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**Louis Le Brocquy's Book**

**Illustrations from 1946 - 1986:**

**The Relationship between his Painting and Illustration**



by  
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Vis. Comm.

## INTRODUCTION:

Louis Le Brocquy, painter, illustrator and designer could be perceived as Ireland's most prolific national and international living visual artist, and due to no fault of his own has been placed upon a pedestal by a protective group of critics, collectors and admirers. What this essay hopes to achieve is the removal of such grandeur, exposing his influences, logical thinking and development within his act; de-mystifying and making his work accessible; revealing his role within an international art scene as opposed to the vacuum in which many people have placed him within; recognising the coercion that exists between his different use of medium; working in unison, creating the necessary impetus to further his artistic and personal development.

In order to achieve a realistic perspective on Le Brocquy I felt it necessary to approach his career chronologically, rather than a random approach which may have blurred and confused questions concerning his development.

## Le Brocquy - The Early Years

Little is known of Le Brocquy before his decision to study the Great Masters in 1938. What we do know is that he was born on the 10th of November 1916, and went on to receive a normal schooling and went on to study chemistry in Kevin Street, after which he continued his studies in Trinity College as an external student. During this period he was commissioned to illustrate life studies of the brain by the neuro-surgeon Dr. Mc Connell, who was a surgeon at the Richmond Hospital and a lecturer at the Royal College of Surgeons. Le Brocquy noticed during his execution of the drawings the part of the brain that represents the imagination which is located under the fore-head and has the appearance of birds wings; it was this observation that was to stay with him to this day "... here I am myself, forty years later still trying in my own way to enter behind the face, the skull, the os frontis, to discover another interior landscape". (\*1)

During the years prior to 1938 Le Brocquy had tried painting but he regards these experiments so unsuccessful, "these were non-paintings, the paint was inarticulate" (\*2). In 1938 Le Brocquy ran away to London to wed his first wife Jean Stoney. While there he decided to study the Great Masters and further his knowledge of painting, for Le Brocquy had no opportunity to go to Art College -, "I studied by going to galleries in London, to the Louvre and the Prado, systematically doing the one room after another, spending so much as a month in each place, peering into the paintings" (\*3). During these trips he became particularly infatuated with Vermeer, Rembrandt, Goya, Manet and Velasquez, the latter two in particular; this resulted in such works as Study from Velasquez, 1971 and Homage á E. Manet, 1981, notice the dates as the influence is far reaching into his career. Rather than returning to Ireland, Le Brocquy and his wife decided to settle in Menton in the South of France, but later in the year, war broke out and so he decided to return to Ireland. After some difficulty in evacuating, they finally arrived back in the winter of 1940.

While in Europe, Le Brocquy recognised some important observations that have remained with him through his artistic career. First, he discovered his Irish identity which he was not aware of when living in Dublin and secondly, the recognition of the 'universality' of the Great Masters. This helped Le Brocquy to steer clear of the "self-conscious nationalism" (\*4) of the Irish artist, who seemed to have found the depiction of thatch cottages, folk dress and "convenient hills" (\*5) suitable subject matter. For the Irish Revival, which had thrived at the beginning of the century had excitement; there was great search for an Irish art, a national art, an "awakening of interest in Celtic culture and speculation as to the part it might play in giving a distinctive character to Irish painting and decorative arts of the future"(\*6). Le Brocquy rejected this ideology, he could not relate to this almost "Nazi Culture" (\*7) or indeed "the ordained marxist aesthetic of social irreality with its own insistence on the compulsively happy peasants" (\*8). So in the years 1939 to 1941 Le Brocquy worked in isolation from this new Revival painting. This is emphasised by the contents of his paintings of this period. Such paintings include A Picnic in 1940, "where each





A Picnic, 1940, 40.5 by 40.5,.  
wax-resin medium on mounted canvas  
(detail).

member of a supposedly social occasion is locked in his or her own thoughts and physical space" (\*9). This technique was nothing new, for in Degas The Cotton Market, in 1873 the figures are carrying on in an isolated function with no relation to any of the other figures around. "Degas and some other painters of his generation used the theme of accidental encounter as a subject matter to portray indifference, isolation, unawareness" (\*10).

The stylisation of these paintings as in a tradition which belonged to the Royal Hibernian Academy and related strongly to an English style of painting which they themselves were trying to cast off. Le Brocquy was aware of this, "That was very early when I painted very slowly because I was learning, I was always interested in appearances and what may lie behind them and my first work was an attempt to relate painting to appearances" (\*11).

An Important artist working in Dublin at this time was Mainie Jellett, who offered a different mode of thinking and expression, breathing new life into the Dublin art scene which was suffering in the war years because of its lack of communication with European art. Jellett, after spending many years studying under Lhôte and Gléizes in Paris with Evie Home, evolved her own form of Cubism, mastering abstract principles and aiming to apply these new ideas to Irish Art "and to equate its essential inspiration with that of two-dimensional twentieth century abstract painting" (\*12).

Jellett's influence on Le Brocquy is considerable and was not fully realised till after her death in 1944. Le Brocquy was not that concerned with Jellett's style or manifesto but with her European thinking ('universality') which was alien and unencouraged in Ireland at the time. Jellett became the leader of an advanced group of artists which did not include Le Brocquy, who cried out for the introduction and application of the artist's mind into industry and society, taking the drabness out of what evolved from the industrial revolution. Jellett recognised the isolation of the artist in another error of the industrial revolution and that it had resulted in artists contributing their gifts and training towards raising standards of living and to the spiritual life of a limited few rather than to the aid of their direct culture and society. Jellett encouraged artists' involvement in public murals, stage designs and graphic design. Le Brocquy himself contributed to the design and painting of stages in the early forties, designing for the Olympia, Abbey, Peacock (Jimmy O'Dea pantomimes) and the Gaiety Theatre (Giraudour's play Amphytrion 38), none of these stage designs exist today. Jellett's most important discovery and teaching was the recognition of the strong similarity between Non-Realistic Art (Modern) and Celtic Art (The Book of Kells, High Crosses and metalwork). The combination of painting skill and "filling and decorating a given space rhythmically" (\*13) were clearly characteristics shared by Cubism and Celtic Art. But it must be pointed out that Jellett also recognised this harmony and rhythm within realism which would have

interested Le Brocquy, for it had particular reference to early Renaissance artists like Fra Angelico, Giotto as well as Titian whose work he would have observed in Europe in 1938. Jellett observed in these paintings that the "exquisite realism of form, movement, colour"(\*14), followed secondly by the "harmony of rhythm and movement linking one form to another, a sense of design within the shape of the space on which the picture is painted" (\*15). The viewer is led by the inner force, directing them to the centre or centre point of interest and this, coupled with the power of colour, reveals something richer and great, "a greater symphony of form, value and colour living in itself, incorporating into its deeper truth the realistic elements which form its outer covering" (\*16). While within Non-Realism, Celtic and Romanesque Art there is a play of pure form and movement, here the viewer is asked to rediscover human or natural elements which are themselves subordinate to the whole but enough to give the work of art spiritual body and soul. So in discovering such comparison, Jellett was "particularly curious that when these principals has been in evidence for half a century-academic Ireland has been content to sleep - artistically in the arms of a worn out English tradition" (\*17). But at the same time Jellett did not want Irish artists to follow blindly the current trends in art "but rather to feel contact, as of old with the inner artistic life of the continent to which they belong" (\*18). For Ireland, from the 9th through to the 12th Century, was not isolated but a major contributor to European art; monks and Irish scholars brought their Christianity and art, sharing and developing it in all corners of Europe. Ireland could then be considered as part of the 'universality' of art, something which Jellett believed and encouraged ".... we will be able to feel the great inner rhythm of the universe, to the part of a whole and draw into and be made part of the new civilisation which is in the painful process of birth" (\*19).

Jellett believed that it was not necessary to borrow or copy so as to contribute "to the creation of a fresh civilisation" (\*20), but that a knowledge of the art of their own country, studying the rhythm, harmony and beauty of form of the book, architectural (Clonfert Cathedral) and metalwork design, would give the foundation for such a development of art in Ireland; "let us search in our own store-houses and re-discover the principles of a great art which is not isolated but a part of a whole whose principles are eternal" (\*21). Le Brocquy was to delve into these "store-houses on many occasions throughout his career, resulting in a large percentage of his output containing an Irish element whether it be cultural, historical or social.

Another prominent influence on Le Brocquy during his early development was his mother, Sybil Le Brocquy, who was an important member of the Dublin literary scene, friendly with the Yeats family, AE and James Stephens, and spent much of her time promoting the arts, encouraging her son's career, and would have been responsible for Louis's commissions in the theatric and stage design. Sybil Le Brocquy's greatest achievement was in 1943 when she co-founded the Exhibition of Living Art, which catered for Irish artists who were interested in new ideas and



thinking that related to the continent. For up to now the R.H.A. had the monopoly and grip on the major exhibitions and seemingly did allow, receive or recognise the new trends in contemporary art. Mainie Jellett was elected Chairman for the first exhibition which was to take place in October 1943. Jellett's main aim was to exhibit "a high standard as possible and representative of various tendencies of Irish Art" (\*22). Jellett's committee included James Sleater, Margaret Clarke, The Rev. Jack Manlon, Ralph Cusack, Norah Mc Guinness, Lawrence Campbell, Evie Home and Louis Le Brocquy, who in 1942 had begun on his first experiments with form.

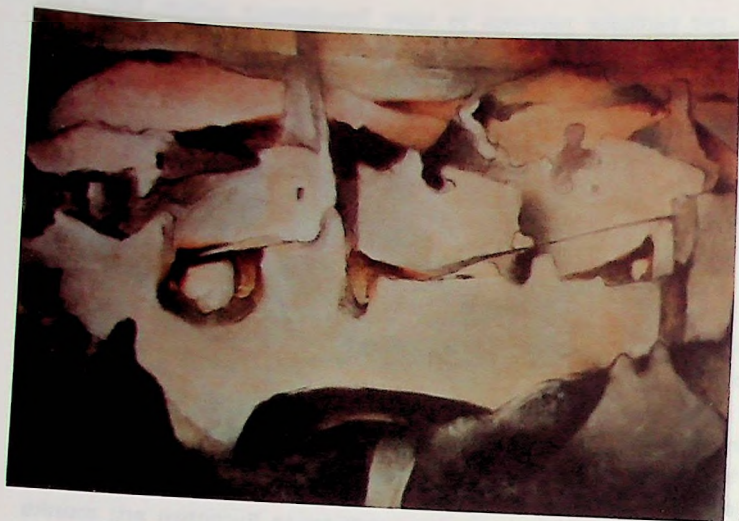
## Classic Themes

In an architectural manner, Le Brocquy created legs like pillars, knees and arms emphasizing weight and stress and his colour became muted containing only greys and greens with little tonal effect. It was this new work that Le Brocquy exhibited in the Living Art and in doing so caught the attention of the London art dealer Charles Gimpel, who encouraged Le Brocquy to go to London, but he refused, probably because of the war situation. Nonetheless the recognition of his work prompted Le Brocquy to continue in his experimental manner, and thus adopt a cubist style, the most important universal development in art since the Renaissance.

During the war years Ireland was visited by many academics and intellectuals from Germany and Czechoslovakia. One of these emigrants was Dr. Ewin Schroedinger, the noted physicist, who opened Le Brocquy's eyes in relation to his thinking to the "essential continuity of art and science as manifestation of human consciousness" (\*23). In 1944 Le Brocquy completed 'Famine Cottages, Connemara', here we witness the first conscious realisation of Schroedinger's thinking, Ireland, during the war years being isolated from Europe, depended on its own resources; this also applied to the arts and resulted in Le Brocquy's painting an isolated barren landscape which emphasised Ireland's current situation. (empty, sterile, dead).

## Tinkers

In 1945 Le Brocquy's work took on a new direction in contents. While travelling through the countryside he discovered and became fascinated with the 'tinkers', a travelling people that have much in common with gypsies. The initial interest was in their culture, tradition and day to day living. But Le Brocquy's most important discovery was their "fierce independence" (\*24), for they lived outside the parish unit and were looked upon thus with mistrust and suspicion (not much has changed today). Le Brocquy viewed them as a symbol of "the individual as opposed to the organised, settled society" (\*25), and paralleled them with the dispossessed refugees of Europe, who had experienced the chaos of world war. And so begins the Le Brocquy's preoccupation with the human condition which was to effect his work right up to the present.

