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LEECH - HIS LIFE AND WORKS - A STUDY IN CONTRADICTION

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1991

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

W J Leech was a very private man, he said little about himself, wrote only rarely and in general left little for posterity or the art historian. Finding out about him was difficult for that reason, even more so because he is not really written about. Therefore I was extremely grateful to the following people that I went to see who were kind enough to talk to me about W J Leech; some allowed me to see original material. All were very patient and giving of many hours of their own time. I thank them all, and the following in particular.

Denise Ferine of Belfast a Ph D student at Trinity College Dublin who is doing her thesis on W J Leech and answered questions and loaned me a book.

Mr and Mrs James Gorry of the Gorry Gallery in Molesworth Street from whom I obtained a better understanding of the painter. Mr and Mrs Gorry were friends of Alan Denson, a friend of Leech, and a writer about his life. I saw books and paintings at the Gorry Gallery which were of great help to me.

John Taylor of the Taylor Gallery. Leo Smith, Leech's agent, at one time owned this gallery, John Taylor bought it after Smith's death. John Taylor showed me, besides paintings by Leech, old catalogues.

The Hugh Lane Gallery of Modern Art who showed me their Leech paintings and the file they have containing letters from Leech and articles about him.

Julian Campbell who wrote a thesis for Trinity College Dublin and wrote on Leech. Mr Campbell also wrote a catalogue



of Irish Impressionists. I am indebted to him for both information and illustrations.

The James Adams showrooms who showed me paintings and old catalogues and were very helpful to me.

I should also like to express my appreciation to the following galleries of art that I visited, or, where distance was a factor, wrote to, for their help in supplying me with help and material; Limerick, Cork, Kilkenny and Belfast; New Zealand and Manchester.





## LEECH - His Life and Works - A Study in Contradiction

This paper will attempt to examine the development of Leech's paintings in terms of technique and subject. The Contradictions between his life and the world his paintings reflect will be explored.

Leech has always had a small but appreciative following, but he has never achieved wide acclaim. In recent years interest has grown in his work, but the man himself remains very much an enigma. There is, of course, an important relationship between Leech's own life and the works he produced. For example, in the light of Leech's life, many of his paintings can be perceived in a symbolic rather than representational light.

If one takes the painting, Nuns in a Convent Garden, (illust.12) Leech's first wife is depicted in a scene of great beauty and tranquility. However, at the time of painting, Leech's marriage was anything but beautiful and tranquil; the painting seems to express a yearning for order and peace.

A major influence on Leech was the painter Walter Osborne. Osborne painted the popular late nineteenth century style; academically based and sentimental in subject. It was an influence recognised and acknowledged by Leech himself. It is not widely appreciated, however, that Leech continued to paint under the influence of Osborne for over sixty years after Osborne's death. Leech never developed any of the new artistic expressions of the twentieth century.

It often surprises people to discover that Leech is in fact

a twentieth century painter. His work continued to express the sentiment of the nineteenth century in terms of both subject and style.

However, though Leech continued to reflect Osborne's style, he displayed his own inspired talent to depict beauty in terms of colour and form.

Thus, Leech should stand on his own as a great artist.

It is this very difference that makes Leech's work both individual and inaccessible. Osborne's paintings are very much an outer observed reflection of his surroundings. Whereas Leech's became an expression of his inner vision. To take Osborne's paintings of Dublin streets, for example, we see a straightforward, romantically stylised portrayal of a type of Dublin society.

In Leech's later paintings, on the other hand, this kind of view, which had been evident in his earlier works, was superceded by a much more joyful and beautiful depiction of the world. It goes beyond the purely representational, as in The Green Room, (illust.3) and reflects an inner, luminous vision. The inner vision is particularly evident in Leech's paintings from 1910 onwards.





### LEECH - His early life and influences

William J Leech was born on the 10th April, 1881, at 49, Rutland Square (now Parnell Square). His father, Henry Brougham Leech, was Registrar of Deeds for Ireland and Regius Professor of Law at Trinity College, Dublin. After several years of private education Leech attended St Colomba's College at Rathfarnham at the age of 12. By 1896 he had left St Colombas's College and was finishing his education in Switzerland. By now Leech was fluent in French; apart from his stay and tuition in Switzerland Leech had another linguistic advantage in that his mother, Anne Louise, was of French Huguenot descent.

Leech returned to Ireland in 1898; he had decided that he wished to pursue an artistic career. His father may have wondered at the wisdom of this as he had ambitions that his sons enter the professions and the army.

Leech himself says; 'I must had something about me which persuaded my father to let me go to the Metropolitan School in Dublin.'

But Leech, left the school as it was not to his liking. 'The teaching there wasn't very good at the time.' (B.3.p.119)

Bruce Arnold in a William Orpen biography describes the Metroplitan School of Art:

The last quarter of the nineteenth century was really one in which the School turned out teachers while the Royal Hibernian Academy, which also had an art school taught artists.

(B.4.p24)

Leech liked the tuition in the R.H.A especially that of Walter Osborne. He stayed there and claimed it was there he learned most. 'Walter Osborne taught here, he taught me all

I needed to know about painting.' (B3. p 119)

Osborne painted in Brittany from 1883 to 1884 and encouraged Leech to visit and study in the area.

It is in the works from Leech's student days in Paris that we see Osborne's influence. Osborne himself was influenced by the French painter, Bastien-Lepage. It is said of Bastien-Lepage: 'Above any other (he) influenced British art students in the early 1880's.' (B 5 p 178)

Bastien-Lepage's style became so popular that it led one critic in reviewing his Salon submission to comment:

Everyone today paints so much like M. Bastien-Lepage, that M. Bastien-Lepage seems to paint just like everyone else.

(B 5 p.178)

Bastien made plein-air pictures of high finish and meticulous technique which though "contemporary", were also readily acceptable.

(B 5 p.178)

During the 1880's Bastien-Lepage took the academic traditional idea of fine line and detail and used it with the colour of the now emerged Impressionists. In doing this 'poaching' - two new ideas at odds with each other - he produced a highly fashionable and popular style of painting.

In the painting of Les Foins, (illust. 4) which caused some controversy in the Salon of 1878, he combined the subject of peasants such as Millet and Courbet had depicted, mixed with the influence of Ingres and aspects of the tone and colour of Impressionism. In this he defeats the idea of Impressionism,



that is, to capture life and light as it appears.

These paintings were acceptable and popular to the general public and the Establishment alike, as Bastien-Lepage used a muted form of the colours and tones of the Impressionists. In so doing he found a balance between the Classical tradition and the more controversial progressive painting of the Impressionists. In doing this he opened up to the viewer a brighter, less historically based form of painting.

Bastien-Lepage had painted in Brittany, at Concarneau, before Osborne arrived in 1881. This area drew many painters of the time. In the work of Osborne we see the influence of Bastien-Lepage and the influence of his style in Osborne's depictions of the countryside. Yet in Osborne's later work there is the added dimension of warmer, brighter areas of colour. They contrast more and give a greater vibrancy, as in the portrait (ill.7) of J.B.S. MacIllwaine. Osborne has heightened the tone and colour; he has taken a step farther from Bastien-Lepage while still painting in the same manner.

Osborne shows a slight revision towards the colours of Impressionism. Paintings like Osborne's The Lustre Jug, (illust 1.8) painted in 1901 may have influenced Leech greatly. Leech may have seen this before he went to France; he would certainly have been familiar with the style.

Leech's early painting style did not have the maturity of Osborne's. Leech's early works are dark in tone, reminiscent of Bastien-Lepage and Osborne's early paintings.

Leech arrived in Paris in 1901; his father had made arrangements for him to stay in a pension and gave him a small allowance.

He studied at the Academie Julien but did not find the teaching of particular value.

At the Academie Julien in Paris, although I translated what painters said to the English speaking students, I didn't need to listen. I just carried on doing what Walter Osborne taught me.

(B 6 p. 111)

While Leech's dismissive attitude to the Academie training may have come from youthful confidence and admiration of Osborne, others disliked it because of its very nature. It followed in the tradition of Ingres.

One painter commented:

It was Julien's ambition to rival, and if possible to surpass the famous Ecole des Beaux Arts, and he was careful to choose masters who would train his students upon the academic lines then in vogue.

(B 6 p.17)

The academies were primarily interested in producing artists who would conform to the traditional expectations and standards. They discouraged any new, progressive ideas or practices. This caused dissatisfaction among artists who attended them.

For example, George Moore said of it:

That great studio of Julien's is a sphinx, and all the poor folk that go there for artistic education are devoured. After two years they all paint and draw alike, everyone had that vile execution.

(B 7 p.11)

The restrictive atmosphere of the academies caused some students to turn away rebelliously and seek the influence





of Degas, Monet and Renoir, as an escape from the academic confines. Although Leech did not find the teaching of any worth he did not rebel against the values of the academie, but stayed on. Indeed the idea of rebelling against the system was quite alien.

Pat Murphy in the Irish Times in 1977, described Leech as 'a quiet unassuming thoroughly likeable man.'

During Leech's time in Paris he set up studio with two New Zealand artists, Sidney Thompson and Charles Bickerton. After they had finished their studies in Paris in 1903 Leech and Thompson left Paris and went to Brittany. Leech stayed in the Hotel de France in Concarneau; Concarneau is one of the fishing ports of Finisterre on the Atlantic coast.

We see in Leech's paintings from Concarneau and earlier student works in Paris and Dublin that he painted with dark low tones not unlike early Osborne and Bastien-Lepage.

The Fair Concarneau (ill.1) and The Barbers Shop (ill.2) painted between 1905 and 1907, are concerned with everyday life in this French town. In these paintings Leech observed the life around him; he portrays scenes of the peasant in his environment. They were popular subjects at the time executed in a conservative style.

Leech's style at this time was slightly 'muddied', the dedication to precise details had not yet developed completely, but the fluid effect of this time was reminiscent of Osborn's work. Yet many people saw Leech as having very individual qualities. He won the Taylor Competition prize five consecutive years from 1902 to 1906, winning the £50 scholarship in 1905 and 1906.

Pat Murphy recalls Leech being dubbed, 'a second Orpen before 1901.' (Irish Times 1977)

Leech's early paintings do have an appealing quality; they are pleasant to look at and interesting in their subject matter, although still heavy in tone and colour.

Robert Elliott in the Nationalist, 1906, in reviewing the Royal Hibernian Academy exhibition referred to 'Mr Leech's brown studies'. (B 1 p. 21)

Even though Leech was still heavily influenced by Osborne and Bastien-Lepage he still had the ability to bring his own delicate and emotive quality to his paintings.

While in Brittany Leech was, according to Ciaran MacGonigal, in the Irish Times, 1981, 'conscious of the work of Cezanne'. Either from records or reminiscence, it is unclear whether Leech was conscious of Cezanne's work because of colour, technique or subject which Cezanne practised. At this stage in 1906 he still painted in the heavy style he always used. In these early works object, style and tone were equally important in capturing a scene, as in the painting, The Barbers Shop, (ill. 2)





LEECH - His paintings as a reaction to his personal tragedies

From 1888 to 1906 Leech led a comfortable life; his family were successful professionals, his paintings were well received in the R.H.A. He was also fortunate in that Brittany was an ideal setting for his kind of figurative painting.

It is still in Brittany that one lives the cheapest. Moreover, models are apparently readily available and accomodating (and) willing to sit for a small fee.

(B 5 p 22)

Yet, it is in 1906 when Leech was moderately successful and quite comfortable, that his paintings change. 1906 was year of terrible tragedy in Leech's life. Of all his family he was closest to his brother Frederick , who died that year.

