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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

PAINTING, FINE ART

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"A FETCH OF WATER AND AIR,"

*The Painting's of*  
Sean McSweeney and T.P. Flanagan,



by

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SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN AND  
COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

BACHELOR OF ARTS,  
in  
FINE ART. (PAINTING).

March 1992





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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis will seek to illustrate the characteristics which have produced or shaped the sensibilities of two chosen artists, namely Sean McSweeney and T.P. Flanagan. In choosing these artists as a subject for my thesis I was especially attracted to their treatment of bog landscapes. Because I have concentrated on the same subject matter in its various forms throughout my time in college and this gives me a certain affinity with others who have focused on this area of study also. I was especially interested in the chosen works of Sean McSweeney and T.P. Flanagan because of its diversity and similarities. Although both artists work within the genre of the Irish landscape, their methods of approach, medium and artistic development differ considerably. The thesis will endeavour to explore what I consider to be the most formative factors in the development of each artist's distinctive style. I will therefore be categorising works according to the characteristics of a given period in the artistic development of each artist. I will consider a specific body of paintings by each artist, moving from description, analysis to an interpretation of each of the chosen works. I will seek to weigh each artist's aspirations against their achievements. I will also consider how T.P. Flanagan and Sean McSweeney fit into a post-war Irish landscape tradition.







While researching this thesis I was disappointed with the small amount of literature, catalogues, and good quality reproductions of the work of these two prominent Irish artist's, however, this did not hinder my determination to gain the information I needed to discuss these two artists and their chosen works.





CHAPTER ONE.

BACKGROUNDS: SEAN MCSWEENEY / T.P. FLANAGAN.

This chapter will consider the development of two artists, namely Sean McSweeney and T.P. Flanagan. The objective is to illustrate their backgrounds and artistic developments to date, with emphasis on place and influences.

Sean McSweeney was born in Dublin in 1935. He spent his childhood there and later became a shipping clerk in the Dublin Docklands. He is largely a self-taught painter, a process which began very early in his life. His father was electrocuted in 1941, when Sean was five. McSweeney Snr. was a keen amateur painter who left a large selection of equipment and paints behind. The legacy of this was that Sean McSweeney could "mess around" while his mother, with a large family to cope with, did not interfere. However, Sean McSweeney's interest in the visual arts was really shaped through his visits to the National Gallery and especially the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art (now the Hugh Lane Gallery) where he spent his spare time through methodical observation, absorbing the work of the great masters. He eventually joined a painting class and studied with Terence Gayer on Saturday afternoons in a basement in Parnell Square.

During his early years in Dublin McSweeney frequently hiked into the Wicklow mountains and often spent weekends there painting and drawing the local landscape, the same Wicklow landscape was to feature in some of his later work, e.g. "Bogland Trees" (1988).







Sean McSweeney subsequently left his day job as a shipping clerk and committed himself totally to painting. After his marriage in the early 1960s he moved to Wicklow and lived there in a small cottage on the outskirts of Hollywood in the Wicklow mountains.

In Wicklow McSweeney learned to paint panoramically and in broad masses - though of course many of the paintings he did there are also intimate and small scale. In the work of that period (late 1970s, early 1980s) one can identify the dark opaque pinewoods of the Wicklow uplands, or the lush rounded deciduous trees of its parklands as in Trees Hollywood (1984).

The paintings of this period in Wicklow are in a warm romantic style, and with something of the freewheeling brushwork of Abstract Expressionism.

During the 1960s, on recommendation of the painter Cecil King, Sean McSweeney began to show in the Dawson Gallery in Dublin, run by the late Leo Smith.

Sean McSweeney has had a series of shows there from 1965 and continues to show with its successor, the Talyor Galleries. The Oireachtas rejected McSweeney's work in 1967 early in his career, but the following year the Irish exhibition of Living Art accepted it and immediately afterwards the Oireachtas followed suit.