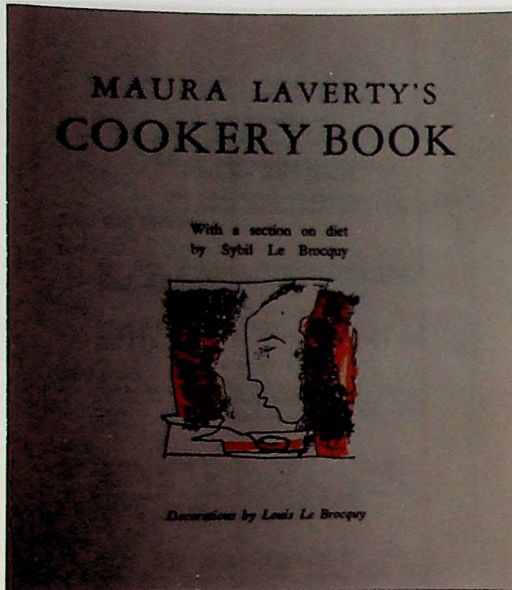


Famine Cottages.  
Connemara, 1944. 50 by 75cm,  
oil on gesso-board.

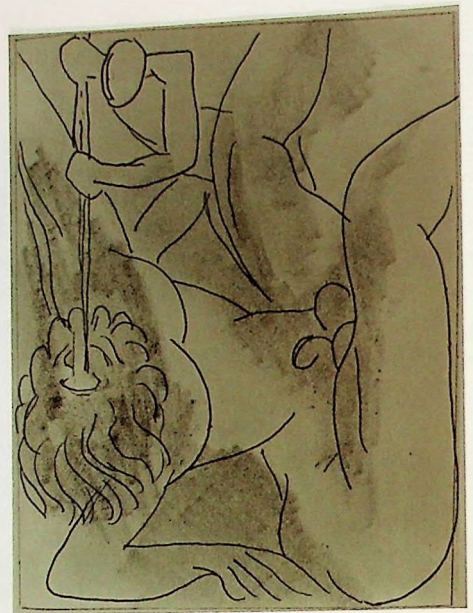


The Condemned Man, 1945,  
91 by 68.5cm.  
oil on gesso-primed hardboard.

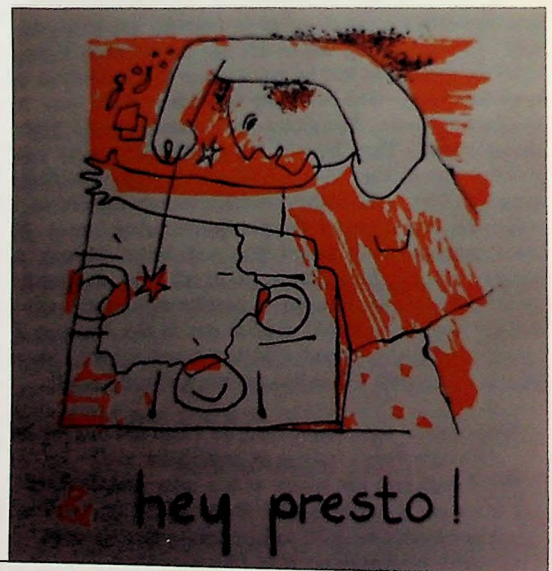




title page



Henri Matisse,  
The Blinding of Polythemus. 1935,  
from 'Ulysses', p142.



Quick Cooking, p109.

## Maura Laverty's Cook Book

Early in 1946 Le Brocquy completed his first published illustrated book, Maura Laverty's Cook Book by Maura Laverty. This probes the question why a cook book, for it seems so out of context; the answer is very simple. Sybil Le Brocquy, the artist's mother, played a minor role in the writing of the book and so it is to be assumed that she got the commission for her son. Yet again she is evident in "getting him off the ground" (\*26) in his artistic career.

Le Brocquy refers to these thirteen illustrations as "decorations" (\*27), so implying that they were executed as a favour, rather than a contribution to his artistic development. The book is printed in offset lithography in two colours, black and golden yellow. In some instances the colours combine in the illustration to form a third colour, but this has not been utilised. This is a result of not knowing the capabilities of the two colour process or simply knowing and not wanting to take advantage of the process.

The illustrations are introduced at the beginning of each chapter which relates to a particular cooking or recipe. The drawings are a logical interpretation of the headings which are combined with the illustration in some instances, and so reveal a play of word and image creating a friendly, humorous tone within the book. The style of the illustration is easily traced to his 'tinker' series on which he was working parallel to these illustrations. These drawings would probably bear a strong resemblance to the notebooks that he compiled during his studies of the travelling people (in which he used charcoal as the primary drawing medium - Earnan O'Malley in Dorothy Walker's, Louis Le Brocquy, Ward River Press Dublin - 1981 p73) and so it could be implied that these 'decorations' are a graphic "shorthand" (\*28) of his main studies. When considering an outside influence, the finger must be pointed at Henri Matisse, for the comparison is easily drawn with Matisse's drawing and book illustrations of the thirties and forties. Between 1932 and 1946 Matisse illustrated five books including Poesia de Stephane Mallarme, Visages by Pierre Reverdy but most notably - Ulysses by James Joyce. This book contains six etchings and was published in 1935 by the Limited Edition Club in New York. The quality of jagged scratchy lines and the rough shading compare without doubt to the cook book 'decorations'. This influence is not surprising, because Matisse would have been one of Le Brocquy's references in the development of his cubist style.

## Post War Years

When the war was over, people started travelling to and from Ireland. Le Brocquy decided that it was time to go to London to take up Charles Gimpels' offer made in 1943. He was also encouraged by the art critic Maurice Collis and the collector James Bomford.



Thus was set his immediate acceptance within the London art scene. There reasons were coupled with the fact that Le Brocquy was fed up with "murals for pubs, stained glass, theatre pantos .... all things very interesting in themselves but far from the problems of painting" (\*29), so giving him good reason for his departure. When in London Le Brocquy became associated with a group of artists including Keith Vaughan, William Scott, Robert Colquhoun, Ben Nicholson, Graham Sutherland and Francis Bacon. His work was exhibited regularly including the involvement in travelling group shows with the British Council. "I was very lucky, my paintings were shown and I was able to serve as a painter which I could not do in Dublin" (\*30). For the first few years in London Le Brocquy continued working on his 'travelling people', working from notebooks which lay the foundations for larger watercolour and oils. But, needless to say, his work and thinking began to change and develop in relation to post-war Europe and the Cold War. The world was now faced with a new fear, a fear of total obliteration, the development of the atomic bomb and the furthering divide between East and West saw a strong return to conservative policies and the rise of anti-communist feelings especially after the Hungarian Rising in 1956. "The natural feeling of exhaustion at the end of an arduous war coincided with the exhaustion of a cultural movement which had affected all developed societies since the beginning of the century: the optimistic drive of Modernism in the Arts, which had moved forward on a series of formal renewals, supported by a belief that the Arts in themselves were capable of bringing about social change" (\*31), but rather than change many artists turned to the past in hope. "Reconstruction in the arts came to mean the recovery of old forms, rather than the evolution of new ones" (\*32), artists with such thinking in mind included Robert Colquhoun and Graham Sutherland, sampling and developing their own type of Cubism.

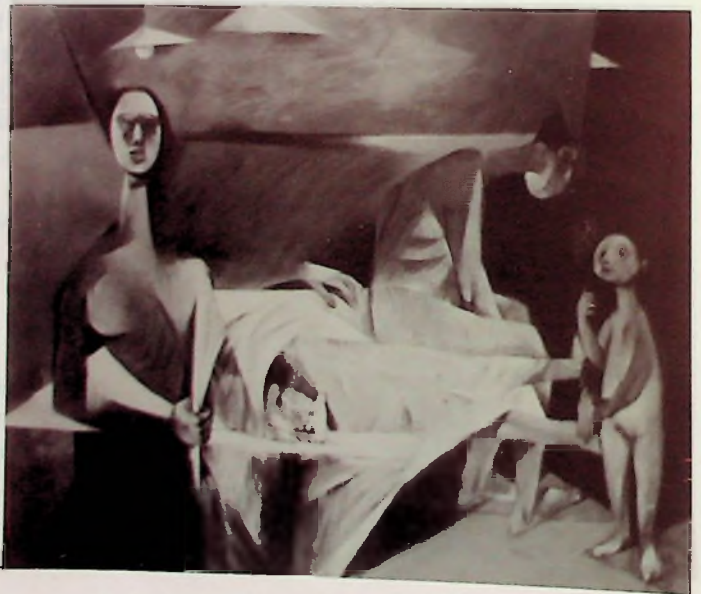
## Grey Period

Alongside these artists a group of painters developed, concentrating on the figure, emphasising the horrors of war, the atomic bomb, concentration camps and the isolation of the individual in such hostile environments. Le Brocquy himself was to take example from the above mentioned artists, combining a form of cubism along with the current theme of isolation. The style can be attributed to Colquhoun who had been inspired by the Picasso-Matisse exhibition in the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1945. Colquhoun's Women with a Bird Cage, in the following years relates convincingly to Le Brocquy's line and form, but underlying Colquhoun's influence was Mainie Jellett's influence. David Jones in 1962 noticed that within these paintings a "tendency to transmogrify objects by the use of stylised motifs which none the less retain a powerful representational significance within a dynamic abstract form" (\*33), as a characteristic of Celtic figuration, as seen in the Book of Kells, he concluded that Le Brocquy's figuration of the pre-white (pre 1958) was "a Celtic vision of Cubism" (\*34). And so we witness Jellett's influence which in fact goes beyond his earlier rejections of Irish references. Le Brocquy entitled the work





Robert Cotiquhoun,  
Woman with a Birdcage, 1946,  
 101.5 by 75.5cm,  
 oil on canvas.



A Family, 1951,  
 150 by 188cm, oil on canvas.



Pablo Picasso,  
Guernica, 1937,  
 350.5 by 782.3cm, oil on canvas.



Poetry in Modern Ireland, 1951,  
 'Fairymaid' from F.R. Higgins untitled poem, p 23.



of the early fifties the 'grey period', which owes its name to the muting of his palette to monochromatic colours, probably prompted by Picasso's 'Guernica' of 1936. The contents of the work refers to the isolation of the individual with particular reference to children who have been orphaned during the war. His most celebrated piece of this period is 'A Family' which deals with the isolation of the individual within the closest of human relationships, the family. This painting bears a strong resemblance to 'A Picnic' of 1940, and displays for the first time the circular pattern in Le Brocquy's work which he uses as a device to further his creative development. Parallel to his painting, Le Brocquy through invitation worked in Edinburgh on tapestries along with other London artists. His first tapestry in 1948 related to his 'travelling people' called 'Travellers'; this was followed by 'Garlanded Goat' in 1950, depicting a pagan who had been embodied by a goat who leered at King Puck, hereof Puck Fair in Killorgan, Co. Kerry. Here again we witness the influence of Jellett; first it is a Celtic subject matter and is stylised so. Robert Melville supports this, ".... a superb latter-day example of Celtic Art of surface decoration" (\*35). What furthers Jellett's influence is the fact that she used Puck Fair as the subject matter for a mural in 1938 for the Glasgow Industrial Exhibition.

## Poetry in Modern Ireland

Along with the tapestries Le Brocquy completed his second illustrated book 'Poetry in Modern Ireland' by Austin Clarke in 1951. This book can again be attributed to Sybil Le Brocquy, as she knew Clarke and would have visited the Le Brocquy's home in Kenilworth Square on many occasions.

The Book contains six illustrations; they are scattered unevenly throughout the book and in most cases it is difficult to find the relationship between text and image. There is no sequence or formula evident; the illustration executed in black brush, pen and ink are somewhat confused, falling between the line quality of his 'travelling people' period and his new developments in the 'grey period'. If we check the dates we discover that 1951 was the transition period from one style to another and so this weakness in execution can be justified.