Freddie always met the boat when I returned home from France, he always saw me off at Kingstown Harbour. I can still see him waving to me as he always did. He used say at home, "our family name will be remembered because of Billie's pictures.

(B 3 p. 122)

Leech and his family were deeply affected by this death. Leech summed it up:

Or family never got over his death, not really. It was terrible. They kept moving house after Freddie died, as though they hoped to lose their sense of loss.

(B 3 p 122)

Leech describes the reaction of his father and family yet he never describes his own personal reaction. As in many things he was a very private and discreet man. Yet it is perhaps in his painting that we see the reaction to the death of his brother. Perhaps Leech had heard or simply felt or understood what Gauguin expressed in 1885:

That feelings rather than intellect create  
great works of art, that both line and  
colour possess symbolic properties...  
that great emotions are best translated  
into their simplest form, through dreaming.

(B 5 p.21)

It may be that Leech himself was unaware of the change in his work and that he himself did not or would not long to express his feelings consciously through his paintings. Though there can be no doubt that Leech was a sensitive and perceptive man.

Alan Denson, a close friend of Leech, recalls:

his inviolable person and integrity was  
not immune from ferment and emotional  
catastrophe.

(B 8 illust.203)

So, in looking at the painting, The Green Room - Interior of a Cafe, (ill. 3), 1908, one of the only paintings Leech dated, we see a slight change in style. The most noticeable difference from earlier paintings (before 1906) such as The Barbers Shop (illust.2), is the clarity with which Leech paints. This is a highly finished piece, with great attention to detail and line. The blurred fluid quality of his earlier work has disappeared. The figures are rigid and posed,



unlike the pre-1906 scenes which were painted very much in the tradition of Osborne, and Bastien-Lepage. It could be argued that this change was simply an improvement of technique.

Yet, looking at this in hindsight, Leech's painting seems, after the death of his brother, to demonstrate a definite shift in visual interpretation. Previously, Leech's paintings had an air of spontaneity; now, through the arrangement and pose of the subjects Leech's presence is tangible.

This arrangement on Leech's part is not so evident in earlier paintings, as in The Green Room - Interior of a Cafe, (ill. 3) for instance; the scene is stiff with a quality of silence, there seems little movement in the figures, and signs of individual character and spontaneity are missing. In this, as in The Barbers Shop, (illust.2) Leech shows an awareness of contemporary society outside his own social climate. The woman in the back room heightens the meditative quality which was absent in Leech's earlier painting.

In 1910 Leech's family left Ireland, after a few unsettled years they moved to London. Leech was greatly attached to Ireland and felt a sense of loss when his family broke this connection. In a letter to a gallery assistant at the Hugh Lane Gallery, he wrote:

It is nearly five years since I have  
been in Dublin. My wife has never seen  
it and I often feel a keen desire to  
revisit it and paint.

(letter in the Hugh Lane Gallery)

This is a rare emotional admission for Leech, who was discouraged from expressing strong emotion even in a letter.

When I once wrote in a rather hot temper to one of my elder brothers, he spoke to me very quietly, and said, you should never write to your brother like that. He holds different opinions from yours about art.

(B 3 ppl22-25)

Though still living in France at the time, the instability caused by the loss of his roots coincides with a change in his painting; again, a change in painting occurs at a time of crisis.

In an exhibition in 1912 entitled, Visions of Switzerland, Venice, etc. at the Goupil Gallery, London (B 9 pp 11-18) Leech showed paintings from his travels in 1910 and 1911 to Switzerland, Italy, Monaco and the South of France. In these the dark brown studies have disappeared. Now Leech displays (ill 9) rural scenes of water and snow. Moving away from predominantly brown tones we see for the first time vivid colours, as in, Water Monaco, (illust. 25) and various snow scenes.

It is not only the shift in tone and type of colour - from brown to blues and greys - that is noticeable but also the changes in subject matter. In Leech's previous paintings the presence of the central object or figure, or figures, were very powerful and striking. In the paintings from 1910 the scenes are bare, almost desolate, despite the use of blues and white. The personal contact or narrative that was present in the earlier paintings is gone. The views show an almost impersonal observation of events. The unreal quality is also noticeable from around Concarneau of the time.





Odilon Rendon, the printer and painter, described this part of Concarneau in 1876;

the dour, grey, mist wrapped landscape  
led him to conclude that Brittany was  
a sorrowful land, weighed down by  
sombre colours....one without daydreams.

(B 5 p.22)

Leech's paintings give a different impression. In the water colour Opal, (illust. 5) we see two figures - one of (5a) which has been reproduced in oils - and the painting, Children Bathing at the Seaside, (illust. 6) hardly show this, 'Sorrowful land weighed down by sombre colours'. The tones seem dull but the colour suggests lightness and joy, not the depression which Rendon describes.

If we look at the R.H.A. list of submissions for Leech's work from around 1909 to 1911 we see that the titles suggest new focussing and concentration on colour. Titles suggestive of colour which had not appeared in previous years, such as, Sunlight and Deep Shadow, ; A Blue Day in Autum, ; The Yellow Sail, , speak for themselves. Indeed the painting, Twas Brilling, which was submitted to the R.H.A. in 1910, was described by Julian Campbell in these terms:

We feel that we are almost experiencing sunshine.  
The children are silhouetted against the light and  
reflected light is observed on their faces.  
However, the careful drawing and dark figures  
contrast with the bright colours of the landscape.

(B 6 p. 113)

It seems that the colour was symbolic of the joy and happiness that was absent in Leech's life at this point.

We can see this change towards colour at a time of crisis colour which is not reflected in the real countryside of Brittany as Rendon stated. Paintings at this time, unlike those of the past, show a subjectivity in terms of light and colour. They are also imbued with a feeling of happiness which seems to be placed there by Leech and is not wholly natural to it. This may be observed in the beach scenes at Concarneau. The detailed figurative painting of 1908 has now been replaced with a hazy, spontaneous brushwork. Though it is unlike the paintings from before 1906, especially in emotive quality.

The people in Opal, (illust. 5) and The Children Bathing, (illust. 6), seem impersonal; we gain no knowledge of their character as we did in Leech's earlier paintings. We see from around 1910 to 1912 relatively rapid changes in Leech's style and emphasis. Yet in 1912 this progression stops. His development in painting style has halted rather than regressed; he continues on in a similar fashion without the progression that was evident continuously from 1908.

The answer to this halt in progression could lie in his marriage in 1912 and the easing of emotional tension. He married Saurine ~~Saurin~~ Elisabeth, on the 5th of June, in London. They returned to France where they both lived.

It was at this calm time that Leech reached a static phase in his career; but two paintings show how there was a slight reversion to the style of 1908. These paintings being, The Tinsel Scarf, (illust. 10), and The Cigarette, (illust. 11), These paintings date from between 1912 and 1918. Here he has lost much of the colour, reflection and shadow which mark the previous phase. The figure of his wife in The Cigarette, (illust. 11) lacks the isolation which had been so evident





from 1908 as though she were now less an isolated, incidental included in Leech's painted world. Through this calm Leech came close to reverting to his previous style.

In 1914 the First World War began, Leech lived in France at this time until 1917, during which time he must have seen the effects of the fighting on the people involved, directly or indirectly. Leech was also personally involved in the war. His two remaining brothers, A.G. Leech and C.F. Leech were both officers in the Royal Horse Artillery and Royal Field Artillery, respectively. One of them was taken prisoner of war but escaped.

Then in 1916 Leech sent his submissions to the R.H.A. of which he was now a full member, since 1910. It was during this year that the Easter Rising took place; one of the buildings that burned down as a result was the Academy which was showing the annual exhibition, including the paintings of Leech. (B2 p.3).

This must have come as a great blow coinciding with the difficulties he was experiencing in his marriage. This marriage broke up around 1920. Ciaran MacGonigle claims that Leech's marriage finished soon after he left Brittany in 1916 to return to London. (b2) While Alan Denson in his book, Visual Taste (B 8) claims that by 1920 'they no longer shared a home'. I believe that Leech did not leave Brittany until after April 1917 and that he, at this time, lived with Saurone Elisabeth. He closed a letter to the Hugh Lane Gallery, written in April, 1917, with the following words: 'with kindest regards from the both of us'.

About this time the strains of the past few years proved too much for Leech and he suffered a breakdown in his health. (B 2 p 3) At this point of depression - as in 1908 and 1910 - there is a

noticeable development in his style; Leech produced two of his most beautiful paintings, Nuns in a Convent Garden, (illust.12), and The Sunshade, (illust. 13).

At this point in marital breakdown he paints Saurine in scenes of great beauty and peace. They are idealised and more remote than the portraits of her in The Tinsel Scarf, (ill.10), and The Cigarette, (ill.11). In comparing these two realistic portraits of his wife, in her environment; whereas, Nuns in a Convent Garden, and The Sunshade, painted at a time of crisis, show her and her settings as one of ideal beauty and tranquility.

The complexities of composition and colour in these later paintings are designed to enhance the harmony. The colours are restful and yet vibrant. Again the contradiction between painted and real emotion is evident. These last two portraits of Surine tell us nothing of her own personality. As in 1908 and 1910 both times of crisis, Leech portrays an ideal.

We know that after his marriage was over he went to London where he was looked after by Percy Botterell and his wife, May. As soon as Leech and May met, they became good friends.(B2) Leech said; 'my father could see we ought to have met years before. He saw we were perfectly matched to each other.' (B 3 pl25)

Perhaps it was the separation from his wife, or meeting May, or both, but it seems from what Leech says that he was happy at last. In Leech's 1921 portrait of May, (ill.14) for which he won the Bronze Medal in Brussels the following year, we see that the vibrance, light and meditative quality are no longer present. Leech had kept the decorative quality which he has been developing in his work, but the bright tones evident at the height of the crisis is missing.





The figure remains consciously posed, revealing character and personality which were missing in the late portraits of Saurine.

In 1921 both of Leech's parents died; first his father then his mother. He had been close to them, relying at times on them for support. He continued to live on in their house in London for only a short while. It was in this year of bereavment that Leech's characteristically truthful representations during periods of calm disappears again.

It was in 1921 when he first exhibited the painting, Un Matin, (illust. 1<sup>5</sup>), the large painting of Aloes. He was painting in the South of France near Grasse. In the paintings of this time we see the shift in subject, the move away from representation to that of decoration.

Leech continued to make visits to France, making studies (16,17,18) of Aloes and Grasse, sometimes separately, sometimes combined. In these he concentrates on colour and shape. instead of narrative. Leech's paintings of Grasse show little of its society. Instead he concentrated on minor subjective aspects. He uses unusual angles to highlight the plants, their situations and sometimes surroundings. But on the whole he he tries to capture colour as though the plant and the whole scene were one decoration.

In Kenneth McConkey's book, Free Spirit, Irish Art 1860 - 1960, he writes about Leech and the Aloe series:

The painter began to take possession of the new visual language. He was, however, constrained by the landscape format.....comparisons with the exoticism of L'art nouveau, Rousseau and Van Gogh might justly be made.



McConkey is probably right when he talks of Leech's 'possession of a new visual language'; Leech had progressed in his work towards a new type of analysis. But McConkey is not right to group Leech with Van Gogh or Rousseau - Gauguin could probably be included in this group - because the exoticism of Rousseau and Van Gogh does not appear in the same way in Leech's work. Neither does the deliberate distortion in Rousseau and Van Gogh's work appear in Leech's. Leech does not use dramatic distortion of surface or image to achieve certain effects.

As in the 1910-12 and 1920 paintings, Leech highlights the beautiful and decorative while omitting sinister, emotionally depressing images in his paintings. External realities of Leech's own situation are not portrayed, as though he did not wish to include them in his painted world.