Sean McSweeney moved to Balliconnell, Cloughbough, Co. Sligo, about eight years ago, after nearly eighteen years of living and working in Co. Wicklow. It seems rather coincidental that McSweeney should return to the birthplace of his mother. His present studio is in the school which his mother and her brother and sister attended as children. It has seemed almost like a homecoming for him, but as it turned out he was the last and slowest of the family to adjust to the new environment, the same Sligo environment which imbued so much of Jack B. Yeats's early work (e.g. Lough Gill Co. Sligo, painted in 1924) with its glowing memories.

After mountainous forested Wicklow, Sean McSweeney found the western boglands alien to him "The hills stand up in Wicklow - here you'd need the wings of a seagull to fly over the landscape and view it properly, but I've come to terms with it." <sup>1</sup> There is quite a difference in terrain between Wicklow and Sligo, and as McSweeney has said "you become conscious of a tree in the landscape because there are so few of them. On the edge of the Atlantic anything that's growing has to be tough to survive." <sup>2</sup> Wicklow for McSweeney was visually more of a "cul de sac" sheltered by mountains and densely forested parklands. Sligo, on the other hand, is flat with vast areas covered by wetlands, and bogs, with just two mountain ranges for shelter, Ben Bulbin and Knocknarea.







Sean McSweeney is not an original painter in the sense that his work provides no startling new formal insight into the Sligo landscape. Sean McSweeney has scarcely varied his subject matter over thirty years and yet, how much contrast and variety there is in his work; what a range of moods and what a consistent line of evolution. There is a sense in McSweeney's paintings of the paint being an almost elemental material which is almost part of the land itself rather than a method of representing it. All of McSweeney's work to date is a set of variations on the theme of a soggy Northern European landscape, but it is also an exploration of the power of paint itself.

Sean McSweeney is now one of the most prolific landscapists in the country and, broadly speaking, he would be considered part of a romantic Irish tradition, which stems mainly from Jack B. Yeats. The other Yeatsian affinity with McSweeney would be Jack B. Yeats strong connection with Sligo. McSweeney acknowledges the influences also of Camille Souter, Nano Reid, and probably our greatest living painter, Patrick Collins, whose "Free and happy childhood was spent in Sligo."<sup>3</sup> McSweeney's international influences are in the work of the American abstractionist painter Mark Rothko, he also admires the English artist Frank Auerbach.







McSweeney now shares his time between teaching one day a week in Sligo R.T.C. and painting. Teaching full-time he thinks is a drain on energies "The students just suck it all out of you."<sup>4</sup>

T.P. Flanagan was born in Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh in 1929. He was brought up by his two maiden aunts, Catherine and Elizabeth, in what Flanagan himself describes as a "quiet staid sort of way."<sup>5</sup> It was with Elizabeth that Flanagan spent most of his early days. She had studied Embroidery and Design at the old Metropolitan School of Art, in Dublin and later ran a school which Lady Gore Booth had set up in Sligo to teach the local women how to knit and make lace.

In those early years the Flanagans had a house near Lissadell where they would spend their summers. The great georgian house of Lissadell had strong links with irish nationalism and literature through Constance Markievicz (nee Gore-Booth) and the poet W.B. Yeats. He wrote evocatively of the house and its grounds, as in his poem In memory of Eva and Constance Gore-Booth. The light of evening, Lissadell/Great windows open to the south ... "two girls in silk kimonos, both beautiful, one a gazelle",

The literary connotations of the house are not lost on T.P. Flanagan who is also an articulate and sensitive writer.



SECRET  
NOV 19 1954



When T.P.Flanagan left St. Michael's Presentation Brothers school in 1940, he won numerous scholarships to both training college and university. He was keen to exercise his interest in literature as at this time he began to write stories and poems, some of which were broadcast on Ulster Radio and B.B.C. in the early '40s.

Flanagan's original dilemma about whether to study literature or art resolved itself when he enrolled in the Belfast College of Art in 1940.

His artistic mentor in the early years of his development as an artist was Kathleen Bridle who obviously influenced his decision to choose the visual arts as a career. She was a Fermanagh art teacher with a love of Modern art and a sensitivity for watercolour (she also taught William Scott). At the Belfast College of Art, Flanagan's interest lay in painting and etching. He also took an attentive interest in the History of Art, and of all his fellow students he probably had the keenest awareness of the European tradition. Flanagan gradually eased himself into the mainstream, in the wake of painters like Renoir and Lautrec. But he soon abandoned the inevitable aura of Pastiche for a more purposeful academicism.