The drawings in general relate to pieces of poetry which have been quoted by the author, but this is not easily understood, for the illustrations in many cases have been separated from their references. For example, on page twenty-three we are met by an illustration of a woman and not until you turn the page do you realise that it belongs to a poem by F.R. Higgins, about a fairywoman who tries to entice the poet. This is not Le Brocquy's fault, it is a design error, but it does undermine the quality of communication which is necessary in a book context. The frontispiece is by far the most interesting drawing in the book. It accompanies the title page and relates to the overall tone, which is a critical analysis of poetry in Ireland. The illustration depicts



a woman's head, representing Ireland, who is keeping her head just above water; she is surrounded by whirling winds and choppy seas, which symbolise poetry's fate of death if it does not revive itself. But along with this explanation there is an interesting undercurrent. Le Brocquy in 1951 exhibited 'A Family' for the first time in Dublin in the Victor Waddington Gallery. The Exhibition was surrounded by much controversy because of the suggested violence and nudity and this, coupled with the distortion of the human form, outraged many viewers. Le Brocquy offered the painting to Dublin Corporation but they turned it down (\*36). This behaviour was typical in Ireland during the fifties, in which there was much censorship in the arts, especially in literature. So in considering Le Brocquy's situation, the illustration could well be a personal comment on the Arts in Ireland - the drowning woman representing the artist, who struggles under the force of the Catholic Church and the "mentality of the middle class" (\*37), which Robert Motherwell describes delightfully: "What most people want is illusion in painting ... a realistic representation with meticulous craft and miraculous detail" (\*38).

In 1954 Le Brocquy took on a new interest; together with William Scott, founded a design firm, Signa Limited. The concern of the company was to promote and design English and Irish graphic industrial and textile designs. Offices were set up in both London and Dublin, meeting reasonable success during the fifties. Here again we witness Jellett's influence on Le Brocquy which is fully backed up by a quote by himself, "I always suspect that my preoccupation with what is called industrial design is rather a neurotic activity. A great many artists feel rather strongly their comparative divorce from society and one desperately wishes to show that one can be useful in some capacity" (\*39).

## Legends of Ireland

In 1955 Le Brocquy illustrated his third book 'Legends of Ireland' by J. J. Campbell. This publication is regarded as Le Brocquy's forerunner to his most important illustrated book, The Tain in 1969. Both books deal with the same contents, the trial and tribulations of Queen Maeve, Cuchulainn and other folk heroes of pre-Christian Ireland.

'Legends of Ireland' consists of twenty chapters, with an illustration accompanying the beginning of each section. Within each chapter there is either a full page illustration (14 instances) or a half page (6 instances). Generally the sections are completed with a small Celtic motif (14 instances) providing that there is space available. The two larger illustrations relate directly to the contents of the chapter but the final Celtic Motif when shown, serve as a decorative function. In some instances the Celtic motifs have been repeated which is particularly evident as we reach the end of the book. This must have been a design problem, for after editing the final sections of the text, extra white space arose and so, instead of commissioning Le Brocquy to do extra



Front-cover to  
Poetry in Modern Ireland.



Henri Matisse,  
Elégie à Janet, 1948,  
from 'Florilège des Amours de Ronsard', p149.

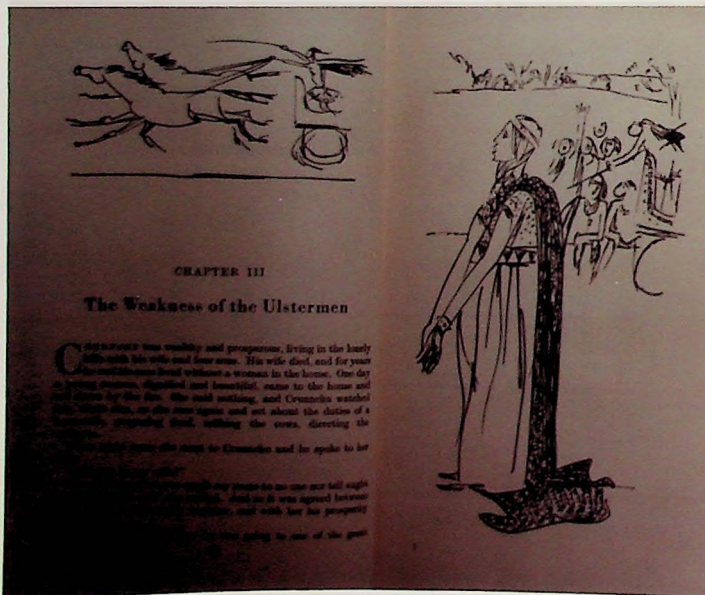


Dust-jacket to  
Legends of Ireland.





Frontis-piece,  
Cuchulainn, from  
'Legends of Ireland.'



The Weakness of the Ulsterman,  
from 'Legends of Ireland', p20-21.



illustrations they simply doubled up on some of the earlier Celtic motifs for example, the Celtic interlacing used at the end of the chapter seven is repeated twice in chapters seventeen and twenty.

The style of the illustration is very curious, it bears no relationship to previous drawing styles especially in line quality. The illustrations were executed in pen and black ink and yet again we must suspect the influence of Matisse. If we return to 1942 and Le Brocquy's 'Classic Themes' we find answers concerning the form and structure of the figures. This is particularly evident on the frontispiece, where Cuchulainn is depicted throwing his arms to the heavens. His body has been reduced to rigid shapes which are supported by legs which resemble pillars. This architectural style furthers the contents of these illustrations, revealing the foundations for which Irish culture is built upon.

On a surface level most of these illustrations are literal and demand little of the viewer. The style and application is consistent throughout which is probably a result of a tight brief. It is evident that the drawings were completed with great vigour and speed and in many cases working against Le Brocquy, resulting in bad drawing and composition.

The most interest part of this book is the dust-jacket which accompanies it; Le Brocquy changed his mediumism for this graphic form from pen and ink to square tipped brush and ink and instead of line drawing Le Brocquy used a loaded brush creating rigid solids, which is a logical decision when you consider the contents of the illustration. Cuchulainn is depicted racing across the horizon on his horse-drawn chariot with the sun behind him, thus revealing him as a solid silhouette. It was this discovery that prompted his style for The Tain which will be discussed in due course when the subject arises.

### 'Presences' 1956 to 1963

Late in 1955 the British export magazine 'Ambassador' commissioned Le Brocquy to travel to Spain and collect 'visual impressions' which would later be applied to textile designs. The trip was a success, resulting in the Gimpel Fils Gallery exhibiting his drawings and findings, many of which sold, but that was not to be the ultimate achievement of his journey. While there Le Brocquy discovered "the obliterating power of light, making substance evanescent, giving body to shadow" (\*40), and so "the impression that the shadow of an object .... appears to be of greater solidity than the object itself".(\*41)

This new discovery gave great impetus to Le Brocquy's work and in an interview with Michael Pappiatt he explains "When I came back, I wanted to drag the images out of this light of this void, from the depths of virgin canvas" (\*42). And so began his white 'presences'-ghostly images immersing and emerging from the canvas and ".... from now on Le Brocquy is concerned less with the physical reality of the object than with its essence, the radiance rather than fact ... he takes away the formal background leaving only the tangible effect of shadow to make the body speak through its aura, its displacement of air" (\*43).

In 1957 Le Brocquy held his first exhibition of 'presences' in London in the Gimpel Fils Gallery. Generally speaking the work was ill received, but saved to some extent by the art critics John Russell and Herbert Read. The latter seemed quite shocked by Le Brocquy's 'most curiously original' work, which is not surprising because of his connection with a form of Cubism up to now. In relation to probable influences, Le Brocquy's impasto of these 'presences' can be compared to Frank Auerbach's work of 1955, even though Auerbach used more vibrant colours, but the similarity in texture is recognisable, especially in Le Brocquy's 'Caroline' 1956. Another probable influence is Francis Bacon who relied heavily on medical and anatomy book references. One of Bacon's recurring anatomical devices is the spine which, if you will excuse the pun, is the backbone to Le Brocquy's 'presences', for it is nearly always present in these paintings. On a more personal level Le Brocquy had another reference to the spine: Anne Madden, his wife-to-be, suffered greatly from a severe spinal injury, resulting in many operations and time spent in hospitals. And so the comparison must be drawn between the clean white sterility of the hospital and the white of the canvas, along with the open surgery on the spine which Anne Madden received. The spine content is the focal point in many of these paintings. But this point can be pushed even further because Herbert Read is quoted ".... he is a painter of the inner world of feeling .... his work reconciles two opposed principles .... innocence and experience"- the white spaces as symbols of purity, out of which emerged "images of erotic fervour" (\*44). And so again comparisons can be drawn with the innocence, purity and whiteness of Le Brocquy's bride-to-be and the consummation which follows the marriage with an erotic sexual experience which in fact will take place within the whiteness of the sheets. This theory may be a tall order but it does hold some truth in relation to Le Brocquy's personal life.

In 1958 Le Brocquy married Anne Madden, followed by their move to Menton in the South of France. The move had little effect on his work, with Le Brocquy only experimenting with red and blue instead of the white, but he would always end up returning to his white on white images. In 1961 Le Brocquy held an exhibition in the Galerie Charles Liehard in Zurich. The art critic Robert Melville wrote the catalogue introduction and gave the most revealing perception of Le Brocquy's 'presences'. Melville viewed him "like a man who chooses to walk in an endless expanse of snow, conscious that its whiteness is sullied only by his presence" (\*45). A whiteness that Melville compares to the importance that Malevich and the Suprematists placed on white





Young Woman, 1957.  
112 by 86cm, oil on canvas.



Male Presence, 1958.  
112 by 86cm, oil on canvas.



Frank Auerbach,  
Head of E.O.W., 1958,  
50.8 by 40.6cm, oil on board (detail).



Brendan the Navigator, 1963-64,  
546 by 442cm, wool tapestry woven by  
Tabard Frères et Soeurs,  
Aubusson.



Ancestral Head, 1964.  
92 by 73cm, oil on canvas (detail).



"signalling to the world that man's path lies through space" (\*46), white symbolising infinity from which Le Brocquy summons his figures, giving hope to the human race. A "concept of partial emergence preserves human grace and dignity as a potential" (\*47), rather than the pessimistic fear of obliteration by the nuclear bomb, and the "university held belief that the concept of man in harmony with himself in spurious" (\*48), spurious meaning not proceeding from the source pretended, a meaning of life which Le Brocquy could not accept, even if it was rooted in the despair and mistrust that developed after two world wars and a continuing Cold War. In 1963 Le Brocquy's work came to a halt. He has described himself as "completely dried up",(\*49) and destroyed forty canvases that year. The question must be asked, had he lost hope in the human race? Especially when you consider that the Berlin Wall was constructed in 1961, continuing the divide of East and West and in 1962 the Cuban Missile Crisis shook the world, when atomic warfare became almost a reality.

During these lean years Le Brocquy did complete two successful tapestries, 'Figures in Procession', 1963, which has its roots in his 'presences' and 'Brendan the Navigator', 1963/64, the second tapestry and by far the more interesting of the two, because of the amount of research which the twenty-four images of St. Brendan's voyage demanded. The images were selected from Celtic and Catalan early Christian references, like The Book of Ballymote, the Cross of Muiredach and Catalan carvings. The style in which it is executed is very illustrative, simple line drawing relating directly to the source image. The importance of this tapestry is the research, for it was to lead Le Brocquy to the new impetus which he was to discover later that year.

## Ancestral Heads

Le Brocquy, still unhappy with his work, visited Paris with his wife to get away from it all, but while there he stumbled across an exhibition of Polynesian Heads from the South Pacific in the Musee de l'Homme. Le Brocquy was fascinated by the sacred qualities of these images which embodied the spirit of the human being, "the magic box that holds the spirit prisoner" (\*50). Le Brocquy then combined these Polynesian heads with his knowledge of the Celtic head cult, which he would have learned of during 'Irish Revival' discussions and also during the illustration of J. J. Campbell's book Legends of Ireland in 1955.