Alan Denson wrote:

His pictures never express commotion or violence, although his inviolable personal integrity was not immune from ferment and emotional catastrophe. "What the eyes see and the hands hold are darkly seen and harshly held unless the viewing eyes and brush in hand are stirred and moved by awareness of the implied absolute unity in nature".

(B 8 p 129)

In the Aloes series Leech concentrates on harmony and beauty. This is typical of paintings from the 1920's and 1930's, at a time when Leech was calm and happy, because of his friendship with May.



Though there is a very minor change in style they became slightly looser, it is not as dramatic as those changes at times of crisis. Again it is interesting to note that the pictures reflect an almost clichéd countryside, while in the real world a bitter war had been fought. As a consequence the country was ravaged by depression .

As an intelligent, perceptive and informed individual, he presumably chose not to reflect the depressing events that were sweeping England and Europe in the 1920's and 1930's.

It is too simplistic to maintain that Leech did not paint social reality because he did not come into contact with it. It is well documented in Alan Denson's article in the Capuchin Annual, 1974. (B3), that Leech travelled through Europe at this time.

Psychology recognises that some individuals cope with problem areas in their lives by ignoring the problems as though they do not exist. The greater the problem and the less power the individual has to control it, the greater is the avoidance of it. Leech's non-recognition of social reality or social problems in his work is not a denial that such problems existed for him, but more likely, his feelings of powerlessness and helplessness predominated.

In 1940 Leech was living and painting in London. He sent many pictures to the R.H.A. from Steel's Studios, Haverstock Hill. It was during this period that England was under seige and London being bombed. Yet while this happened Leech's paintings become even more detached from this emotional





reality. The painting became richer in tone and colour though the vibrance evident around 1920 is missing. They are a pleasant, cosy representation of life.

Pat Murphy wrote:

His health seemed to deteriorate, and began to fret in the 1940's, because London where he then lived and worked was changing rapidly and for the worse.

(Irish Times, 1977)

Leech expressed this view verbally, but how did it find expression in his work? It was obvious to those who knew him that he was unable to cope with strain. Leech recalls his father before his death in 1921, saying:

When my father knew he was dying  
he made May promise to never forget  
about me. He was worried, he knew how  
helpless I was in all practical  
matters.

(B 3 p 125)

This view was expressed by his father when Leech was nearly forty years of age. It would seem that by 1940 - 41 he was no better at coping. Again the only visual signs of this anxiety is the further reluctance to portray society around him; for instance, his painting The Kitchen, 4. (ill.19) Steele's Studios, London, depicts a view from the kitchen window. It reveals a little of the kitchen, part of the table, the garden viewed through a curtained window looks calm and pleasant and its central feature is a birdbath. This view is depicted at a time when the London around him was being heavily bombed. The colours are darker and richer in tone.



There are many paintings of the birdbath from various angles.

Another painting of this time was A War Time Garden, (illust 15) shows a washing line beside a house, it could be any washing line anywhere, I believe it to be his own; but it is an ordinary familiar object. The colours are dark and rich contrasting with the bright areas. The painting is peaceful.

After the burden of anxiety caused by the war was lifted Leech's subjects became less immediately familiar, in that they lay outside his home and garden. But the colours he used during the 1940's remained unchanged after the war.

There are exceptions, for example, In Regents Park, (ill. 21) painted in the mid fifties, where the heavy colour used during the war lifted in tone. But many still retain dulled colours. This may be due to the upheaval of leaving London and moving to Surrey in 1958.

In 1953 May and Leech married. Both their previous partners had died and marriage was now possible. In a quiet cul-de-sac in Surrey they spent their last years living quietly, (B3 p 125) Leech's paintings did not vary in style and quality during this time in Surrey with May.

Pat Murphy in the Irish Times 1977, recalls:

He seems to have lived there in utter happiness and contentment with the love of his life, May, until her death in July 1965 which left him once again desolate.

(B 3 pl25)

Leech wrote to Denson:

My lovely May is dead. I don't  
know how I got through the days  
after she died, or the awful funeral...  
But I don't know what I shall do  
now.

(B 3 p 125)

Here in 1965 after the greatest tragedy in Leech's life since the death of his parents, he recaptures some of his former qualities. His world narrows in his paintings to those subjects which have familiar, happy associations, such as, The Wheel Barrow (illust. 22). In this painting he depicts his garden tools of which he was fond. Also there are many self-portraits in the garden and studio, (ill.23) The colour which had been evident about 1920, vibrant, deep shadows contrasting with colourful high tones reappear at his time of extreme grief.

Stephen Ryan wrote in 1939:

From Leech's work one never get the impression that he, like other artists, sets himself down on a stool and plies his paints....His are inner pictures, the flash of a scene on the retina miraculously arrested on a canvas. The critic wants more particular data of the painted object than Leech would deign to impart. The critic has no use for that fragmentary recollection of a joyous scene as only Leech can give us.

(B 1 pp 38-43)





The beautiful colour had returned with all its qualities of peace and beauty but the subjects lack the power of emotive communication that had been present in previous works, as in Nuns in a Convent Garden (ill. 12)

Having considered the idea that Leech's subconscious reactions to events in his life were responsible for the development of his work after 1906, it is also possible that Leech was influenced by modern trends. Certain isolated works by Leech have been compared with many different groups and movements of the time such as Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism and individual painters such as Gauguin, Van Gogh, Rousseau, and Roderick O'Connor.

Writing in the Irish Times, 1977, Pat Murphy observed:

He seems to have become a Fauve for a short period.....colours which are to be found in similar works by Matisse, Derain and Valminck of that time. Leech was a staunch admirer of Modigliani, Matisse, Braque, Bonnard and as he put it, some aspects of Picasso.

In the same year Tony Ryan replies to this article:

Leech was a competent painter of the Classical school whose vocation was rooted in the observation of nature. The suggestion that he was an admirer of such iconoclasts as Matisse, Braque and Picasso would appear to be a device for claiming a devotee of Modernity. This is far from the truth: W J Leech expressed his detestation of this entire School and at the circus behaviour of some of its practitioners.

(Irish Times 1977)

Alan Denson seems to express a middle ground which may be closer to the truth:

Mr Leech did express to me with his usual consistency, admiration for Picasso's technical mastery as a joker holding his idolators in contempt.

(Irish Times, 1977)

There are differing opinions on the stylistic influences absorbed by Leech. Leech by his own admission seems to have been influenced by Picasso and only then in his technique and certainly not his style. While the influences he drew on in style and technique, according to reminiscences of his friends, were those of Osborne, Bastien-Lepage, Cezanne and some Japanese printers

(Irish Times, 1977)

Alan Denson wrote on some aspects of Leech's influences:

A novice might think it derived from Bastien-Lepage; but only novices would be so easily deceived.

(Irish Times, 1977)

Leech was no mere copyist, his paintings were a recreation of his inner vision. At times when beauty and peace were absent in his own life these qualities became most prominent in his paintings. In the Irish Times in 1977, Denson wrote: 'the inner vision which sights a picture'.





Leech's painted world and the one he inhabited were contradictory

It is evident from the records of Leech's life, his education, family, travel and associations that he came from a wealthy and privileged class. His upbringing would have endowed him with intellectual and cultural sophistication. He would have had a good understanding of social politics. In his early paintings of peasants in Brittany there are signs of social awareness.

Leech recalls on a visit back to Ireland:

He (his brother or father?) was very much interested in Tarriff Reform, and was to tour in North Wales on that platform. I was home just before he was due to leave, so I went with him.

(B 3 p 122)

Leech travelled before 1906 with either his brother Frederick, or his father, as they went to speak on this subject. At this time Leech's work displays a social awareness but soon after his brother's death in 1906 these aspects of social consciousness are absent from his paintings.

Subjects such as The Barbers Shop, (illust.2) and The Fair Concarneau, (illust.1) after 1908 show scenes that do not relate to any particular class, certainly no social class predominates. Perhaps Leech's motivation in avoiding controversial subjects was similar to Orpen's, because he,

he played down his comprehension of what was happening around him...to have made the conscious decision that the most judicious course of action was to stress youthful indifference.

(B4 p22)

Bruce Arnold is referring to Orpne's avoidance of the controversy which surrounded the Irish question at the beginning of the twentieth century, Orpen may have found it detrimental to his career to be indentified with one side or another in the Republican struggle.

Leech, like Orpen, came from a solid middle class professional background and it may have been in both their interests given their social status to avoid any contraverisal of unpopular themes. Leech was not working under Orpen's - he was a portrait painter - constraints. In his early career he depicted scenes of social realism, the fact that Leech did not continue in this vein was probably not a conscious decision. The early social scenes Leech painted in Brittany may have been influenced by his observation of Dublin in his youth. Breton Girl, (ill 24)

Dublin at the turn of the century was a city in which the divisions between rich and poor, and differing religious and political persuasions was inescapable. Leech's observations of the deprived social class in Brittany, as in The Green Room - Interior of a Café, (ill.3), may indeed be painted in a traditional manner. But the romanticism of the peasant evident in so many artists depictions of peasants are absent in Leech's work.

In Leech's figures from Brittany up to 1908 we see the weariness and strain caused by the poverty of their life. After 1908 this subject and its reflection of society is absent. This may have been unconscious, yet evident in Leech's paintings is the editing out of all unpleasantness or threatening aspects surrounding him. The death of his brother



marks a gradual change in that Leech's work became increasingly removed from the realities of his situation. For example, beach scenes from Concarneau, 1910, or Nuns in a Convent Garden, 1920 (ill. 12), and views of his studio and garden, 1940.

The extent to which Leech avoided or contradicted external reality in his world can be seen clearly at first if we look at his paintings from Concarneau. His original paintings, 1903 - 1908, can be compared to those of Osborne's who painted in the same area. In both painters we see the hard struggle of the peasants. Yet by 1910 Leech's reflections of the area are colourful and buoyant and far from one commentators' description:

This type of expressive landscape scene which reflects the fullness of human experience, was one important element of the appeal of Brittany for painters in the late nineteenth century. Brittany's barren intolerable coasts echoed the hardship and danger facing its inhabitants.

(B 5 p 15)

Could the implied joy in these paintings in some way reflect a happiness felt by Leech? This would seem to be unlikely because we know at the time they were painted when he was going through an emotionally depressing time. Again this contradiction between the painted and real world is seen in his paintings of the Second World War years. His paintings during the war years show withdrawal from external reality. We know he must have been aware of what was going on and participated in some small way through his paintings for the Red Cross. (b9)

This outward conscious recognition of events with inward pictorial denials seems evident throughout Leech's work since 1910. Why should this be? As a sensitive artist he may have simply been unable to face unpleasant external realities in his painted world. It is clear from reminiscences that he found coping with everyday events difficult.

Alan Denson wrote:

Billie depended on May for everything; emotion, intellectual, spiritual and material things. I've never known anyone so dependent on another person. One who knew them intimately said this to me. As a friend in their later years I can corroborate this amply.

(B3 pl27)

This observation may convey the erroneous impression that Leech's intellectual ability may have been limited. Yet we know from his family and education that intellectually he was developed and that capability was displayed in paintings like The Barbers Shop (ill.2) and The Green Room, (ill.3). These paintings show an analytical approach to the depiction of society. These scenes show his training and ability to use it to create a traditional scene which has moved away from the romantic formula.

Although later scenes of tables, windows and plants are very beautiful but the same intellectual process does not seem to be evident. Although some have argued that it was at work. However it was surely through the use of intellectual process that Leech edited his pictorial world; a critical, analytical process was at work. Although this process of elimination of subject seems to be emotional rather than conscious as it occurs





at times of crisis instead of in rational progression.