T.P. Flanagan graduated from the Belfast College of Art in 1943 with a generation of students who were held to be of considerable promise, e.g. Basil Blackshaw, Martin McKeown and Cherith Boyd (McKinstry).







On completion of his college studies Flanagan obtained his first teaching position at the convent of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Lisburn. He also lectured part-time at the Belfast College of Art during 1955 - 1965, and for much of his life he has had to work as a part-time teacher at St. Mary's College of Education in Belfast to support his art. Although time spent in the classroom was time away from his own work, his attitude was that while he was teaching he felt he was obliged to do it properly: "To get satisfaction from teaching I must work as part of a team with my students; they must be as interested speculatively as they are in the results of a picture."<sup>6</sup> Flanagan never went as far as to work alongside students. His opinion is that students "shouldn't be encouraged to adapt a style they do not fully understand."<sup>7</sup>

T.P. Flanagan has continually lectured throughout his career but it has never interfered with his output of work. His first one-man show in 1958 was held under the auspices of C.E.M.A. This establishment was set up in 1951 to encourage music and the arts in Northern Ireland.







T.P. Flanagan's contribution to Irish art over the past forty years has been consistent. His paintings have been presented in exhibitions abroad e.g. U.S.A., Russia, China, and are included in all major Irish public and private collections. In 1974 he won the Oireachtas prize, (similarly awarded to McSweeney who received it in 1968). He also received the Royal Ulster Academy Gold Medal in 1976, and for many years exhibited in the Hendricks Gallery, Dublin.

In his paintings T.P. Flanagan is particularly keen on the serial production of paintings "as offering alternative experimental solutions to a specific thematic problem."<sup>8</sup> Throughout his career T.P. Flanagan has continued to work on "themes" rather than through a single canvas (e.g. the "Men in a muddy field paintings in 1962, the Lissadell, Co. Sligo works of 1964). In the paintings of that period Flanagan was "impersonating the objectives of one painting in several paintings."<sup>9</sup> The acquisition of a house in 1969 near the townland of Roughra near Ardara in Donegal, encouraged the sequence of bogland paintings. The result was a series of paintings known as the "Gortahork paintings" e.g. Gortahork (2) (1969)







Flanagan has described it as "The result of a great visual stimulation I experienced when I first visited the area around the Bloody Foreland, during the frosty days of October and November in the late sixties." <sup>10</sup>

T.P. Flanagan has continued to work on serial productions throughout his career, and is presently working on a series of pictures about the Irish rain "Especially in the West, foregrounds in the Irish landscape are challenging, to paint emptiness is always a challenge. An Irish artist has great opportunities to study the colour of grey in all its forms." <sup>11</sup>

T.P. Flanagan admires the work of a number of Irish artists such as Basil Blackshaw, Barrie Cooke and William Scott. His international influences are wide and varied: Picasso, Mattise and Corot, to name but a few.

T.P. Flanagan attributes much of the artistic growth in Belfast to the "historical fact" that a group of highly trained artists called the Ulster Unit had returned to teach in Belfast in the late 'forties and 'fifties. This coherent and closely-knit group was comprised of artists like George and Arthur Campbell, Gerard Dillon, James McIntyre and Thomas McCreanor.

T.P. Flanagan feels more at home in the company of poets rather than fellow painters, and is strongly associated with the two Northern poets Seamus Heaney and John Hewitt.