A few months later he visited the ancient Celtic ruin of Entremont which was destroyed by the Romans in 123 B.C., not very far from where Le Brocquy lived in the South of France. This visit reinforced his earlier discovery (or realisation, as it was lurking there all the time). The most impressive element of Entremont was the great styles (pillar-like stone slabs) which are decorated

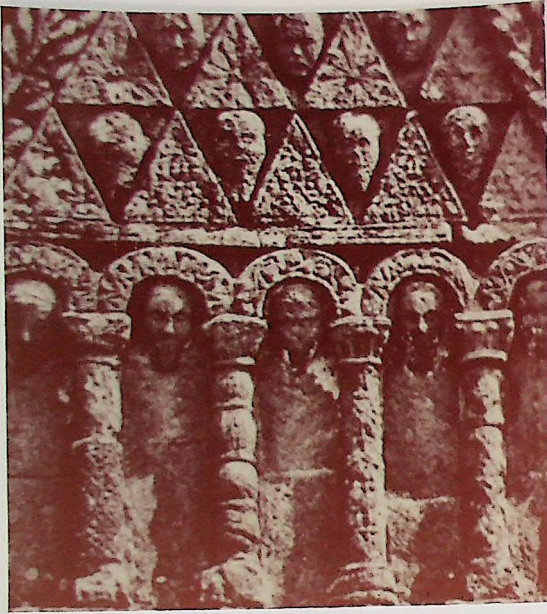
with heads where the "ancestors and warriors were invested with oracular powers" (\*51). But also in these new images, entitled 'Ancestral Heads' there is present the influence of Irish Celtic art, with particular reference to the three-headed stone of Corleck, the head images of Dyserth O'Dea in Co. Clare and the doorway of the Romanesque Cathedral in Clonfert, Co. Galway, the latter which Le Brocquy describes as "... the heads within the plummet-measured face' of Romanesque Clonfert. At once persons and stone bosses, both durable and timeless, forever emerging and receding, they signify a profound paradox, a balanced ambivalence, a succession of presence' (Joyce) spread out before as, without beginning or end" (\*52).

The early heads of 1964 and 1965 are nearly completely abstract, they are more skull than head and thus "lack the emotive quality of recognition" (\*53), but after 1965 Le Brocquy started to develop Irish Rebel Hero which referred to Theobald Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmett which were to be followed by his first studies of Joyce and Beckett, entitled "Image of James Joyce as a Boy" and "Reconstructed Head of Samuel Beckett". Within these head images, Le Brocquy recognised the persecution and obliteration of a civilisation, in Gaulish France, by the Romans in 123 B.C. and in Ireland, the Celts by the Elizabethans in the 17th Century. And so we are witnessing yet another development of Le Brocquy's human condition, "I always find myself returning, in a way to human circumstance" (\*54). There is also a logic behind the arrival of the head image, as it was part of a development which started in his 'tinkers' painting, where Le Brocquy studied a specific group of people. This was followed by the 'grey period' in which we see him concentrating on a smaller unit, the family; this leads on to the presences' singling out the individual, and finally the head image which is the briefest way of expressing the individual in a recognisable way. This point emphasises Le Brocquy's linear development but within this progression there is present a circular pattern, for in order to move forward Le Brocquy has always to return to a past experience or a historic past which layers and gives greater substance to his work. This is also in a feature of James Joyce's work, especially in the recurring episodes of Finnegan's Wake in 1939.

## The Tain

In 1969 Le Brocquy was given the opportunity to further his quest and knowledge of his Celtic ancestors. Thomas Kinsella had newly translated 'Tain Bo Cuailgne' from Irish to English and the Dolmen Press decided to publish this. Two factors contributed to Le Brocquy being commissioned to do the illustrations. First, his mother Sybil was at the forefront of Dolmen and was a personal friend of Thomas Kinsella, and secondly Le Brocquy had discussed a book of this nature with the designer and typesetter Liam Miller who ran The Press, some years previously.





Portal detail from Clonfert Cathedral,  
Co. Galway.



Reconstructed Head of an  
Irish Martyr, 1967,  
130 by 91cm, oil on canvas (detail).

## THE TÁIN



### I THE PILLOW TALK

**ONCE** when the royal bed was laid out for Ailill and Medb in Cruachan fort in Connacht, they had this talk on the pillows:

'It is true what they say, love,' Ailill said, 'it is well for the wife of a wealthy man.'

'True enough,' the woman said. 'What put that in your mind?'

'It struck me,' Ailill said, 'how much better off you are today than the day I married you.'

'I was well enough off without you,' Medb said.

'Then your wealth was something I didn't know or hear much about,' Ailill said. 'Except for your woman's things, and the neighbouring enemies making off with loot and plunder.'

'Not at all,' Medb said, 'but with the high king of Ireland for my father — Eochaid Feidlech the steadfast, the son of Finn, the son of Finnoman, the son of Finnen, the son of Finngoll, the son of Roth, the son of Rigeon, the son of Blathacht, the son of Beothacht, the son of Enna Agnech, the son of Aengus Turbech. He had six daughters: Derbriu, Ethne, Ele, Clothru, Muguin, and myself Medb, the highest and haughtiest of them. I outdid them in grace and giving and battle and warlike

The Táin, p8



Pablo Picasso.  
Don Quixote and Sancho Panza,  
1955, brush and black  
ink on paper.



The book is entitled 'The Tain' and its contents deal with Pre-Christian Ireland, including tales of Queen Maeve, Cuchulainn and other mythical warriors and events, a history reaching back as far as 400 B.C. Many of the stories in 'The Tain' relate to J. J. Campbell's 'Legends of Ireland' in 1955 which Le Brocquy had illustrated, and so he had had experience in handling such work before. But this time Le Brocquy changed his approach, "I had done some illustration about ten years before [15 actually] for a book of Irish Legends, but in The Tain I tried my best to not impose myself to produce a certain anonymity and spontaneity of execution and imaginary .... to allow the events related in The Tain to throw their shadows on the page ...." (\*55). Le Brocquy realised that he would have to be as impersonal as possible because the stories existed owing much for the memory of a people that had lived some twelve hundred years ago (600 A.D. is the presumed date when the stories were recorded in Irish from which Kinsella translated). Le Brocquy insists that the illustrations are an extension of the text and not a graphic comment; this would imply a decorative function which harks back to Jellett's "harmony of rhythm and movement, linking one form to another, a sense of design with the shape of the space" (\*56) which she had observed in the Book of Kells and other Celtic manuscripts, and so we witness Le Brocquy's desire to create a modern Celtic manuscript.

Thomas Kinsella was particularly delighted with the collaboration of writer and artist, text and image, and is quoted "When Le Brocquy's technical means are restricted, as with the black brush drawings commissioned for a translation of the early Irish epic 'The Tain' with the subjects prescribed and the tone pre-set - it is characteristic that his art should burst into sensual excess, a copious revitalising of primal images - of bull, bound and carrion crow, of warrior, queen and horde. And again coherence is a feature of the performance. The apparently random commission found a prepared response - even a prepared style, as the cover design for a book of Irish tales drawn by Le Brocquy many years earlier attests. The effect is to throw a stronger emphasis on the Celtic (not necessarily Irish) element that has formed his work since the early 1960's" (\*57). Within this quote many questions arise, especially in relation to this 'prepared style' that Kinsella mentions. Are we to assume that the influence of the dust jacket was the only one, which would make it extremely easy so analyzing 'The Tain'? No, the depth of influence is far reaching, both inside and out and deserves adequate attention. In relation to this work of the period 'ancestral heads', the illustration of such a book would have furthered his knowledge and understanding of the Celtic people and therefore it complemented his main studies but in relation to style it bore no resemblance at all. You would have to return to Spain in 1956 where he discovered the power of sunlight and the density of shadow, "the obliterating power of light, making substance evanescent, giving body to shadow" (\*58). This influence is confirmed for Le Brocquy refers to his Tain illustrations as "shadows thrown by the text" (\*59), but it must be noted that it is only the shadows and their quality that influenced the illustrations, for they bear no relationship to his 'presences' which evolved after this Spanish experience.

## Picasso Influence

If we now turn our attention to outside influences we find many possibilities, the most immediate of these being Picasso's bullfighters of 1955 which was followed by similar work concerning 'Don Quixote and Sancho Panza' of the same year. The comparison is undeniable, relating strongly to the form and structure of these black brush drawings. But again it would be too easy to single out Picasso's work of 1955 as the only outside influence.

## Spanish Levant Rock Art Influence

Thomas Kinsella gave us a lead when he mentioned the images as being "a copious revitalizing of primal images" (\*60). At first there seems to be no relationship with Palaeolithic Art especially in relation to Ireland, but when faced with the rock art of the Spanish levant several comparisons become apparent. This particular art form is found along the east coast of Spain and belongs to a people who like the Celts were hunters and gatherers. The images which are depicted range from battle scenes, hunting trips and social activities. The style of these paintings bears much resemblance to 'The Tain', consisting of flat monochromatic colour which has been applied in large brush strokes in a fluid liquid paint, and so resulting in much movement and vitality which is not the norm in Palaeolithic Art. The depiction of human figures emphasises this movement; they are mere gestures whose bodies and limbs have been reduced to simple structures and in some cases they have been executed in one single stroke of the brush. Animals are treated somewhat differently, revealing detail and naturalism; they are also depicted in profile and consequently realistic animals are found alongside explosive figures. Le Brocquy's association with such an art is unclear but when in Spain in 1956 he may well have stumbled over such work and also in 1964 Le Brocquy used Catalan references in his St. Brendan's voyage tapestry Brendan the Navigator. So this influence cannot be ruled out.

## Japonisme

During the late 19th Century, many European artists became influenced by the introduction of Japanese Art and Culture, and by the end of the century a Japanese style of brush painting was introduced to the academies and teaching institutions, for it offered new problems to subject matter and movement. Manet, Degas, Monet and Toulouse-Lautrec studied, applied and advanced this oriental art further within a European context. Le Brocquy would have been aware of these experiments, witnessing many of the outcomes when visiting the galleries of Europe in 1938.

One of the major transformations the Japanese brush painting had on European art was the end of single mindedness in relation to "the division of the artistic process into two parts - the sketch





Levant Cave Art,  
Cueva de la Vieja, Alpera.  
Archer with his triple  
curved bow and arrows.



Pablo Picasso,  
The Kill, 1957.  
brush and ink on paper.



Shozo Sato,  
Spirit of the Stroke, 1983,  
 brush and ink on paper.



Franz Kline,  
Betsy, 1957,  
 114 by 91.2cm,  
 oil on canvas.



and its gradual transformation into the finished picture was replaced by spontaneity" (\*61). This spontaneous painting process is particularly evident in black and white work which is referred to as Sumi-e, which through a process of simplicity, understatement and clear expression aspires to capture the spirit of the subject or object in question. There is no over-painting, detail or repeated layers of colour, with the white space having as much importance as the black ink itself, letting the painting exhale and inhale air and light, with the quality of the finished piece depending on the few as opposed to the many things it contains. And so we are left with a striking, elegant image which bears much resemblance to Le Brocquy's style in both execution and form. It is even possible to isolate a particular style of Sumi-e to compare with Le Brocquy's illustrations: the Hokkotsu tradition, in which a loaded brush is applied directly to the paper with no use of outline, and so resulting in black ink solids (also referred to as the 'boneless technique'). This style is viewed as "a way of painting where both way and painting are translated in their broadest meanings as a path of seeing" (\*62). It is conceivable that Le Brocquy took one of these paths so as to realise the Celtic civilisation. But in direct contradiction to Le Brocquy's use of such a Japanese style, the fact that he didn't want to impose himself on the illustrations would question greatly his respect for the medium. For within Sumi-e every brush stroke must be reflected upon before touching the paper, neither negligence nor indifference is tolerated, the artist must feel what he is painting, for the brush is described as being the handmaid of the artist's soul and must be responsive to his inspiration, thus implying the imposition of the artist in the creation of such work. But these guidelines are only really relevant in a Japanese context and cannot really be applied to a 20th Century European artist, whose experience of life and art differs greatly from that of the Orient.

## **Tachisme and Abstract Expressionism**

During the 1940's and 1950's many European artists sampled different Japanese styles of brush painting, in which "each artist creates his own categories, and the rules derived therefrom make up a subjective code, or private language" (\*63).