Alan Denson in an article on Leech wrote:

Cezanne whose work he reveres and whose comprehending vision he envies sought immolation in the generative flux or harmony which Turner interpreted as sunlight and others call the voice of God or music of the spheres.....(Leech) constantly eschewed all rhetorical exaggeration and decorative bias. For him outward visible forms were symbolic metaphors; signposts to the truth of what is implicit.

(B3 p 27)

The truth which Leech seemed to be trying to find was of a beauty not present in his life. We see in Leech's work the interpretation of beauty, (colour and sunlight; elements of harm, both physical and abstract were avoided. These paintings were a contradiction in themselves, they did not express the realities of Leech's world.

The symbolic metaphors which are translated into beauty through sunlight and colour suggest his desire for peace and order.

the unity implied when disparate forms are aligned, dissimilar temperaments are seen as complementary shadows one of the other. Dove and eagle, tiger and toad, justify each other, need each other if they are to be known as they should be known. The concepts of a portrait in a background in the background is a deceitful fable.

(B3 pl27)

It was not in his conscious nature to manipulate or be untrue to his subjects. Leech himself believed that his paintings should be truthful and at all times express unity through the inclusion of all aspects around him. Leech included all elements he perceived - they suggest peace and calm, things he needed.

He did not divorce his first wife because she did not wish it; this was an action motivated by kindness towards her, as it was hardly in his own interests. Likewise he would not sign for an agent or gallery as he believed it was not a proper or decent thing to do (B3).

The more grief and disorder prevailed in his own life, the more intense his painted interpretations became.

### LEECH - Colour and subject

After 1908 Leech's paintings began to change. One area of change was colour. Which painters exerted the greatest influence on Leech? The two most obvious influences are Osborne and Cezanne. These influences manifest themselves clearly in such works as Water Monaco, (ill.25) and Regents Park, (ill.21).

The influence of Osborne can best be seen in Leech's mature work in the balance he achieves between areas of light and shadow. The brighter colours in Osborne's later work can also be seen in Leech's later paintings. In his early work the actual subjects and composition are reminiscent of Osborne.

The influence of Cezanne can be seen in the areas of brighter colours. In Cezanne's painting, L'Estaque, (ill.26) **there is a mass** of blue and white and a vertical dramatic cut of trees through it. Leech's work can be Cezanne-like in the areas of blue as in his 'Water Monaco. But in saying that, Leech in no way copied their use of colour. He used the techniques they displayed, as in Osborne's portrait of J.B.S. MacIllwaine (ill.7), in which the tonally bright colours contrast with the darker background area. This use of colour can be seen throughout Leech's paintings after 1908.

Osborne's later paintings displayed brighter more vibrant colour with a dappled effect. We can see the influence of this colour in Leech's work in the tonal contrasts and high colour tone. Leech understood Osborne's method and technique but Leech's own style can be seen in the much broader areas of





dark and light which are typical of his work.

This use of broader areas of contrasting colours may have been an influence of Cezanne. Again, Leech does not strive to create the same style or effect as Cezanne.

Leech acknowledges his debt to these painters also in his own reported works. That their influence is a major one is beyond dispute but what is interesting to consider is why these painters were particularly instrumental in Leech's development in terms of colour.

The Impressionist and Post-Impressionist schools have been claimed by art historians such as <sup>T.H.</sup> Julian Campbell, Kenneth McConkey and Anna Gruetzneras influential also.

In the painting The Goose Girl <sup>V 971</sup> many have pointed to the influence of Osborne, Impressionist groups and Fauvism in its composition, colour and technique. To look at this picture one would suppose that Leech's paintings were a mixing of these styles and techniques. From this painting one could suppose that Leech was directly influenced to the point of copying.

However it could also be said that ~~this painting is~~ so out of character to seem not have been painted by Leech at all. This claim has been made by many people who deal in paintings of this epoch.

There is a great confusion over influences on Leech. This can be seen from Julian Campbell who wrote:

During his years in Brittany Leech absorbed the influence of plein-airism and

Impressionism, and his works shows various influences such as that of Van Gogh, Bonnard and Matisse. However, other more conservative influences continued in his work such as those of Dutch Orpen and Garstein and his later English work had similarities with contemporary British painters.

(B6 pl16)

This description of Leech's influence is unhelpful and certainly confusing. Attempts to label Leech or put him into any particular group are unsuccessful and contradictory. For example Gruetzner claims: 'He (Leech) was influenced by Orpen and later by the Fauves', (B 10 p 201) when reviewing the Goose Girl, (ill.27)

Frances Ruane in a text to accompany the Leech paintings in the A.I.B. collections states; 'Leech's feel for sunlight probably grew out his contact with Impressionism and Post-Impressionism'.

In their desire to find influences on Leech's style and development, critics can mislead and misinterpret . In trying to ally Leech with these groups many critics overlook Leech's own views on them. As Thomas Ryan in the Irish Times in 1977 states: 'worthless charlatans were engaging the attention and the funds of successive Arts Councils'.

There is no hint of actual dissent even at the earliest stage of his career at the Academie Julien, where many other





students were openly rebelling and went on to become members of avante garde movements. Comparisons are frequently made between Leech's use of colour and these avante garde artists. Yet as Leech showed no interest in their ideas at the Academie and later seemed openly disapproving of them, it seems hard to believe, as many critics try to claim, that he was a practioner of, or practioner in their groups and trends.

As stated earlier Leech was influenced by Osborne and certain aspects of Cezanne but by 1908 the direct and powerful influence of Osborne in particular, on subject and style is over. From now on, these influences are merely instrumental in the creation of Leech's own style.

The painting, The Goose Girl, (ill<sup>27</sup>), would seem to support the critics argument that there were many direct influences on Leech's style. This painting from Brittany, painted between the years 1914- 1919, would seem to show that Leech was still depicting a romantic social realism and using muted tones. This runs contrary to the evidence that his paintings had changed after the crisis of 1906. This painting displays the direct influence of Bastien-Lepage, Osborne and Cezanne, in terms of colour, subject and composition.

Julian Campbell wrote:

There is an "impressionistic" feel in the sense of air and sunshine, and in the application of bright colours in small dabs. Among the Impressionists Sisley, for instance, depicted scenes with geese.

(B 6 p 262)

Indeed the colours of orange and violet create a sense of warmth and harmony typical of Impressionism.

Yet, as Julian Campbell also writes:

The delicate "mosaic-like" brushwork is not exactly typical of Leech, and the picture is unsigned. There do not appear to be other Quimperlé paintings by Leech, as he worked mainly in Concarneau.

(B 6 p 262)

This colour and its application are not found in any other of his paintings. He certainly used these colours but not in these combinations. The colour range and tone used are likewise not to be found elsewhere in Leech's work, along with the application of small patches of paint to represent the sunlight.

Leech used much broader areas than those delicate ones found in The Goose Girl, (ill.27). An example of the use of broad areas of colour can be seen in the painting, Nuns in a Convent Garden, (ill.12), Brittany, which is reputed to have been painted around the same time as The Goose Girl. It is strange in the light of Campbell's comments that Anna Gruetzner described the painting as follows:

In the Goose Girl Leech's training under Osborne can be seen in Bastien-Lepage influenced subject and composition. But it is also an exercise in depicting reflected sunlight and bright contrasting colours of orange and violet. The decorative quality of the painting anticipates the future direction of Leech's work.

(B 5 p.201)



This would contradict the development in Leech's style and colour depiction. Whereas it could be argued that this painting could fall into a similar category as The Tinsel Scarf, (ill. 10), or The Cigarette, (ill. 11), which shows a reversion to Leech's former style. This painting cannot be included with them for several reasons. When Leech reverted, as in these two paintings to a previous style, he also reverted to brown and black colours which appear up until 1908.

Yet the colours in The Goose Girl, are much more in keeping with those of post 1910. Gruetzner claims that this anticipates the future direction of Leech's work. This would seem hard to support when actually compared to the direction Leech's work did take, as in paintings such as the Aloes series, and his wartime paintings.

Julian Campbell had claimed that this painting was 'not exactly typical of Leech', and in view of the subject this is very true. Whereas Leech had painted peasants in a Osborne and Bastien-Lepage influenced style up until 1908, his view of them and depiction had changed substantially by the period The Goose Girl, was supposed to have been painted.

In all other paintings from this time, 1910 - 1919, Leech displays an isolated and distant view as evident from the beach scenes. In contrast, The Goose Girl, portrays an actual individual going about her work. In it Leech depicts a child of a recognisable social class, of a recognisable epoch, in a recognisable setting. Yet, Leech had, since before 1910, turned away from this subject matter. Therefore, the subject based on social realism, is no longer consistent with Leech's painted view of the world around him, at that time.

The composition is as much if not more out of character than the subject at this time. Francis Ruane writes:

Leech is also well known for  
taking an unusual vantage point  
in his compositions.....you can  
see how Leech prefers to use  
diagonals that cut across the picture.

(B 14)

While Campbell states about The Goose Girl, 'the receding horizontal layers of flowers are cut by the upright girl and the vertical lines of the trees!.

(B 6 p 262)

Here again are examples of contradictory and misleading interpretations of Leech's paintings. Evident from all post 1908 paintings is the view held by Frances Ruane; because of colour this painting could not have been painted by Leech before 1908, yet the composition is uncharacteristic of his style after 1910.

The composition of The Goose Girl, is based primarily on the vertical which can be seen in the trees, girl and geese, while Leech, - possibly under the influence of Japanese prints - based his compositions on the diagonal or horizontal plane. Movement is suggested in the arrangement of geese and girl. They seem to walk from left to right, while the scene in which they are included has a static quality.

This is in total contrast to other paintings by Leech. In none other - apart from a sketch for The Fair Concarneau -(1a) does Leech display movement in this way. In other paintings movement from object to the next is created through the arrangement of angles, light and shadow. Also, in composition



and treatment of the figure we see a profile of a face totally in shadow. This again, is uncharacteristic of Leech, who used opportunities such as this in his careful arrangements and compositions, to show the play of light as well as shadow upon the features. Examples of this are, The Tinsel Scarf, (ill.10), The Sunshade, (ill.13), and Nuns in a Convent Garden, (ill.12).

Apart from these considerations, the absence of Leech's signature on the painting - which appears on all other paintings I have seen - is unusual for such a meticulous man. It is true that his initials W.L. and the word 'Quimperle' appear on a piece of paper on the back of the frame. In all other paintings I have seen there are signatures on the back of the frames; signatures on paintings after 1910 also include the initials, R.H.A. as Leech had become a full member in that year. These initials are not found on the back of The Goose Girl. Though, if it is his work, by Leech's development in colour it should have been painted sometime after this year.

Leech's close friend, Alan Denson, has published two brief biographies of Leech in which he includes all Leech's major works and may minor, apart from those he was unable to trace. The Goose Girl does not appear in either book.

To conclude; his colour development, subject choice and compositional development, all indicate that this painting would have been a most surprising one for Leech to execute.

As Anne Greutzner claims, it would have been a signpost to Leech's development if he had not undergone the traumas that

he did. Whereas at one time Leech may well have tackled such a subject in this fashion, by the year 1910 he was no longer painting anything that resembled this.

One explanation for this painting may come from Alan Denson when he wrote about Leech's first wife, Saurine.

Old friends who knew them both have declared her work in landscape often to be indistinguishable from Leech's sligher sketches.

(B3 p 122)

The same analysis of subject and style that has raised doubts about The Goose Girl, can be applied to Leech's other works, and as a representative study, his portraits.