"I met John in 1943 when I was just finishing at Art School and he was Art Director at the Belfast Museum, he would read my poetry and encourage me in this and in my painting. In those years John made me feel that what I was trying to do had some use - some dignity - and he gave me a sense of trust in myself." <sup>12</sup> Flanagan has always been associated with Heaney because they both share a close affinity with their natural surroundings through the medium of their work. The rural landscape, particularly the wild and desolate boglands of North Donegal, has appeared time and time again as an integral element in their work (e.g. Flanagan's peatlands series, 1987 and Heaney's The Haw Lantern, published in 1987). So while T.P. Flanagan fulfils some of his literary impulses in writing, most of them are expressed through his paintings. T.P. Flanagan's paintings are not illustration or mirrors of a writer's work. They are two different venaculars. Flanagan considers that the two are separate: "they can parallel, but can't duplicate." <sup>13</sup> He believes "that artists can't illustrate poetry, neither should the poet write a poem after seeing a particular painting." <sup>14</sup>

T.P. Flanagan's contribution has been critically seen as major in the development of watercolour painting in Irish art over the past forty years. Aidan Dunne considers Flanagan "the foremost Irish landscape watercolourist - praise loaded with qualification - but Flanagan is very much a specialist, his spikey evanescent images are vitually a cliché of Irish Art. They are unmistakable." <sup>15</sup>



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As can be seen from the preceeding description, the backgrounds of both artists are quite dissimilar.

Sean McSweeney has had no formal art college education and would be considered largely self-taught, part of his artistic development has been achieved through his knowledge and understanding of the Irish countryside, particularly the Wicklow and Sligo landscape. This knowledge of the countryside is not transmitted through the realistic representation of images. It is achieved through the manipulation of paint, the scumbling colour of large areas of blue and yellow which collide with rich effect. McSweeney is not afraid of strong clashes of primary colours either. He demonstrates throughout his work his expertise in the handling of paint, what Brian Fallon considers "the spontaneous stroke that pulls a whole composition together."<sup>16</sup>

In the case of Flanagan, apart from his college education his approach differs in many respects to McSweeney's. Flanagan works through the accumulative memory of things he has noticed and eventually they focus into images in a series of thematic responses. "My painting is essentially retrospective, I can't react to immediacy."<sup>17</sup> McSweeney's attention however lays emphasis on the "subject of the paint"; it is a process of liberation. He shies away from literal transcriptions from simple naturalistic views. "you work towards freeing the thing, you have to find a sympathy for the paint, for the texture after that it doesn't matter what it looks like."<sup>18</sup>







Flanagan lays importance to the theme. According to Flanagan "I think all your life you might only have one theme, or at the most three, but that's why I decide to paint the things I do; they're subjects that enable me to explore a certain theme."<sup>19</sup>

Flanagan's leafy romantic paintings of lakes and landscapes have been synonymous with the R.H.A. over the past forty years unlike Flanagan, Sean McSweeney has had a latent feeling of hostility towards the R.H.A. He does not exhibit at its annual shows and blames it for "trying to kill off Modern Art in Ireland a generation ago."<sup>20</sup> Without the Living Art exhibition, he feel modernism in his country might have gone under decades ago.







FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER ONE.

1. FALLON, Brian, Artists At Work,  
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2. TOIBIN, Colm, McSweeney's Sligo,  
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3. CAMPELL, Julian, Patrick Collins, "Sense of Place",  
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5. WALSH, Caroline, Talking to T.P. Flanagan,  
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6. WALSH, Caroline, Talking to T.P. Flanagan,  
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7. WALSH, Caroline, Talking to T.P. Flanagan,  
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8. FLANAGAN, T.P., Paintings, 1967 - 1977,  
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9. FLANAGAN, T.P., Paintings, 1967 - 1977,  
Belfast, Arts Council, 13th October 1977.
10. SHEEHAN, Noel, Interview with T.P. Flanagan,  
Belfast, January 1992.
11. SHEEHAN, Noel, Interview with T.P. Flanagan,  
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12. WALSH, Caroline, Talking to T.P. Flanagan,  
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15. DUNNE, Aidan, T.P. Flanagan Review,  
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17. CARTY, Ciaran, Sunday Independent Arts Page,  
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18. DUNNE, Aidan, To The Waters And The Wild,  
Dublin, Sunday Press, May 25th, 1986.
19. FLANAGAN, T.P., Paintings 1967 - 1977,  
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20. FALLON, Brian, Artists At Work,  
Dublin, Irish Times, 13th September, 1989.







CHAPTER TWO.