The artists who practised such techniques became known as Abstract Expressionists, in relation to American artists, and Tachisme, in relation to European artists. During the fifties, London was saturated by these new movements, and it would have been hard for Le Brocquy to ignore such activities. Artists such as Pollock, Kline and Motherwell exhibited black and white work in London in 1958, which were well received and interpreted as a "Manichaeian Struggle" (\*64), which concerned the powers of light against the powers of darkness. The canvasses looked like "battlegrounds, arenas, crucibles, melting pots ... nameless presences, figments, gestures, sheer visual modalities which resisted a literal meaning" (\*65). Even though Le Brocquy belongs "to a category of artists who have always existed - obsessed by figuration outside and on the other

side of illustration, who are aware of the vast and potent possibilities of inventing ways by which fact and appearance can be reconjugated" (\*66), he could not fully reject these new Abstract Expressionist principles because the underlying content of 'struggle' was present in his own work. In relation to Tachisme, Le Brocquy may have found a more common ground. For artists like Andre Mason, also recognised the power of the East, realising its possibilities in both calligraphic and figurative forms. This is emphasised by Karl Appel's Figurative Calligraphy in 1953, which offers us an example in which the artist has created an unknown creature, executed in a somewhat ruleless, spontaneous technique, everything is open, changeable and flowing, nothing is rigid, he has applied his own version of the 'boneless technique', resulting in a work of the highest quality and containing many of the qualities evident in Le Brocquy's Tain.

## Henri Michaux

Another artist of interest who worked in black and white was Henri Michaux. This connection was prompted by John Montague's article in 'Arts in Ireland', in which he mentions the "technical fulfilment in the illustrations for *The Tain*, those great battle hostings which remind one of the mescaline visions of Michaux in their swirl of variety and detail" (\*67). After researching such mescaline visions the comparisons were very slight but looking back at the earlier work of the fifties the comparison becomes more apparent. The work of this period is comprised solely of black Indian Ink drawings, which Le Brocquy may have seen in 1957 when Michaux had an exhibition in Gallery One in London.

When viewing Michaux's work you are faced with 'exorcisms', signs chasing across the white of the paper, "herds which fly before the prairie fire, spuming breshers or apocalyptic whirlpools" (\*68). Within these images there is one common theme of movement and speed, "... storm and flight, the airborne and earthborn battles of the heavenly and earthly hosts, of somersaulting gremlins and of chasing ghosts" (\*69); - a recognisable factor in Le Brocquy's illustrations. In 1951 Michaux completed the writing and illustrating of 'Movements', which was published by Rene Berthele who helped Michaux in the editing of the book; this is comprised of one long poem which is accompanied by sixty-four drawings. These drawings were selected from some twelve thousand images, which all depicted the movement of creatures. After the completion of the book Michaux is quoted, "They are gestures, interior gestures, the ones with which we don't have limbs, but desires for limbs, stretching, impulsive movements and all this with living ligaments that are never thick, never big with flesh nor enclosed in skin .... what an experience it will be when the time is ripe at last and having got into the habit of thinking in sign, we are able to exchange secrets with a few natural strokes like a handful of twigs" (\*70). In relation to the first section of this quote we can identify traits of Le Brocquy's illustration and painting with particular reference to his 'presences', but within the second half, with particular reference to 'a few natural strokes'





Karl Appel,  
Figurative Calligraphy, 1953,  
 125 by 100cm. oil on canvas (detail).



Henri Michaux,  
Ink Painting, 1959, 75 by 105cm,  
 brush and ink on paper.



The Táin,  
'The Sickle Chariot', p152.



Michaux is pointing out that more of these strokes that exist the more he existed, for the drawings helped him to discover another self; similarly Le Brocquy through his illustrations discovers a civilisation which aids him in his own self-discovery.

Another important point that Michaux makes about 'Movements' is the power of the images to liberate the density of the text, and so acting as another stimulant in provoking the imagination of the reader/viewer .

Within 'The Tain' there is a certain 'liberation' but it is shared by both text and image. For in many of the illustrations there is a lack of narrative, and in many instances this could be interpreted as ink blobs but, with the aid of the text and the imagination of the reader, a coherence is achieved, revealing a pathway to a somewhat inaccessible civilisation.

## Game of Chance

It is as if we have been asked to play a game, a game in which Le Brocquy himself has played, "It was really a kind of game in which I tried to allow vestige or fossilised remains of the saga to emerge .... the game is that one tries to allow to emerge some general trace of the very wide and deep reality .... to discover how it appeared rather to impose one's view".(\*71) The question that arises now is, is this the game that Duchamp refers to, where 'chance' liberated his spirit of play. Le Brocquy does regard 'accident' as extremely important and that the role of the artist is to recognise these ".... significant marks as they occur. And these are what I retain and expand, and from which I hope an image will emerge" (\*72). It is this automatic procedure that allows Le Brocquy to sensitise himself to the intrinsic characteristics of marks, shapes, colours and materials, and especially in the behaviour with each other, in different combinations and scales (Le Brocquy created a series of lithographs after the book was published based on key illustrations in The Tain, working them on a much greater scale), so aiding the artist's improvisation skills. Le Brocquy's use and recognition of chance furthers the possibilities of his illustrations, but we must also recognise the presence of 'intention' within his work. Chance and intention are parts of the mind and are found in every art form, they are like creative partners, striving for a particular end. Within Le Brocquy's illustrations we can recognise the brush technique as chance and the fulfilment of the brief as intention, which have been brought together by the artists' awareness of his feelings and materials. The surfacing of this awareness is also a result of chance: the brain like an encyclopedia stores all previous experiences and through random selection, which has been prompted by the artists' intentions, emits a stimulus from which the artist makes associations resulting in some sort of a solution, but, of course not always a successful one.

Chance also plays a role with the viewer, in relation to the illustration standing on its own without the support of the text. In the same manner in which Leonardo De Vinci described the stains on a dirty wall " .... with the idea of imagining some scene, you will find analogies for landscape with mountain, rivers, trees .... of all kinds. You will see also battles and figures with animated gestures and strange faces .... an infinity of things" (\*73), similarly Le Brocquy conjures up such imagery in his illustrations, and with the give and take of such unconscious prompting and accidents as stimuli, Le Brocquy confirms his faith in intuition and feeling, both in the making of art and in its determining role in the viewer's response.

## **The Issue of 'Black'**

Another important issue within 'The Tain' is the use of black. Are we to suppose that it is merely functional and does not require understanding or does the black probe deeper, containing a substance, contributing to the content of the illustrations? For 'black' has been described as "an agent of the spirit" (\*74) containing primeval contents and so having the power to be read in many different ways.

Matisse learnt much from black, especially after witnessing the density of black shadow when he visited Morocco. His recognition of its 'force' helped him to simplify his structures and so it became a colour "of light and not a colour of darkness" (\*75). Similarly Le Brocquy's 'black' simplifies form but most important of all it reveals, giving life to subject matter which is dead and past, and therefore revealing a hope concerning its existence. In complete contradiction to this analysis of 'black', Motherwell, Le Brocquy's exact contemporary offers a different approach. Motherwell, like Le Brocquy, was much influenced by the "soot black shadows"(\*76) of Spain, but also by the darkness of the Spanish funeral, in which the mourners, the coffin, carriage along with its horses and their plumes are black, in stark contrast to the Spanish light and the bright whites of Spanish housing. This translation of black and white is very literal, "Black is death, anxiety: white is life, eclact" (\*77), hence, the reason why Motherwell's art suggests "black flags, severed genitals, megalithic temples shrouded bodies and pervasive presence of death" (\*78). This literal description can easily be applied to the Tain, for like a 'memorial card', his illustrations are a memory and a tribute but also a certificate of death.

## **Conclusion**

On a surface level the work of most of the artists I have discussed bear a strong relationship with Le Brocquy's illustrations. What is common to all is the contrast between black and white and its effect of squeezing out the middle tones, resulting in all colours becoming either black





The Táin.  
gathering of the armies,  
p236-237 (detail).



Robert Motherwell,  
Q, 1968,  
oil on canvas.  
(detail)



The Táin, 1970.  
407 by 610cm,  
wool tapestry woven  
by Tabard Frères et  
Soeurs, Aubusson (detail).



The Playboy of the  
Western World,  
front-cover detail of  
'Christy Mahon'.



The Playboy of the  
Western World,  
'Violet mask of Old Mahon',  
p97.



or white. The extremes of dark and light create a spatial effect which, when properly applied to the surface of the work, represents flat parallel layers rather than continuous recessions or hollowing. This quality is evident in the large horde scene (p236-237) of The Tain, in which you sense a perspective rather than an emergence or immergence of figures. But needless to say, in relation to single figures the latter qualities do prevail, harking back to Le Brocquy's 'presences' and 'head images'. It is not plausible that everything that has been mentioned is a direct influence on what Le Brocquy has created, but what it does do, is place him in an international art context rather than simply adhering to Le Brocquy's humble explanation of "shadows thrown by the text".

After the success of The Tain, Le Brocquy executed a series of large lithographs based on key images from the book, which were later exhibited in the Dawson Gallery in Dublin. This was soon followed by a commission from the architects Scott, Tallon and Walker for a tapestry for their clients P. J. Carroll and Co. (cigarette manufacturers) whose factory is located in Dundalk, in the general area where the stories of The Tain originated. So, Le Brocquy applied his recent developments in illustration and content to the tapestry which he completed in 1970 and entitled The Tain. The images of the tapestry include several dozen 'head images' which all face the viewer. They were executed in a variety of colours, but within each individual 'head image' there are only two tones, one depicting the shape of the head and the other the details, nose, eyes and mouth and sometimes hair.

## **Playboy of the Western World**

This technique was later adapted for Le Brocquy's next illustrated book, John Millington Synge's The Playboy of the Western World, (1970). The book involved The Dolmen Press but only as printer, since the publishers are The Imprint Society in Boston. It is a limited edition of 1950 copies and signed personally by Le Brocquy and the editor Stanley Sultan.

The Playboy of the Western World is a play, and was first performed in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin in 1907. The play is essentially a comedy based on rural life in the west of Ireland at the turn of the century, and is regarded as an important part of 20th Century Anglo-Irish literature. There is a total of six illustrations in the book which have each been allocated a full page, and are executed in exactly the same style as 'The Tain' tapestry. The six illustrations relate directly to the six main characters of the play; not only are they named but the colours which Le Brocquy chose relate precisely to the characters themselves. The first illustration is of Pegeen Mike, the heroine of the play; she is depicted in rose and pink, suggesting her beauty and femininity. Shawneen Keogh is next, who is to wed Pegeen Mike; he is seen in shades of green emphasising his innocence and naivety, but also his envy of Christy Mahon, which is the third

illustration. He is depicted in ochre and yellow, revealing a bright lively character who charms Pegeen Mike and is thus a threat to Shawneen Keogh. But yellow also implies a cowardly figure, which becomes evident at the end of the play. The fourth image is of the Widow Quinn, seen in orange, lively and spirited but acidic and dangerous because she wants Christy Mahon for herself. This is followed by Old Mahon, Christy's father, who is depicted in violet and purple, relating the head injuries which Christy inflicted on his father with the butt of a loy (spade). Finally the last illustration is of Michael James, Pegeen Mike's father, in red and vermillion relating to the fact that he is a heavy drinker and a publican, to his anger towards the turn of events and finally to his embarrassment over the misjudgment of the situation. The front cover is also illustrated but this is a double up of Christy Mahon, in which only the detail layer is used, executed in gold on a yellow ground, emphasising the main character of the play. And so a beautiful logic has been administered, giving body and adding humour to Synge's characters. What must be pointed out is the fact that you cannot fully appreciate the illustrations until you have read the book or seen the play.

## Northern Images

In 1971 Le Brocquy embarked on a series of 'head images' which related to the 'troubles' in Northern Ireland, the homeland of 'Tain Bo Cuailgne', but more importantly Le Brocquy has been stimulated by the helplessness of the individual in a time of disaster, coupled with the individuals' definitive fear of death. The images are entitled Northern Image or Occluded Image; and portray the victims of violence, Le Brocquy taking the side of the dead of both factions, and so making a universal statement, showing yet again his concern for the human condition.