The very early paintings of Leech's sister, Kathleen, (ill.28) displays the influence of Osborne and Bastien-Lepage. This is very darkpainting with few light patches; the tones are very dark the colour being mainly brown. The dress and setting would date this picture at about 1899 or 1900. Though the colours are sombre Leech has succeeded in capturing her youthful personlity.

From this portrait until 1908 we can see in paintings such as Man with a Bottle, (ill. 29) and The Barbers Shop, (ill.2) Leech's academic and traditional approach towards the figure. One reviewer in 1908 wrote of Leech:

Excepting the work by Leech and Kernoff the portraits are uninteresting  
.....there is both unusual composition  
and dramatic intensity in Leech's  
L'Actrice.

(B 1 p 134)



In 1908 a slight change becomes evident. The individual personality which Leech had brought to portraits and figures up until this point disappears and is replaced by a more general effect. The individual characteristics which were present have not been replaced by a set of characteristics which Leech may have implied. It is rather that we learn nothing of any of his figures characteristics after 1908, apart from Saurine in The Cigarette, (ill. 11)

After the upheavals of 1910 the browns of Leech's earlier paintings is replaced by more colourful blues, yellows, though still tonally dull. We see this in Leech's paintings from the beach around Concarneau. Yet there is more significant development than just the introduction of colour. In these figure paintings as in all Leech's paintings from the time, they depict an ideal rather than the observed reality which had been evident up until 1908.

This progression towards the ideal away from external reality can be seen in the paintings, Nuns in a Convent Garden, (ill.12) and The Sunshade, (ill.13). Here the tones are very bright and seem vibrant when contrasted with the darker, yet, colour-filled areas. It could be argued that these paintings represent the high point of Leech's work.

Leech has created a balance between an emotive and interesting subject and powerful colour. Whereas prior to this in paintings such as Cafe Interior (ill 3) and paintings from 1910 - 1912, colour was secondary to the subject. Now post- 1920, in Leech's first painting of May, 1921, and various studies of her, (ill.30, 31) we see that the composition and narrative content which had made

Nuns in a Convent Garden interesting, was now missing.

If we accept that this is symbolic of a beauty Leech wanted or missed, we also see this symbolism was represented through colour and subject. As subject became secondary to colour so too did the emphasis of symbolic value shift to colour.

Leech's various portraits of May throughout their relationship seem to be much more vehicles to convey colour (ill.32) rather than personality. From the painting of her in 1921 to those when she is an old woman, Leech has continued to emphasis a decorative quality. This can also be seen in the painting, Regents Park, (ill. 21) where the figures are represented by patches of colours, rather than a figure being coloured. (ill 21a)

An example of the increasing emphasis placed on colour is that of Leech's last self-portraits. In them, at this time of great stress, the subject is very low key. Leech portrays himself in his garden or surrounded by close and intimate objects which by their nature could only have been of interest to him. However mundane these objects are, Leech has endowed them with a symbolism through the use of colour which is filled with joy.

Frances Ruane says:

His distinctive use of colour and his unorthodox composition make his work easy to identify. Both these elements are charged with electricity so that the pictures are rarely restful. You are jolted to attention rather than lulled to sleep.



While these portraits represent a part of Leech's prodigious output over many years they are also representative of the direction Leech's work took. It could be summed up in Cezanne's words:

That feelings rather than intellect  
create great works of art.....  
emotions are best translated into  
their simplest form through dreaming  
rather than through direct observation  
of the external world.

(B5 p21)



LEECH - in the context of the twentieth century

The end of the nineteenth century saw the culmination of painters ability to represent natural subject matter in a convincing way.... Even before this achievement itself was accepted by the general public, younger artists of the avante garde were seeking new challenges. At the risk of over-simplifying the subject, we could say that these artists fell roughly into two groups, Abstract artists and Expressionist and Symbolic artists.

(B15 pl45)

For reasons already discussed Leech's work does not fall into any of the above categories. Other groups he has been compared with have been the English School and the Abstract School who:

aimed at creating ideal harmony or beauty; consequently they had no doubt that they ought to change natural appearance, as if this would make their work harmonious or beautiful.

(b 15 p 145)

However, unlike the Abstract artists Leech did not feel the need to change nature. Indeed, he greatly respected truth and the deliberate distortions practised by abstract artists would not feature in his work or temperament, as stated previously.

It must also be remembered that Leech was reclusive by nature and temperament. and there seems to be no evidence that he came into contact with progressive artists. At this time





there were not any distinctly English or Irish art movements. Whereas countries such as France, Italy and Germany produced movements which represented the aspirations and temperament of their people.

Here groups of artists such as the Impressionists, Futurists and Expressionists joined together to follow one common theme or idea. For example, the New English Art Club which first convened in 1886 (Bl2 p 51) described themselves as Anglo-French in style. Artists such as Whistler, Sickert, Osborne and Lavery (who Leech is being compared to) had to keep themselves abreast of all modern European trends and departures so as not to become isolated.

This involvement would clearly not have been conducive to someone of Leech's temperament. Possibly if there had been a strong indigenous art movement in England that reflected a truly English or Irish art, the isolation which is displayed in Leech's work may not have been so pronounced in both style and content.

The upper middle class with its privileges and distinctions which Leech had been born into began to disappear during the inter-war years and after the Second World War its disappearance was even more rapid, in England with the defeat of Winston Churchill and the electoral victory of the Labour Party and the new aspirations of post-war Britain. This was a general social trend. With the loss of colonies and the re-shaping of previous boundaries, the post-war world was very different to the pre-war one.

This was also true of art. In America and Europe there were many new art movements; abstract, expressionism and popart.

All of which had developed from early twentieth century movements. Yet Leech's work remains reminiscent of the nineteenth century. Indeed, not only Leech's paintings but his values reflect those of the nineteenth century.

Alan Denson describes Leech as:

Not at all like the silly vulgarised popular misconception of 'an artists life'. Like Renoir Leech had delicacy in all aspects of his life.

(B 3 pl25)

In this sense Leech remains in Osborne's era and at this time of great changes in society and art Leech tries to maintain an order that was reminiscent of the time before the death of his brother. Leech continued to paint until his death in 1968; always adhering to his statement:

I just carried on doing what Walter Osborne taught me.

(B6 Pl11)



## CONCLUSION

It is interesting to compare Osborne and Leech's work. Osborne was his teacher and one of his main influences. The similarities between Leech's work and Osborne's work are striking, in colour and subject. This is particularly evident in Leech's early work which is also reminiscent of Osborne's early work, in which we see observations of outside realities in his contemporary world.

Yet after 1908 the reflection of the world Leech shows is radically different to that of Osborne. Like Osborne, Leech's work developed delicate and vibrant colour, at the same time moving away from the representational to the symbolic.

Leech's paintings after 1908 were not representations of what he would have seen and experienced.

As we see in paintings from Concarneau he began to represent a happiness and optimism which was not there in reality. His paintings developed increasingly towards symbolic representation of the elements lacking in his own life; as the painting, Nuns in a Convent Garden shows.

This use of symbolism became increasingly dependent on the use of colour. The beauty Leech displayed through colour was not always carried in subject matter. Whereas he avoided controversial and disturbing subjects. Those he did pick mainly after the 1920's are mundane and uninteresting in themselves.

At the end of Leech's life we see, as in The Wheel Barrow





how Leech's progression in subject and colour affected his work. This painting, with its gardening tools and glorious colour typifies Leech's development. We see familiar objects with happy associations involved with his beautiful symbolic colour. These paintings are a far cry from those brown representational pieces from pre-1908.

The cause of change in Leech's work may be clear from the death of his brother, the break-up of his marriage and the other turbulent events that befell him. Yet, in his work, Leech does not, like many painters of the twentieth century, try to solve or understand the problems around him. Instead Leech began and continued to depict an ideal world; one in which reality evaded him.

This avoidance of disorder and harm and search for beauty through paint becomes particularly significant when viewed against the painful realities that at times faced Leech. Viewed in isolation without an accurate understanding of Leech's life his paintings may appear merely pleasingly sentimental and decorative.

When viewed in the context of his life and times, however, a deeper meaning can be found.

Leech painted a world which represented beauty and security which was denied him in reality.



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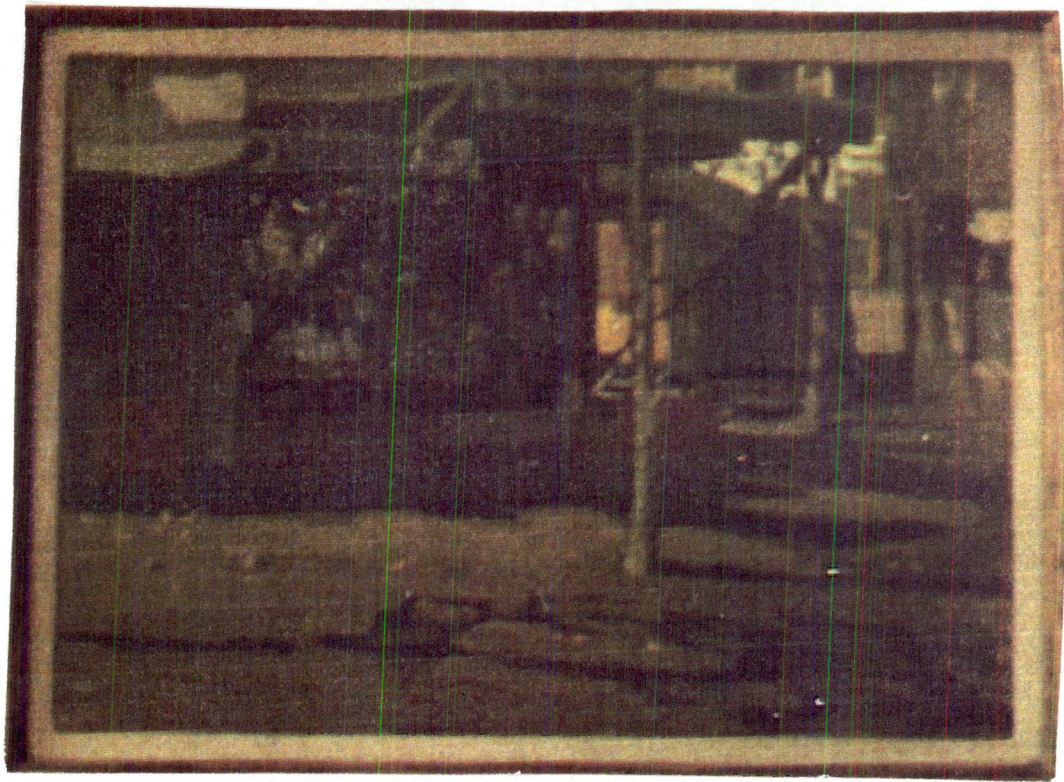


## ILLUSTRATIONS

1. The Fair Concarneau
- 1a. Sketch, Fair Concarneau
2. The Barbers Shop
3. The Green Room
4. Les Foins
5. Opal
- 5a. Reproduced figure in oils from Opal
6. Children Bathing at the Seaside
7. J.B.S. MacIllwaine
8. The Lustre Jug
9. Trees in the Snow
10. The Tinsel Scarf
11. The Cigarette
12. Nuns in a Convent Garden
13. The Sunshade
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17. Maison Cabris, Grasse
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20. A Studio Garden
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22. Wheel Barrow
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32. Lamplight - sketch of May
33. The Painter with his picture