WORKS: SEAN MCSWEENEY / T.P. FLANAGAN.

This chapter will examine a specific body of paintings by each artist, discussing related works according to characteristics of a given period in each artists' development. It will move from discription and alalysis, to interpretation, seeking to examine whether the artists aspirations are realised through their work.

Sean McSweeney's work represents an important strand of continuity in Irish painting. While being aware of some of the most sophisticated current movements, Sean McSweeney has remained faithful to his first loves: paint and the landscape. It is now the rural landscape of particular areas of Sligo he paints. It seems that those aspects of reality McSweeney likes best are those in which he lives, and works and to which he is naturally drawn. According to Brian Fallon "he has always been an instinctive lyricist rather than a formal thinker and this at times accounts for both his faults and virtues."<sup>1</sup> Sean McSweeney is a painter who keeps himself to himself and gets on with the process of creative discovery. He lives quietly in the midst of the landscape that inspires him, away from the noise and fuss of the commercial art world. "In Sligo you have the sea, the shoreline, a bank of gravel to keep the sea at bay, from May until August it is a wild garden full of bog Iris, to have all this to myself is a rare pleasure."<sup>2</sup>







There are two distinctive influences on Sean McSweeney's work: Abstract Expressionism and the Irish romantic tradition. When Sean McSweeney was forming his style, Abstract Expressionism was a dominant movement, and while McSweeney is not an abstract painter, there are definite comparisons. His brushwork, his pictorial rhythms and his overall sense of form have reached some of the beneficial qualities of Abstract Expressionism. However, it is more than style which would separate McSweeney's art from the New York school of thought, it is the very essence of the Irish landscape tradition stemming from Yeats and Collins. It would be the reconciliation of this style and tradition that would according to artist/critic Gerald Davis "categorizes McSweeney as a lyrical romantic more concerned with the nature of paint, than literal or intellectual considerations."<sup>3</sup>

Early in his career McSweeney was nominated as a successor to Jack B. Yeats and there is obviously some validity in the association. McSweeney with his romantic suffused colour and thick paint shows similarities, but McSweeney is purely a landscapist while with Yeats this was rarely the essence of his work. According to Brian Fallon "Yeats rarely painted an unpeopled countryside; it is the figures which give his work its special reverberation. McSweeney by contrast cannot find it wild enough or lonely enough, and he revels in wet, waste country."<sup>4</sup>



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In seeking to examine a body of paintings by McSweeney, the day to day preoccupations of the artist should not be overlooked, especially a painter like McSweeney whose methods of achieving results are as important as the results themselves "One senses a total bodily involvement in his mental effort."<sup>5</sup> McSweeney's broad, energetic way of working does suggest an isolated painter sitting hunched before his easel in a field or wood. Contrary to this image, McSweeney usually does his paintings indoors although he does a lot of sketching in the landscape, using chalks, pastels and charcoal. Therefore McSweeney's paintings are distillations and not immediate responses to the landscape, which has similarities with T.P. Flanagan as regards approach. According to Flanagan "My problem is that I can never paint a thing at the time. I've got to let it lie in the imagination and marinate."<sup>6</sup>

Sean McSweeney is a methodical constant worker continually absorbed in the Sligo landscape. He is certainly a prolific painter, but that is a matter of disciplined professional industry and not the product of working fast. According to McSweeney "When I am working on a painting, it takes over and a little bit of magic comes in, it lasts two or three days and then you start thinking about the next piece."<sup>7</sup>







