. Norah McGuinness born in Derry in 1903 was the daughter of a coal merchant and ship owner. Even at school, she always knew what career she intended to follow; she always painted and wanted to become an artist.

Nano Reid was born in Drogheda in 1905 and Camille Souter in Betty Pamela Holmes in Northampton in 1929. Camille's parents were English but had business connections with Ireland where they eventually moved to. None of these three artists Norah, Nano or Camille came from very well to do people. Both Norah and Nano began their artistic training in the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin. Nano won a scholarship

to attend the Metropolitan School of Art in 1905. Camille was never formally trained as an artist, she went to London in 1948 to study as a trainee nurse at Guy's hospital and after contracting tuberculosis had much time on her hands and began painting.

After Norah McGuinness was married to Geoffrey Taylor, she became involved in the exciting literary and theatrical world of Dublin and eventually became involved in theatrical design. In 1929, her marriage broke up and she decided to go to Paris to study, she went to Paris as an artist with several years of work behind her. She seems to have been less immediately effected by her teachers than one might expect. Norah McGuinness never became an abstract painter; instead she turned almost exclusively to landscape painting. Norah McGuinness also travelled to India where she stayed with her sister for five months returning briefly to Paris in 1937. She also went to U.S.A. for the opening of a mixed show by Irish artists where she stayed until 1939 and had a second show. In the 1940's when she returned to Ireland after having been away for ten years, she became President of the Irish Exhibition of Living Arts and in 1957, she was voted honary member of the R.H.A. In no sense of the word is she a traditional Irish landscape painter, with a few brush strokes she evokes a sense of natural objects, sounds, colours and atmosphere and thereby creating a landscape art which is far more enduring, alive and Irish than all the cottages and turf stacks.

Nano Reid studied in Paris like all of the other female artists I have talked about so far. She worked at La Grande Chaumiére

in 1927 and after about nine months in Paris, she moved to London and studied at Southampton Row Central School of Art in 1929, and in 1930 at Chelsea Polytechnical. The conditions which the French and English Schools offered were a lot better than those in Ireland. In 1933, the Belgian painter, Marie Howett had a painting exhibition in the Gresham Hotel in Dublin, which had a profound effect on Nano Reid's attitude to painting. Nano is considered one of the most interesting Irish painters, her work is extremely varied and charming, lyrical evocations of the countryside whose themes unfold as one studies them. She is also a poetic visionary writing in code about things behind the seen surface.

Camille Souter is the first of the seven Irish female painters whom I have discussed who never ventured to Paris to further her painting career, instead she was drawn to Italy where she had first visited while studying as a nurse in Guy's Hospital. In 1958, she won an Italian Government Scholarship which gave her four months in Italy but she stayed on for nine months. In 1962, she married Frank Morris and settled on a farm in Calary Bog and began painting again. In 1979, she was awarded an Arts Council Bursary. It is no use to look for a steady development in Camille's work, as she uses what ever suits her. She is a painter of rarity, a mistress of subtlety, she is obsessed with nature.

It is impossible at this stage to calculate the contribution of both Nano Reid and Camille Souter to Ireland's cultural life. What is clear is the extraordinary degree of commitment to activities that promise little in terms of material gain.

'A poem, a novel, or a painting', the critic Denis Donoghue has written about the relationship between modern society and its art, 'is never what a society thinks it needs. Indeed, the relation between a society and the arts is never one of need. It's only in retrospect that a work of art may be seen to have defined the society that provoked it'.

FOOTNOTES

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13. Peter Cormack, Women Stained Glass Artists and Craft Movement, William Morris Gallery, 7th December 1985 - 2nd March 1986; London Borough of Waltham Forest 1985.
14. Denis Donoghue, N.C.A.D. Decade Show 1987.

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3. Brian Fallon on Mary Swanzy; Irish Times Review; 14th March 1974.

4. Terrance de Vere White on Mary Swanzy, Irish Times Review; 1976.
5. Anne Haverty on Nano Reid, Irish Times; 14th March 1984.
6. Brian Fallon on Nano Reid, Irish Times; 2nd May 1984.
7. P.J. Murray on Mary Swanzy, Irish Times, 28th April 1982.
8. Harriet Cooke on Nano Reid, Irish Times; 14th April 1969.

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1. Dr. Julian Campbell, Irish Artists in France; Trinity College, Dublin, Thesis 266, 261.
2. Darina Roche, Camille Souter; National College of Art and Design, Thesis No. 276.
3. Imelda Fierney, Two Irish Artists Camille Souter and Barrie Cook; National College of Art and Design, Thesis No. 258.
4. Dr. O'Grady, Sarah Purser; Galway University.