1. THE FAIR CONCARNEAU

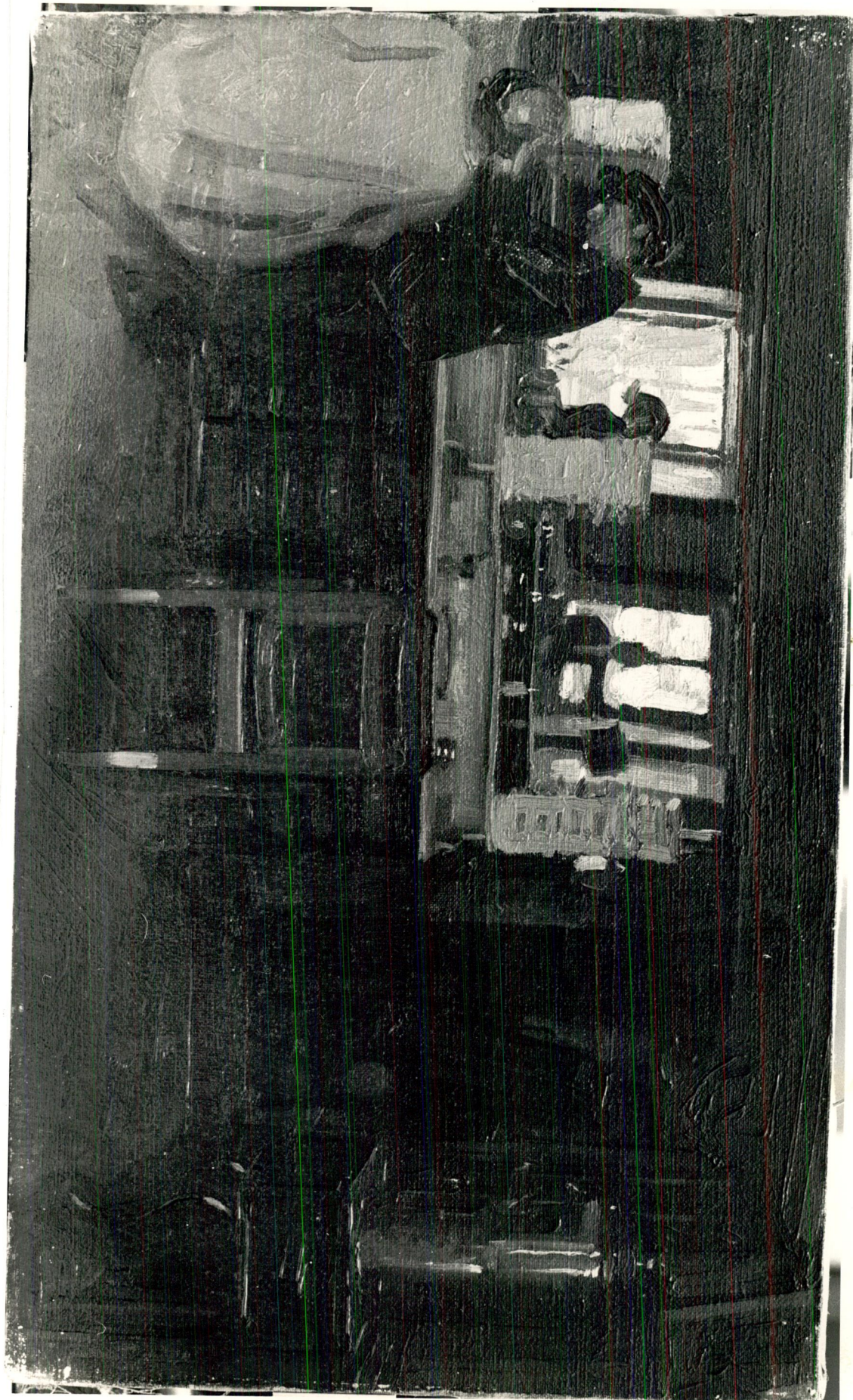






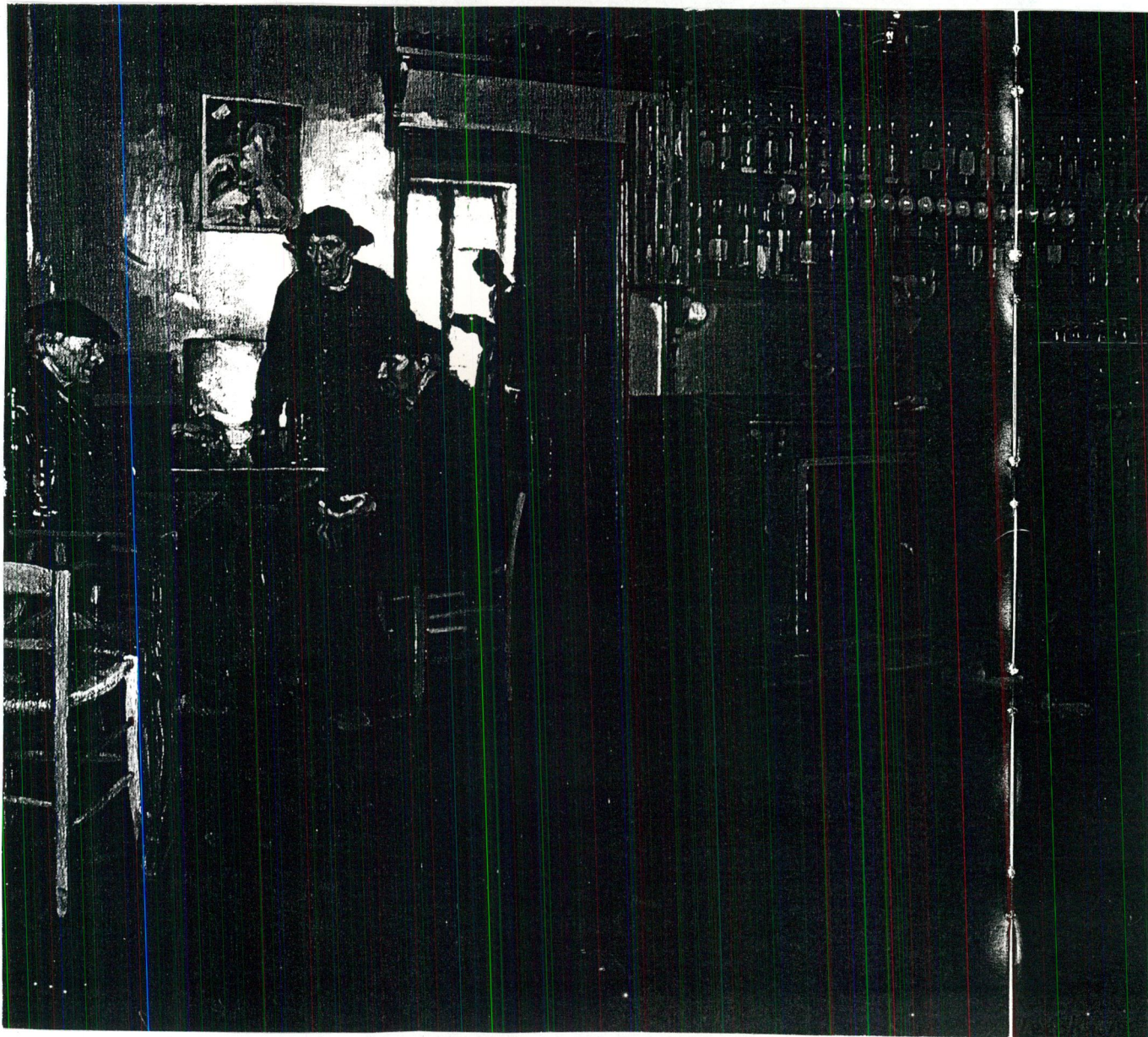
1a Sketch - Fair Concarneau





2 The Barbers Shop

















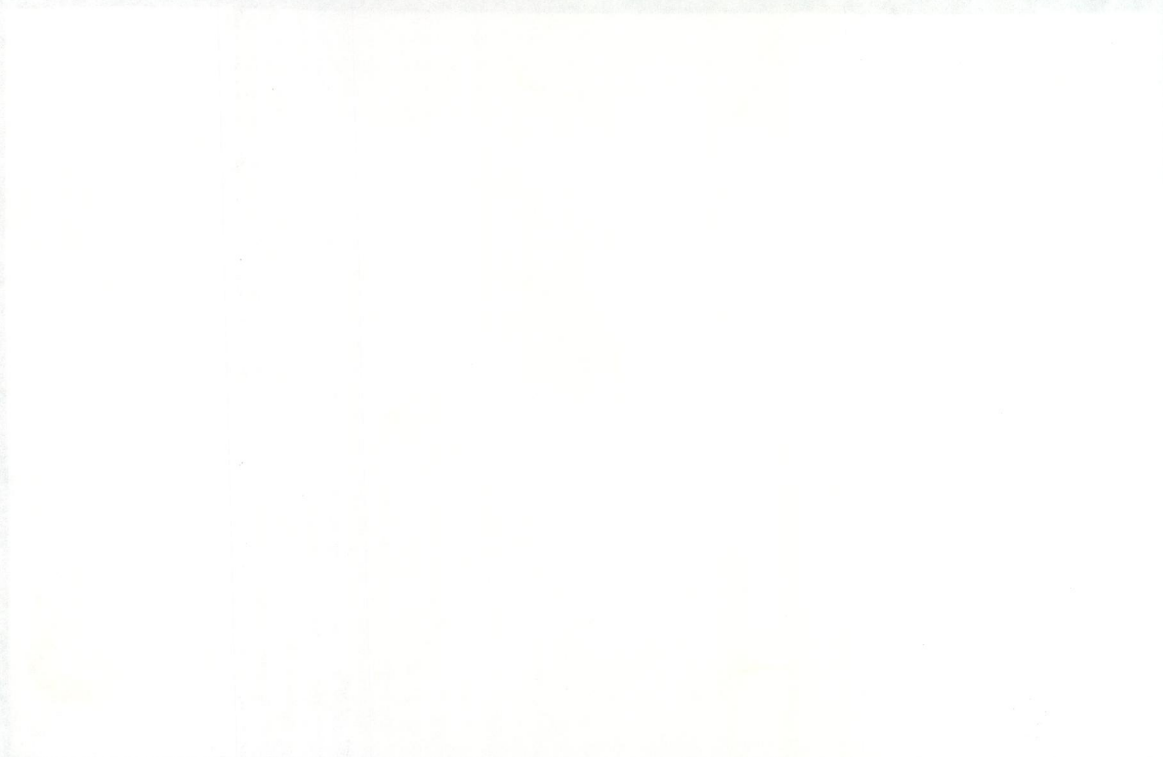


5a Reproduced figure in oils from Opal









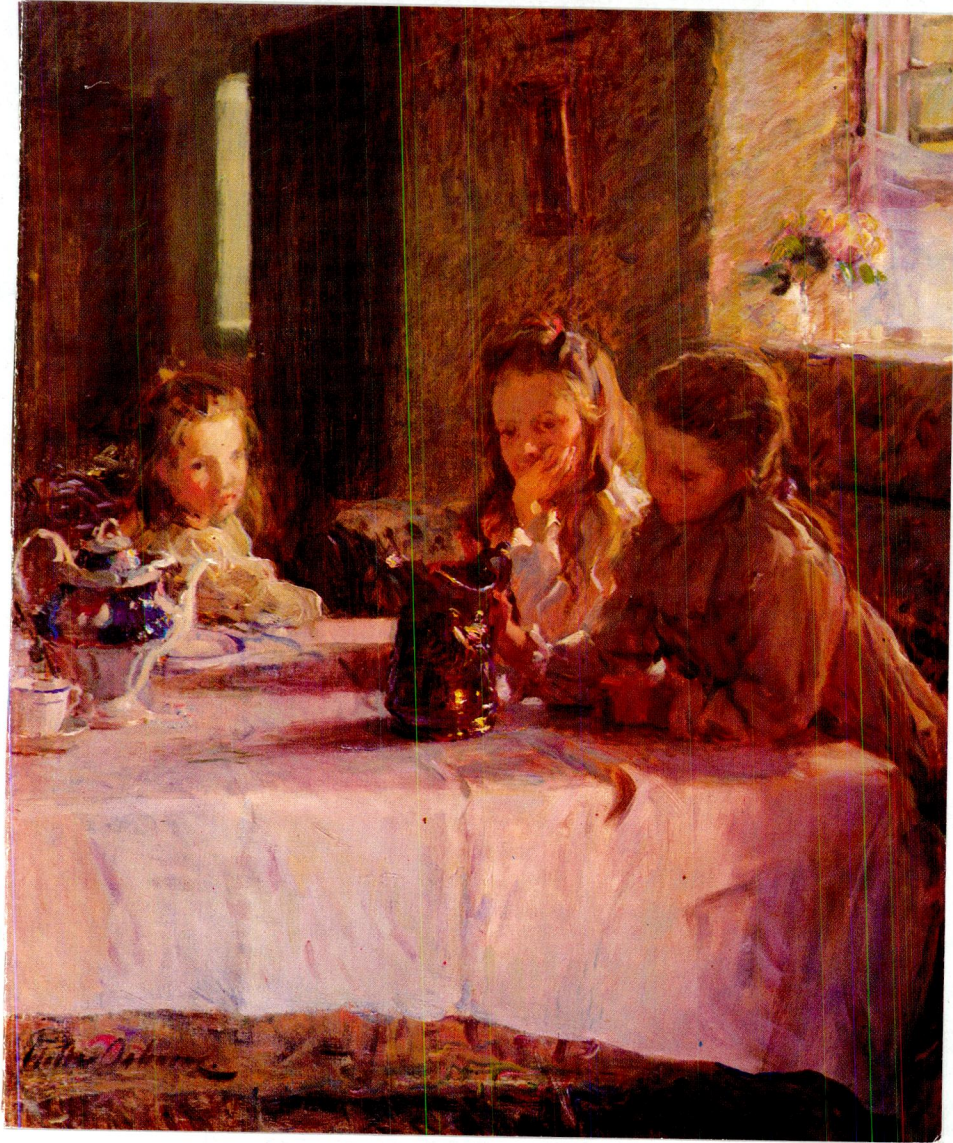


7 J.B.S. MacIllwaine









8 The Lustre Jug









9      Trees in the Snow





THEY IN THE SNOW

1891, 1892, 1893, 1894, 1895, 1896

*History of the Art of the*

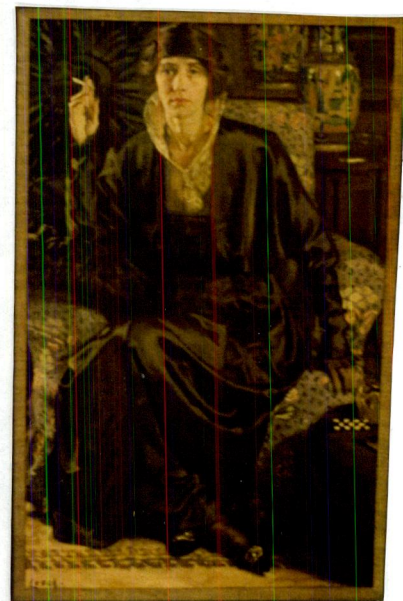
Born in Dublin, Leach studied law under O'Connell and then at the Académie Julian in Paris. In 1902 he went to Brussels where he came into contact with the other avant-garde artists of the day. This winter scene is executed in delicate washes with fine charcoal drawing and illustrates the decorative aspect of Leach's work.