What is unique to these 'head images' is the introduction of the hand, "instruments of art, of work .... pleading, directing, applauding, caressing" (\*79). And if the hand in question relates to the victim's hand, which is generally placed before the face, we presume it is in defence, protecting from violence. But also it can be noticed that the heads have been consumed by the whiteness, imprisoning the victims whose hands reach out but are met by a transparent surface (palms of hands depicted as if pressed against glass) and so furthering the victims' dilemma, which is heightened again by the screaming open mouth of each individual. This in turn is reminiscent of Francis Bacon's Study after Velasquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X in 1952. In contradiction to what has already been discussed, the hand is also an instrument of violence. The hand, predominantly seen as red in these paintings could be perceived as the crest of the province: the Red Hand of Ulster, a Protestant motif which smothers and silences the victim, an oppression which is rooted in a past as far back as the 17th Century Elizabethan Ulster. Nonetheless these paintings are cries for help, furthering Le Brocquy's preoccupation with the human condition.





Francis Bacon,  
Study after Valesquez's Portrait  
of Pope Innocent X, 1952,  
 153 by 118cm,  
 oil on canvas.



Head with an open mouth,  
 1973, 70 by 70,  
 oil on canvas (detail).



Study towards an image of  
W.B. Yeats, 1975.  
 50 by 45cm.  
 colour etching (detail).



Image forming on a  
red ground, frontispiece  
to Frederick May's  
'String Quartet in C Minor',  
 colour etching.

## W. B. Yeats

In 1973 Le Brocquy's mother died, resulting in little work for the next two years. But in 1975 Le Brocquy was approached by the Swedish Gallery owner Per-Olov Borjeson to contribute to a portfolio which he was compiling, based on the thirty-three Nobel Prize winners. Each prizewinner was depicted by a different artist with Le Brocquy choosing the 1923 literature award winner William Butler Yeats. Le Brocquy used photographic references combined with his own childhood recollection, for the Le Brocquys were friends of the Yeats family, giving him an edge on other artists' portrayals of the great poet. But when executing these images he came into great difficulty, for he realised that no one single image could portray Yeats' genius. This dilemma resulted in some one hundred studies towards Yeats, in oil, watercolour, etching and charcoal drawing. What Virgil was to Dante, Yeats became to Le Brocquy: "my guide in this other world" (\*80), a world of human consciousness which Le Brocquy believed was symbolised by the head usage of the poet. Later in 1976 Le Brocquy exhibited his studies of Yeats in Dublin's Dawson Gallery. The work gained much respect from the critics and also from Anne Yeats, W.B's daughter, who "found it and haunting an unforgettable experience .... roomful of faces, each one apparently an impression, but adding in total, to an astonishing feeling of vigour and intellectual liveliness" (\*81).

### Quartet In C Minor

Parallel to his Yeats studies, Le Brocquy took on another Dolmen Press associated book. The publishers this time were Woodtown Music Publications Limited. The book, entitled String Quartet in C Minor, was written by the Irish music composer Frederick May; it was published in 1976 and its contents mainly consisted of May's musical score for his piece String Quartet in C Minor. May also wrote the introduction, which is followed by a tribute to May by the Scottish poet Hugh Mac Diarmid. Le Brocquy's contribution is a single etching as a frontis piece opposite the title page at the beginning of the book. This publication is a limited edition of five hundred copies, with copies one to fifty signed personally by all three participants.

The illustration is entitled Image forming on a red ground, derived from an etching and then adapted for lithography. The style and texture of the image bears a direct relationship with a series of etchings that he completed the previous year based on his studies of the poet W. B. Yeats. The colours red and white are the same, but this time in reverse, as if you were now looking at a photographic negative. It is not apparent that the illustration refers to May himself, as the image is somewhat obscure and unidentifiable, and has more in common with his 'ancestral heads' than anything else. But after reading the introduction and tribute we discover



that may, and his later work, is preoccupied with death and the "enclosing darkness of fate" (\*82). And this we can re-evaluate the etching and place it within the context of May's line of thought. So again we witness Le Brocquy's use of the same play over and over again in his illustrations, offering the viewer no literal explanation when viewing it alone but when applied to the text the image and its contents become more apparent and thus complete a logical and intelligent pattern.

## The Gododdin

In the following year Liam Miller, director and designer of the Dolmen Press approached Le Brocquy to illustrate The Gododdin. Desmond O'Grady had compiled the poems of the Welsh bard Aneurin, The Gododdin and The Gorchanau: Three Laments. It was fitting that Le Brocquy should illustrate the book because the poem dealt with the destruction of a people called the Gododdin in early Christian England (450-600 A.D.)

The Gododdin inhabited an area between the Forth and the Tyne Rivers and were constantly being attacked by the Anglo-Saxon armies of Bernecia and Deira. King Myngddog, the Gododdin King, prepared a select army of three hundred warriors and attacked the Anglo-Saxon at Catreath; after a week of fighting The Gododdin were annihilated, but one escaped to tell of the tragedy, believed by some to be the Welsh bard Aneurin.

Le Brocquy viewed the slaughter as "a cry which gives echo to the final ordeal of Entremont and of its holy place Roquepertise" (\*83) (in 123 BC by the Romans), and so placed the Gododdin within the context of the destruction of the Celts throughout the ages. Le Brocquy while illustrating the poems "discovered nothing but rooks" (\*84), symbols of evil and death, scavenging after the total annihilation of the majestic warriors. He adopted his 'Tain' illustration style, with the blackness of the images suiting the melancholy of the poems. The use of such images is ironic for it does not pay tribute to the warriors, which the poems do, but emphasises the Anglo-Saxons' victory; at the same time these bird images emulate the freedom of the Gododdin people after the ultimate sacrifice of death. When executing The Gododdin, Le Brocquy had his right working hand in plaster and so had to use his "clumsy left hand" (\*85) to illustrate and paint during this period. Le Brocquy commented on his disability saying, "It would seem to show that no predictable skill whatsoever is involved and that images emerge not by imposition on my part but, as it were, atomically - jerked into coherence by a series of vaguely directed accidents, discovered rather than executed" (\*86), this further emphasises his association with chance but also gives an alibi in justifying his belief that he does not impose himself in this work. [Which we already know is highly unlikely because of the presence of intention with works of art.]

## XLVII

Gododdin  
I demand backlure  
Valleys capired over mountains  
Mountain ridges fragmented

This young man,  
irreprehensible,  
desirous of reward  
through good counsel  
has wracked in both  
new wracking in wisdom of counsel

Blaze of light,  
doorway of pain  
for a pilgrim.

Bulling for battle  
has slaughter was sung by Aneirin.

## XLVIII

An equality of wariness  
was plainly at Caerul—  
last tidings, last moment.

To defend the humoured hospitalities  
of their households  
the sword-swinging  
splendour of horses  
led the Gododdin  
with passion.



The Gododdin,  
double page, p44-45.



THE GORRCHANAU: THREE LAMENTS

The Gododdin,  
Introduction to 'The Gorrchanau',  
p69.



The Gododdin.  
p16.

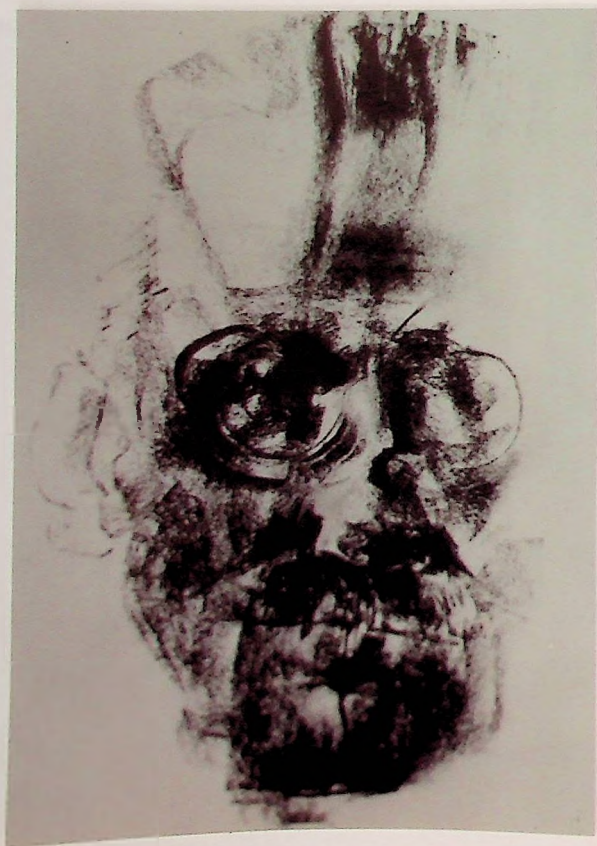


Image of James Joyce, 1977,  
34 by 29cm, charcoal on paper.



An interesting question arises from these illustrations, is Le Brocquy himself a black raven, scavenging from a past, grave-robbing as such, in the hope that by surrounding himself in such open concern for his supposed ancestor and associated cultures that he himself may become part of such a culture? For Le Brocquy is only first generation Irish; his father and his family are rooted in Belgium, while his mother was Irish, involved in the Irish Revival and a guiding force behind his career in the arts. Thus creating an identity crises, in which le Brocquy must experience Irish and other associated imagery so as to proclaim and convince himself of his 'Irishness'.

## Head Images : Continued

The success of the Yeats studies prompted Le Brocquy to create a series of images on James Joyce in 1977. This snowballed, resulting in further studies of other artists including Samuel Beckett, Federico Garcia Lorca, Francis Bacon, Pablo Picasso, William Shakespeare and Auguste Strindberg, which have formed the main body of his work to this very day. It must be pointed out that these images were not the first, he had painted in 1964 Image of James Joyce as a boy, and a Reconstructed head of Samuel Beckett in 1965.

Le Brocquy justifies his countless studies of these head images through the construction of past experiences, which when united form an alibi for their existence. His head images are described as "paintings of interior meaning, rather than of particularised content" (\*87). This is the norm in 20th Century art, for many artists understand their work to be an avenue of search, not just for 'forms' or originality but for deep meaning and penetrating vision, such as Kandisky and his 'inner world', or Mondrian and "the universal that towers above us" (\*88). From this search the artist regards himself to be closer to that 'something' than others - serving it, however, informally but with more sincerity and wisdom than are commonly encountered, as supported by Le Brocquy's dictum " .... an essential quality of art is its alienation, its otherness" (\*89).

Le Brocquy regards himself as an "archaeologist of the spirit" (\*90), a spirit which does not refer to any formal spiritual tradition of religion, as any "flash of insight requires no temple, no dogma to sanctify it" (\*91), for he admits to being "a good agnostic" (\*92) whose knowledge and awareness of the spirit is a result of the teaching of Dr. Erwin Schroedinger during the early forties. Schroedinger presented the idea to Le Brocquy that the spirit is indestructible for, like matter, it can change into any form, such as energy, and therefore be captured within painting. Another Schroedinger statement which astonished Le Brocquy and has remained with him ever since is that, "Consciousness is a singular of which the plural is unknown, and what appears to be a plurality is merely a series of different aspects of this one thing" (\*93) and so since Le Brocquy has regarded the poet/artists' head 'as an image of human consciousness', the multiple images which he creates are only part of the whole, therefore justifying his lengthy head image series to himself.

But Le Brocquy does realise and question the tangibility of painting as an "impalpable thing"(\*94) like the spirit, and recognises that his obsession with it has become a private search " .... involving even the problems of one's identity" (\*95), searching and turning up with elements of yourself which you didn't know existed - "It is true that the painter continually tends to paint his self - portrait in all things, since what he tries objectively to draw up for the depth of his canvas lies really somewhere in his own head" (\*96). This raises the question, Who is Louis le Brocquy? If we are to believe that within his head images Le Brocquy witnessed morsels of himself, than we must consider him to be one of the most important artists of the 20th Century in Ireland or even internationally or else a vain and pretentious one. What adds fuel to the fire of the latter proposal is that, in dealing with such poets, writers and painters his work immediately becomes more accessible to a larger audience, which is not a bad thing, but in relation to his Irish public, who are Le Brocquy's best buyers and are somewhat conservative in their tastes, Le Brocquy offers an intelligent looking art and a good investment.