Hubley 1918







The Republic of the Philippines  
June 21, 1946







12 Nuns in a Convent Garden









the kinthale  
Dore corveth





14 Portrait of May









un mata





16 Aloes Near Les Mortigues

















19 The Kitchen, 4, Steele's Studios, London.













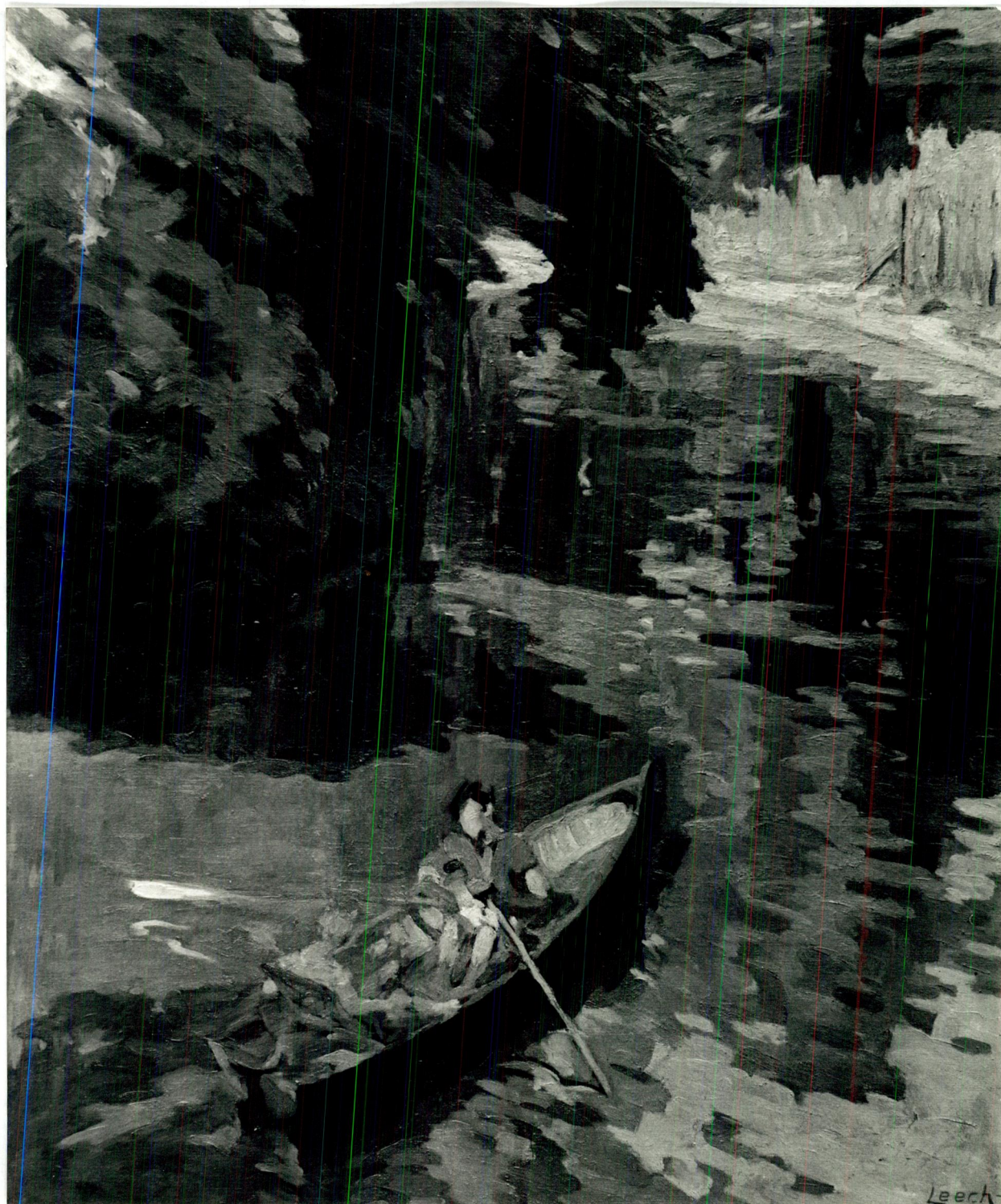


20 A Studio Garden









21 In Regents Park

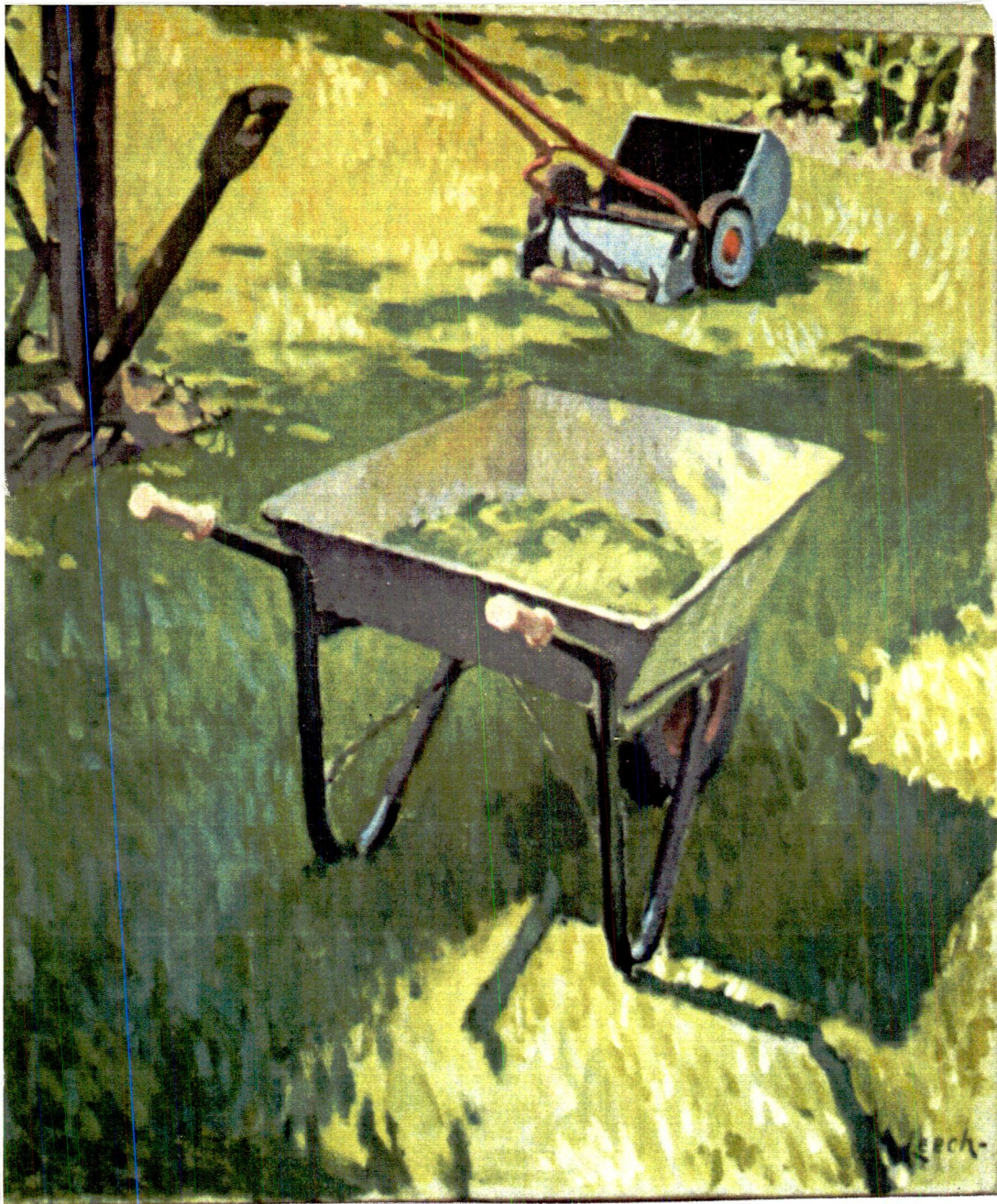


Right bank by 157 bend in stream  
River bridge 1957



21a Detail Sketch for 21













23. Painting in a Garden - Self-Portrait

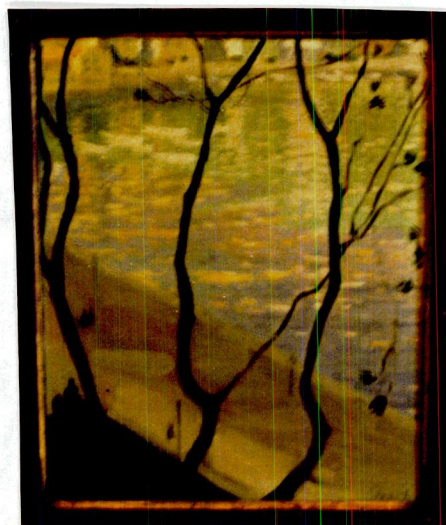


24 Study of Breton Girl









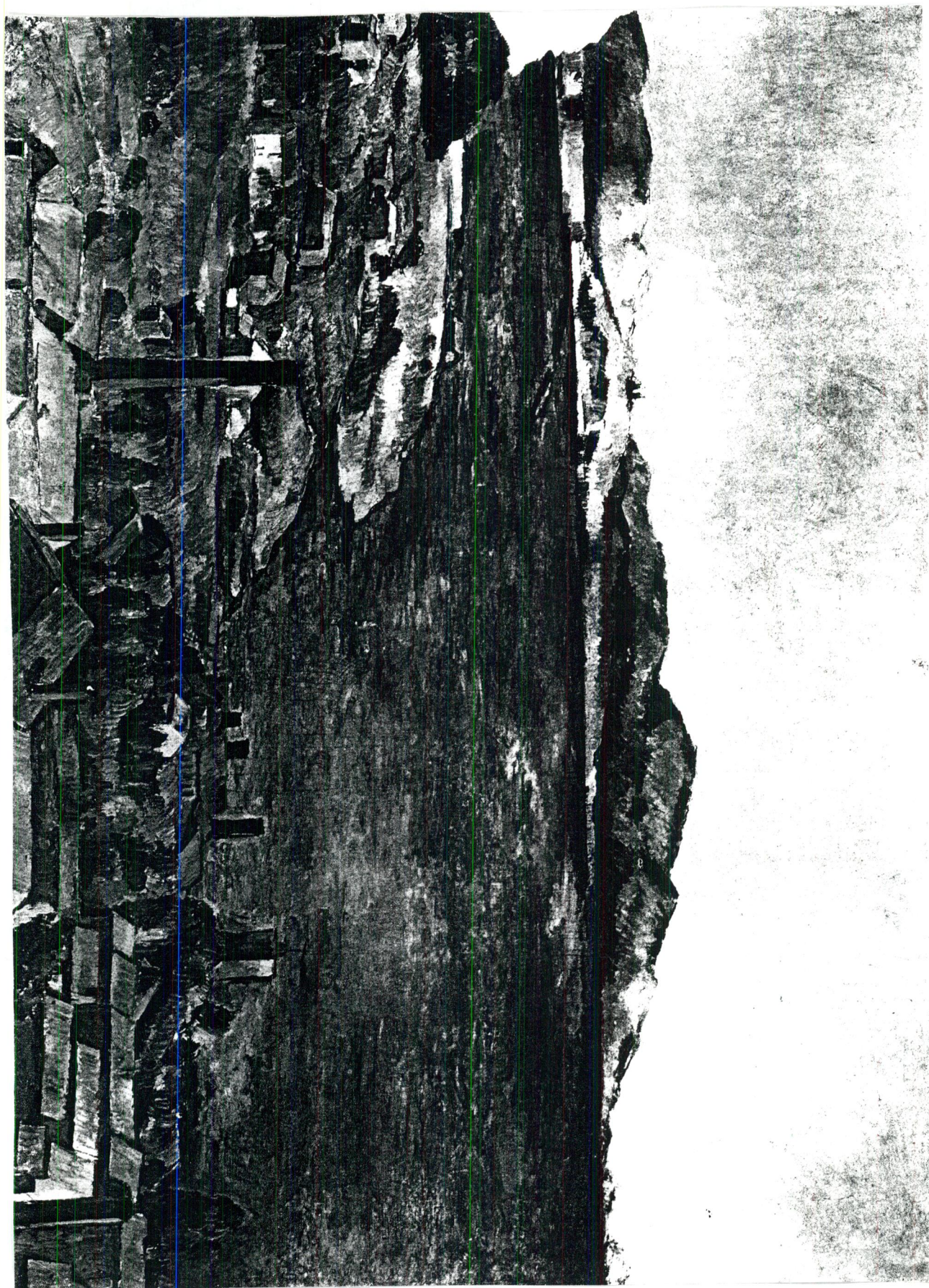
25 Water Monaco



The Water Window by W. J. Leach

Ex. Lib. F. A. 13





26 L'Estaque

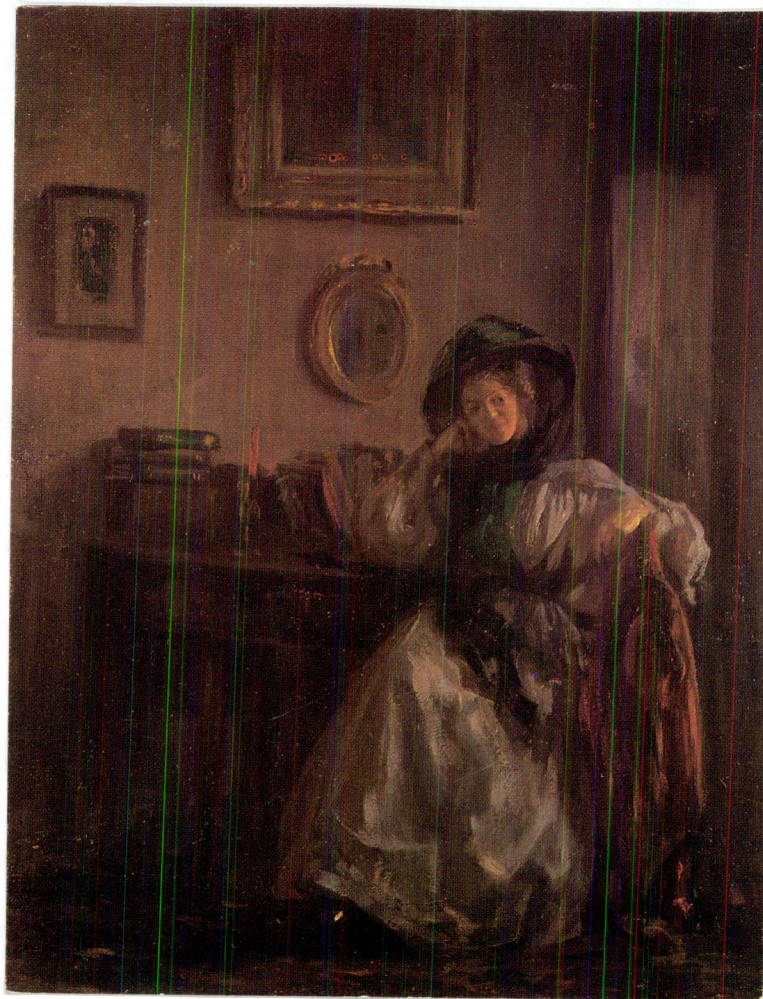












28 Artists sister



WILLIAM J. REICH (1906-1953)  
STUDY OF A WOMAN  
IN THE CANYON

*Probably Is Sister*

THE POSTER CARD  
LARGE ABOUT THE SIZE OF A POSTCARD

postcard -











30 May sewing



We are happy to welcome enquiries, to add to our mailing list and to assist in any of our services—including valuations and cleaning of works of art.

Major exhibitions of Irish painting since 1981 include *The Irish Renaissance*, *Splendour and Open and the Education*, accompanied by a published catalogue. catalogues are well researched, informative. Copies of these and most of the gallery's available.



31 Woman sewing



Women's Society  
Prayer Meeting  
Oct 11

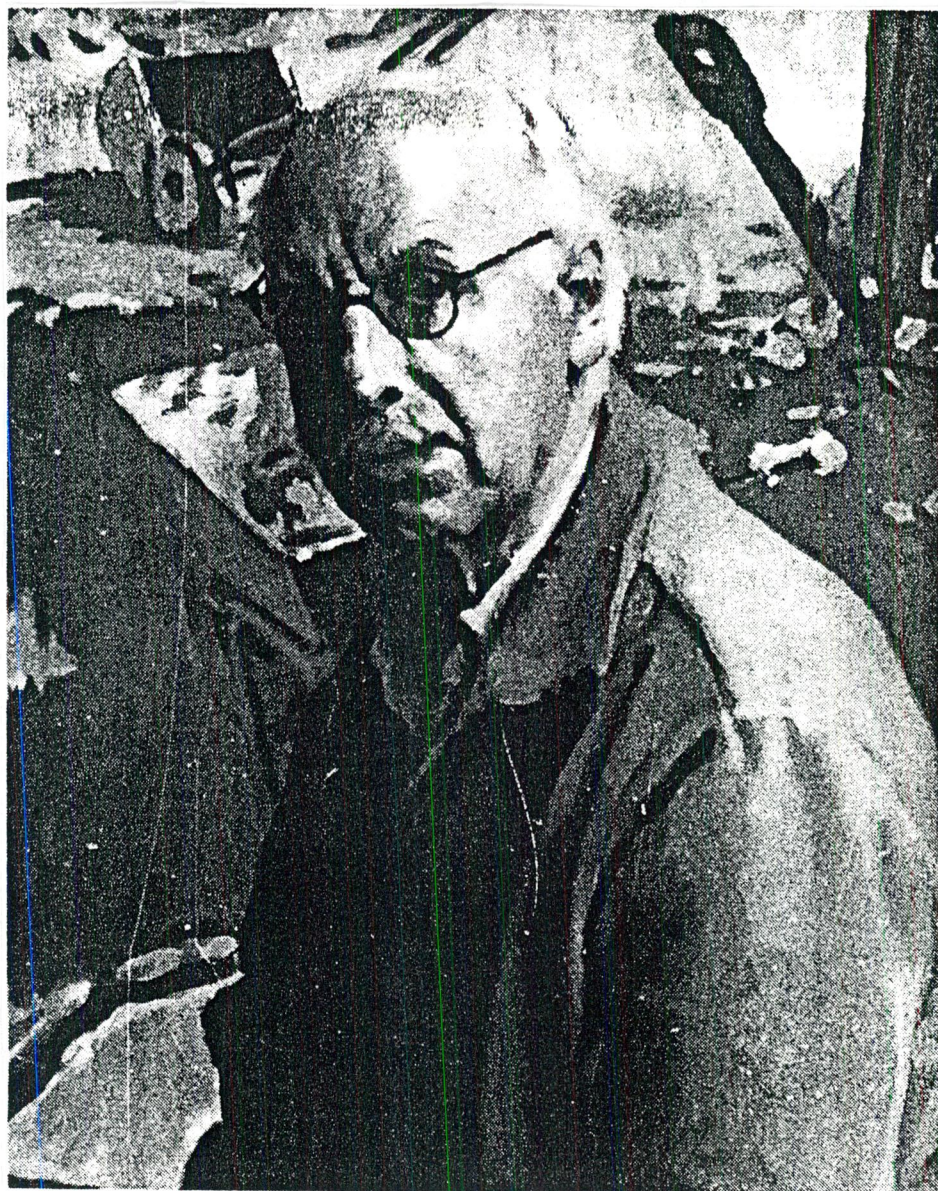


32 Lamplight - sketch of May



Implye del en conves 7'29  
1435-46





33 The Painter with his picture