"Whatever the work is and whatever its nature, the message conveys shaky but real confidence that our lives may not be just empty exercises, soon to be concluded, but no, it offers direction, and in taking this direction it can initiate a lifetime of work" (\*97).

### The Later Years

#### **Ugolino**

To return to Le Brocquy's illustrated books: In 1979 he took on Seamus Heaney's poem Ugolino. The book's text was printed by Dolmen Press, with Le Brocquy's illustrations adapted for lithography and printed by Irish Printers Limited in Dublin. It was privately published by Andrew Carpenter who also wrote the introduction and is a personal friend of all the participants involved. The book is only sixteen pages long with the poem contributing four pages and the illustrations two. It is in a limited edition of one hundred and twenty five and is signed personally by Heaney, Le Brocquy, Miller and Carpenter. The introduction describes the contents and makes it easier to analyse. The poem is based on the story of Archbishop Ruggieri and Count Ugolino, told in Cantos XXXII and XXXIII of Dante's Inferno, in which the Count and his grandsons, Niro des' Visconti were respectively the heads of two Guelf parties which held power in the town of Pisa in 1288. To get rid of Niro, the Count allied himself with the Archbishop, and as soon as Niro was driven out, the Archbishop saw that the Guelfs had weakened, turned on Ugolino and imprisoned him with four of his sons and grandsons in a tower subsequently named the Tower of Famine. They remained there until March 1289, when the Archbishop ordered the tower to be locked and the keys thrown in the river. After eight days the tower was opened, revealing all victims dead of starvation (\*98).

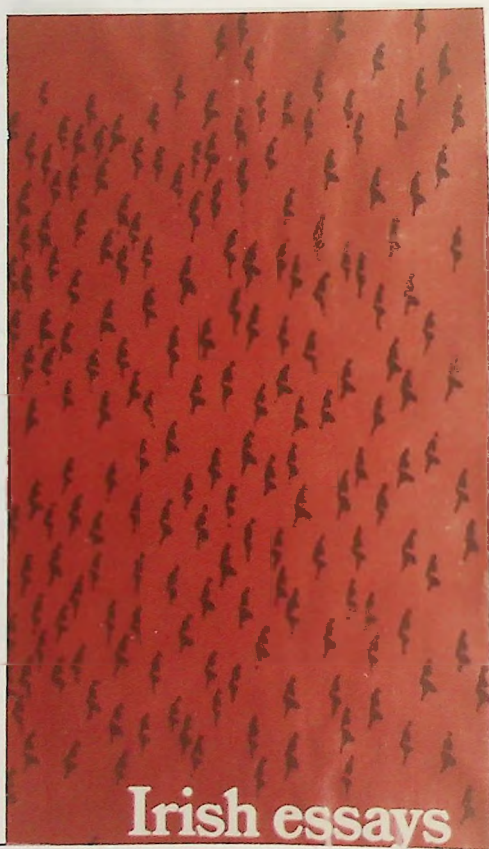


Ugolino,  
opening illustration,  
charcoal on paper,  
adapted for lithography.





Ugolino,  
closing illustration,  
charcoal on paper,  
adapted for lithography.



Irish Essays,  
dust-jacket.

Seamus Heaney explains that he was drawn to the material "because I sensed there was something intimate, almost carnal about these feuds and sorrows of medieval Pisa (treachery creating nothing but mutual hatred), something that could perhaps mesh with and house the equivalent and destructive energies at work in, say, contemporary, Belfast" (\*99), a subject Le Brocquy had touched on in his 'Northern Images' between 1971-1972, giving him extra insight in handling the illustration, which feature at the beginning and end of the poem within the book. Their style relates directly to his charcoal studies of Yeats (1973) and Joyce (1974). The charcoal in these drawings has been used on its side, creating planes rather than lines, resulting in a depth and style reminiscent of Cubism. The images are comprised of double head images, not side by side as seen in 'Duel Image' 1970 but on top of each other, relating more to a totem pole than anything else. The contents of the illustrations relate directly to the lines of the text, with the first drawing emulating the opening section of the poem. - "We had already left him. I walked the ice - And saw two soldered in a frozen hole - on top of other, ones skull capping the other's",(\*100) the poem continues and reveals that the top head is of Count Ugolino who gnaws a the bottom head of Archbishop Ruggieri ("As if it were some spattered carnal melon" (\*101)).

The second illustration echoes the first in composition and execution and adds to the hopelessness of Count Ugolino's situation, for no matter how long he continues to grow at the Archbishop's head he will never regain the lives of his sons and himself, and as a result of his treachery he must spend an eternity within the Frozen Circle IX of Dante's Hell.

The fact that his particular ring of hell is composed of ice gives meaning to Le Brocquy's style within the illustrations. For the angular rigid style of his charcoal drawings compare convincingly with the sharp, brittle yet solid qualities of ice. And so yet again a simple basic logic descends upon Le Brocquy's illustrations, but it must be pointed out that in order to fully comprehend this work a basic knowledge of both source and content of the poem must be understood. Hence, Le Brocquy would believe that he is not imposing himself on the text, but in contradiction to this, the fact that an internationally renowned artist such as Le Brocquy has illustrated such a limited edition book, conclude that he has imposed himself, his name and person, as opposed to his style of execution, on this publication.

## **Irish Essays**

In the following year Le Brocquy illustrated the dust jacket for Kevin Cahill's Irish Essays, which dealt with the Northern Ireland situation and the proposal of possible solutions. The subject matter is of interest to Le Brocquy as Ugolino was, but Cahill, the President General of the American Irish Historic Society, is a personal friend and collector of this work, and so we can presume that Cahill simply asked for a contribution from Le Brocquy, which of course would add substance to the essays' contents.

Le Brocquy applied his black brush drawing technique of 'The Tain' to the Irish Essays' front cover as it dealt with the convergence of two large crowds, and needed to be as versatile as possible, without requiring detail. Le Brocquy (on the inside flap of the book jacket) explains in detail how he arrived at such an image - "I have tried my poor best with a brush drawing showing two groups or streams of human beings progressing from the back cover of the dust jacket, over the obstacles implied by the spine, and onto the front cover, where they converge and blend into - hopefully - a single society. The figures are made with very simple almost symbolic brush strokes. - The figures are in black ink on an earth colour, the common background of all" (\*102).

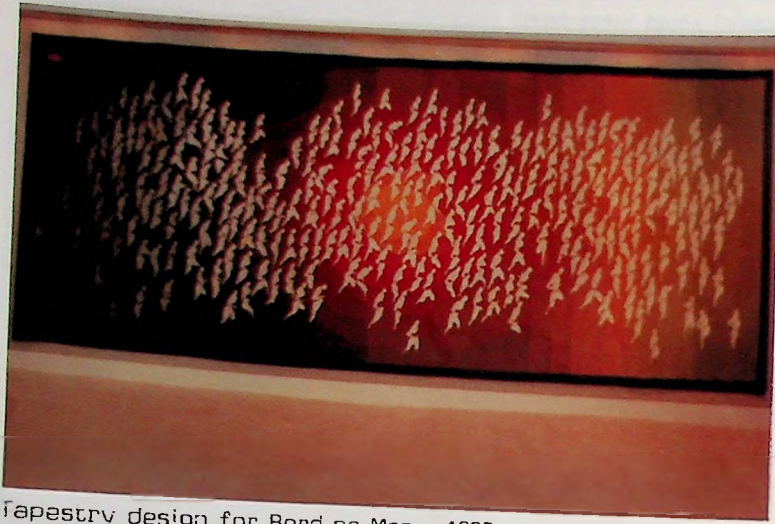
This perfect quote emphasises the logical pattern that exists within his illustrations, but what must be pointed out, is, that the image in question was adopted from a tapestry which Le Brocquy had executed in 1980 for 'Bord Na Mona'. Therefore the question must be asked, did Cahill view this earlier tapestry image, find it suitable for his book, and simply ask Le Brocquy to adapt it for 'Irish Essays' or did Le Brocquy double up on this image without Cahill knowing, or was it simply suggested by the artist and agreed by the writer. Whatever, the reason, the fact that the original source had different implications detracts from Le Brocquy's interpretation of 'Irish Essays'.

## **Eight Irish Writers**

The third book of this period is Le Brocquy's own publication 'Eight Irish Writers'. It was published in France by Imprimerie Arte Adrian Maeght - Paris in 1981 as a limited edition. The text is written and compiled by Andrew Carpenter and the preface is by Seamus Heaney (Le Brocquy's companions in 'Ugolino'). Where this book differs from all others is that Le Brocquy completed a series of head images, eight in total, with charcoal on paper, after which Carpenter was given the responsibility of attaching some text to each illustration. The eight writers and their work included W.B. Yeats - 'A Bronze Head', J.M. Synge - 'Queens', James Joyce - 'Tilly', Francis Stuart - 'Immortality', Samuel Beckett - untitled poetry, Thomas Kinsella - 'The Secret Garden', John Montague - 'The Black Pig' and finally Seamus Heaney - 'Digging'.

The layout of the book is also universal in that it has not been bound. Each loose leaf page has been folded in two, creating a four page folder. On page one the writers' name has been printed, followed by a sample piece of text chosen from the writers' work; page three is empty and finally on page four a brief biographical synopsis has been included relating to the writer in question. Placed inside each folder is a loose collotype lithographic print of the particular writer, which has been signed and numbered by Le Brocquy. All eight sections along with the preface and listings are gathered together and presented in a fold-out box, completing a very luxurious item.





Tapestry design for Bord na Mona, 1980.



Image of James Joyce, 1979,  
40 by 30cm,  
charcoal on paper (detail).  
same drawing used in  
'Eight Irish writers'.



Procession with Lilies, 1984-85,  
115 by 146cm,  
oil on canvas.



Pigeon in Flight, 1984,  
50 by 65cm,  
oil on canvas.



Le Brocquy's 'head images' of 'Eight Irish Writers' relate directly to his main studies. They are charcoal drawings adopted for lithography in a similar technique to that of 'Ugolino' in 1979. Carpenter chose poetry in every instance and his reasoning is explained within the book "... they do seem to represent its major themes and preoccupation with uncanny accuracy, Irish Writers seems almost obsessively concerned with the search for roots, for self-definition and for clarity of vision of the self. In tone and mood, as well as in theme, then the poems in this collection are unified: the writers like the artist, seem fascinated to be engaged in the exploration of the personality" (\*103). This is a point made earlier in this essay, which when combined with the fact that Le Brocquy recognises his own self-portrait within all these images, leads us to believe that he is even more arrogant than before. Because in placing such quotes from the writers to Le Brocquy's illustrations (in which he envisages his own self-portrait) are we to assume that the written words relate to different parts of his psyche, which like the plural of this consciousness are in fact the singular consciousness of himself.

Heaney in the preface tells us of Le Brocquy's successful journey, "... heads are in this way quotations from bodies, from lives even ... they are complete: they have come through" (\*104), but this 'successful journey' is of illustration and its combination with text for it completes a circular motion, in which the poets' ideas, emotions and greatest thoughts are translated from the head to words on paper, and from these words Le Brocquy creates head images of the poet, completing a vicious circle which seems to have trapped Le Brocquy for the last fifteen years.

### **'New work' 1984**

In 1984 Le Brocquy's work took on a welcomed "... breath of fresh air" (\*105) for the critics had enough of his 'head images', "... absurdly over-rated, for about two decades Le Brocquy has been painting the heads of men who have become cultural icons .... they virtually look as though they should be illuminating, because they are skilfully painted with plenty of roguish voids and visual ambiguities, but they tend to end up as being nothing but surface" (\*106). So viewers at his exhibition at the Dawson Gallery, Dublin, were met by images of flowers, birds, goldfish and most important of all, the major work Procession with Lilies, which gave the appearance of something new and forward looking; on reflection, many skeletons were removed from the cupboard. This was particularly true of 'Procession with Lilies' which went far beyond the depiction of "School girls returning from church after the Blessing of the lilies on the Feast of St. Anthony" (\*107), which is the caption below the photograph that Le Brocquy received from Robin Doybn in 1939. Le Brocquy had found this image to be particularly stimulating, "To me this processional image related to certain feelings concerning time and continuity which interested me then" (\*108). Thus, had resulted in several attempts to paint a "fluid succession of presents" (\*109) on many occasions, one as early as 1945 with further studies during the late fifties and



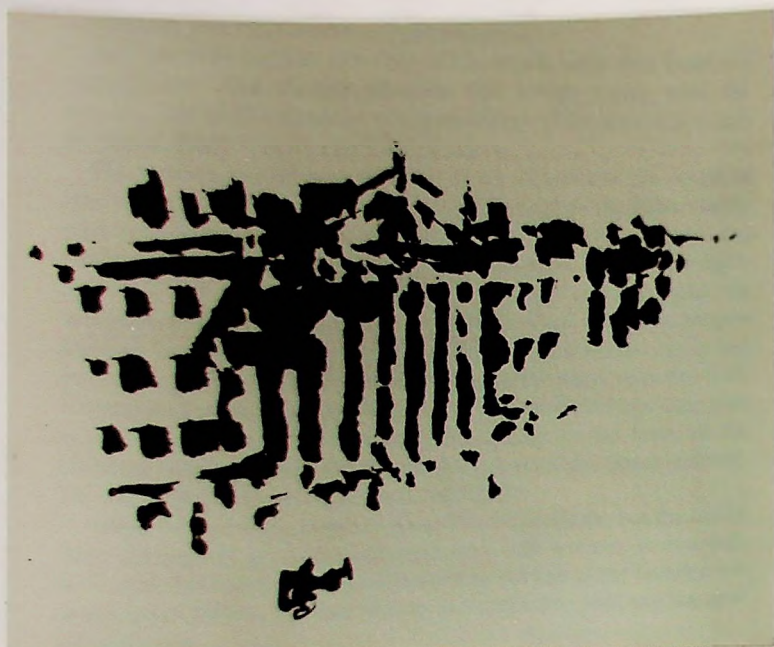
early sixties. For the complexities of this image are intriguing, the combination of the white and the purity of the girls is juxtaposed with the other events of the day, for it is also 'Bloomsday' and the publishing day for Joyce's '*Finnegans Wake*', which is coupled with the fact that it was the last summer before World War Two and Joyce's too, for he was to die in the following year. Le Brocquy tries to justify this nostalgia by saying that, "when a painter is working in his studio he is concerned only with resolving a painterly problem and not with exhibiting its resolution. But because this forgotten movement almost fifty years ago belonged to Dublin, I feel I want to return it unto Dublin, as it were, to bring it back at last" (\*110).

In relation to his flower images such as Bignonia Growing, 1984, a relation can first be drawn to this Homage à E. Manet, 1981, in which Le Brocquy pays tribute to Manet's peonies and also to the artist who has greatly influenced him during his early career. The comparison can also be drawn to Monet's 'Waterlilies' 1916-26, for Le Brocquy, like Monet in his later career, used his own garden as source material. Finally in relation to his bird images, Pigeon in Flight, 1984, which reveals many past associations. Most relevant is the comparison with 'Dove' which he completed in 1955, which bears similarities to Picasso's interest in keeping such birds, but more interesting is the fact that the birds flight relates to his experience in 1938 when he observed the winged shapes of the 'Os frontis' of the brain when illustrating it for the neuro-surgeon D. Mc Connell of the Richmond Hospital and the Royal College of Surgeons (\*111).

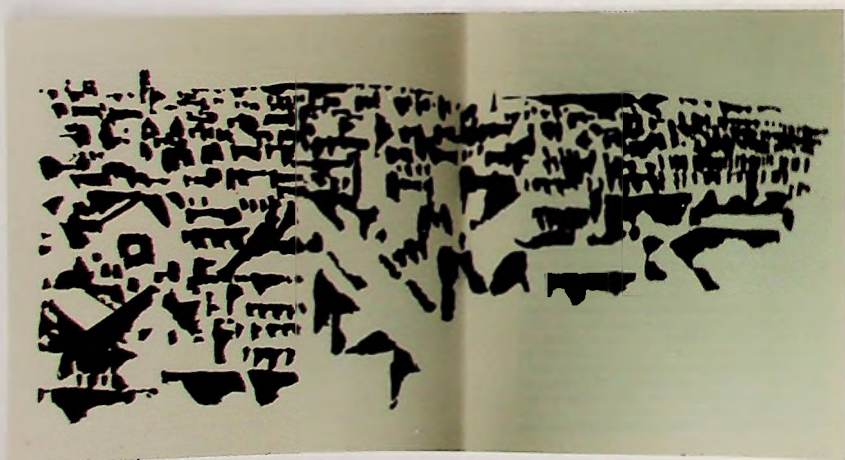
Parallel to all this activity, Le Brocquy maintained his painting of 'head images', including new studies on Picasso (furthering the dove relationship) and Shakespeare, many of which have been purchased by major galleries throughout the world. And so we are left feeling that Le Brocquy is still stuck within his vicious circle of intertwining loops, which he seemingly moves in and out of in an attempt to progress further in his personal and artistic development.

## Dubliners

Le Brocquy took this a step further in 1986 when he illustrated James Joyce's Dubliners, first published in 1914. This publication was prompted by Kevin Cahill and involved the participation of the Dolmen Press, who reverted to letterpress especially for this publication. Since they had abandoned that method in 1979. So with the combined design skills of Liam Miller and letterpress craftsmanship of Eric Gill's nephew Christopher Skelton, the book was printed. It is a limited edition of five hundred, hand bound and signed personally by all participants involved. James Joyce's '*Dubliners*' is a collection of fifteen sketches of short stories. His intention, he said, was to write, "in a style of scrupulous meanness" (\*112), a chapter of the moral history of his country, but particularly of his capital city Dublin, which appeared to Joyce to be the "centre of paralysis" (\*113). The stories' contents deal with Dublin people and situations naturalistically and realistically in a manner alien to English literature at the time. The stories are rich and



Dubliners.  
 illustration from  
 'Clay' p113.



Dubliners.  
 illustration from  
 'The Dead' p200-201.



## A Painful Case



MR JAMES DUFFY LIVED IN CHAPELIZOD because he wished to live as far as possible from the city of which he was a citizen and because he found all the other suburbs of Dublin noisy, modern and pretentious. He lived in an old squire house and from his windows he could look into the dimmed distillery or upwards along the shallow river on which Dublin is built. The left wall of his uncarpeted room were free from pictures. He had himself bought every article of furniture in the room: a black iron bedstead, an iron washstand, four cane chairs, a clothes-rack, a coal scuttle, a fender and trons and a square table on which lay a double desk. A bookcase had been made in an alcove by means of shelved white wood. The bed was clothed with white bed-clothes and a black and white rug covered the foot. A little hand-mirror hung above the washstand and during the day a white-shaded lamp stood at the side of the mantelpiece. The books on the white wooden shelves were arranged from below upwards according to bulk. A complete Works of Shakespeare stood at one end of the lower shelf and a copy of the Manuscript of the Manuscript, seen into the cloth cover of a notebook, stood at one end of the top shelf. Writing materials were always on the desk. In the desk lay a manuscript translation of Hauptmann's *Madame Xantippe*, the stage directions of which were written in purple ink, and a whole sheet of papers held together by a brass pin, in these sheets a manuscript

Dubliners,  
illustration from  
'A Painful Case', p124-125.



Claude Monet,  
Waterlilies, 1917,  
183 by 148cm,  
oil on canvas.



complex, and there is much irony and symbolism at play beneath the realistic top layers, a common trait in Le Brocquy's work. The final and longest story within the book is 'The Dead', and is regarded as Joyce's first masterpiece, containing the deepest and most compassionate contents.

Le Brocquy's interest goes beyond his Dolmen relationship and his head studies of Joyce, for like Joyce, Le Brocquy regards himself as "an exile of sorts," (\*114) and so decided to illustrate 'Dubliners' from afar, as many of the images refer to Dublin landmarks that no longer exist, such as Nelson's Pillar which once stood in O'Connell Street - "My knowledge of Dublin is closer to the city Joyce knew than the Dublin of today. Of course it has changed. The greatest changes are in the great suburbs ... I might as well be in Poland" (\*115). But he also admits to being drawn to Dublin like Joyce, - "It is said that no Dubliner can quite escape from the microcosmic world of Dublin, and in this I am no exception. James Joyce is the apotheosis, the archetype of our kind and it seems to me that in him - behind the volatile arrangement of his features - lies his unique evocation of that small city, large as life and therefore poignant everywhere" (\*116). Another added bonus for Le Brocquy in illustrating this book was the further knowledge and insight he would achieve through such an exercise, which would transpire into further developments within his own journey of self-exploration.

Le Brocquy borrowed his Tain illustration style once more, he viewed it as appropriate - "Dubliners, essence of a people distilled from the intimate life and history of a city, surely demands no less particular respect" (\*117). The book contains a hundred plus illustrations which are distributed in relation to the length of the short stories. What is common to all is a double page space, which is either fully utilised otherwise illustrated at the beginning of each section. All illustrations relate directly to the text but again, as seen in his other books, a basic understanding of the text must be known, so as to fully appreciate the drawings.

Where serious doubts arise is in the general description of such illustrations - "a white sea of memory or recollection" (\*118) for this description undermines the quality of The Tain, because when executing the illustrations he could not experience or recollect any memories of a people that existed in 500 B.C., a memory which he could avail of in the execution of a Dublin past in Dubliners: therefore imposing himself and undermining the quality of the drawings. Justifiably Dubliners received some bad reviews - "Dubliners is aimed at collectors and there is probably enough of them around to net Liam Miller a tidy profit. Louis, however, appears to be hedging his bets. The order forms sent out by Dolmen specify that cheques should be made payable to Le Brocquy's solicitor. The Dubliners illustrations emphasise the point that Le Brocquy's artistic inspiration has been stalled for the last 15 years or so ...." (\*119) and therefore we must sit back and observe that what we are witnessing is the latter half of an artists' career, in which it is commonplace for the artist to produce work of minor significance but at the same time of immense accessibility due to the internationally renowned success that Le Brocquy has achieved throughout his lengthy career (\*120).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

<i>Anne Crookshank</i>	.....	<i>Trinity College</i>
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<i>John Hutchinson</i>	.....	<i>Art Historian</i>
<i>James White</i>	.....	<i>Art Historian</i>
<i>Ronan Sheehan</i>	.....	<i>Writer</i>
<i>Taylor Gallery</i>		
<i>National Gallery</i>		
<i>N.C.A.D. Library</i>		
<i>Melanie Steward</i>	.....	<i>Louis le Brocquy's Sister</i>
<i>Vanessa Dowling</i>		
<i>Paula Ormsby</i>		



Image of James Joyce, 1978.



## FOOTNOTES

- \*1 Kevin Cahill (introduction)  
Louis le Brocquy and the Celtic Head Images  
New York State Museum - State Education Department  
Albany, New York - 1981
- \*2 Dorothy Walker  
Louis Le Brocquy  
Ward River Press, Dublin, 1981, p20
- \*3 Louis le Brocquy  
Emmanuel Kehoe  
'Tete a Tete, 'To Le Brocquy 100 Heads are better than one'  
Sunday Press, July 20th 1980
- \*4 Louis le Brocquy  
'A Painter's Notes on his Irishness'  
The Recorder (The American Historical Society)  
Vol.42, New York - 1981
- \*5 Ibid
- \*6 Hilary Pyle  
Irish Art 1900-1950  
Rosc 1975, Cork - 1975, p.9
- \*7 Ibid
- \*8 Ibid
- \*9 Dorothy Walker  
'Louis le Brocquy'  
Art International (Switzerland)  
Zurich, Vol.18, No. 8  
October 1974
- \*10 Harriet Ann Watts  
Chance: A Perspective on Dada  
UMI Research Press, Michigan - 1975

- \*11 Emmanuel Kehoe, op.cit.
- \*12 Hilary Pyle, op.cit., p 13.
- \*13 Mainie Jellett  
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