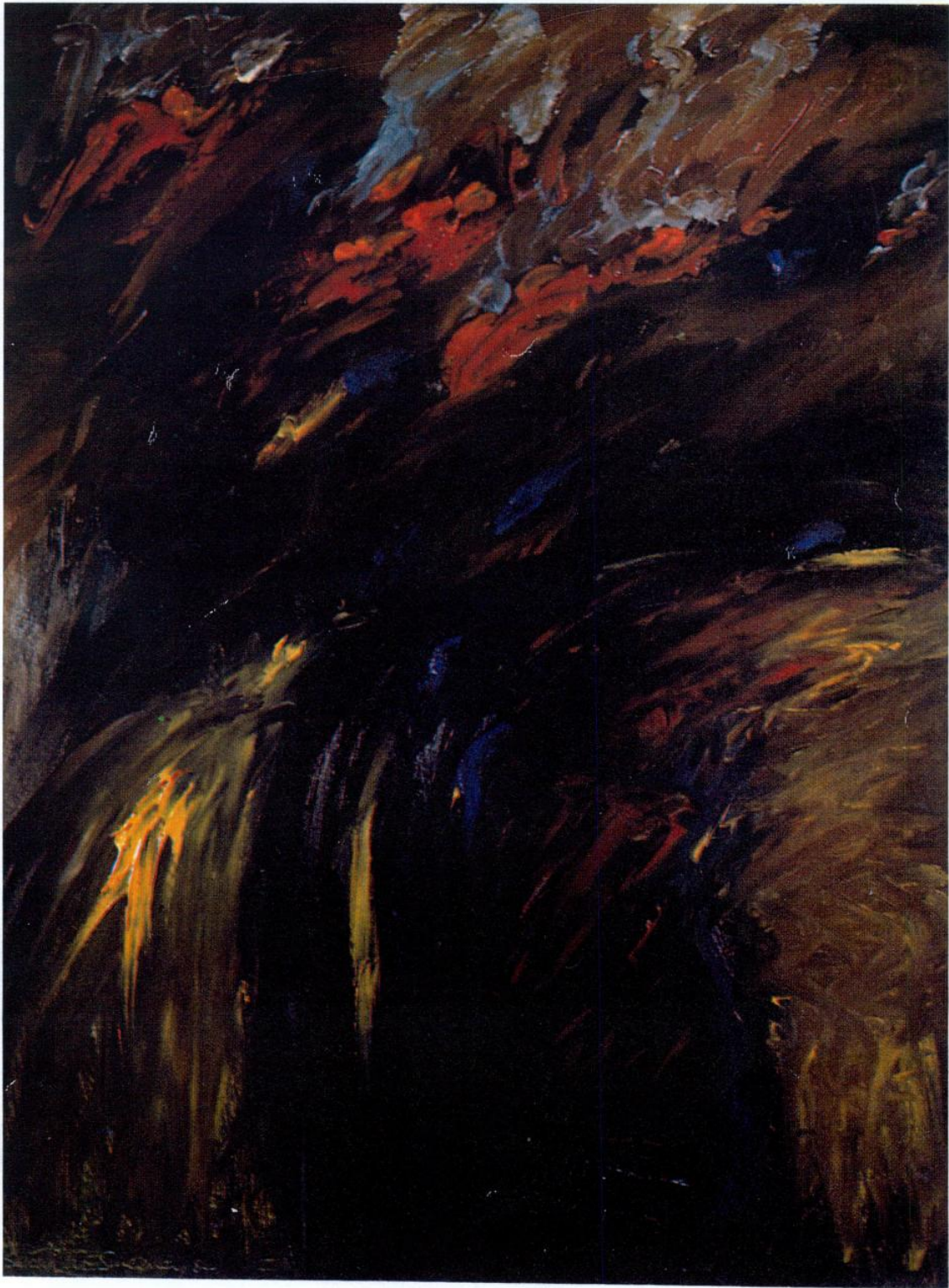
McSweeney cuts and stretches his own canvas, although a lot of his work is done on board, which is cut to size for him by a local Sligo tradesman. The smooth surface of the board is sanded to give "tooth" for the paint to grip, and grip it does. For McSweeney is more concerned with the nature of paint than literal or intellectual considerations. His direct energetic assault on subject and canvas give us "brooding apocalyptic visions of a hauntingly lonely Irish landscape."<sup>8</sup> He pours himself into his work; with total bodily involvement and mental effort. According to McSweeney "it's all moving and changing, the landscape. I always try to get to the stage where there's an energy and excitement in the work."<sup>9</sup> This indeed is accurate for at certain stages he discards his brushes and paints to work with his hands and fingers. Sean McSweeney achieves the very paint surface of his landscape by this bodily involvement, and the surface is emphasised by the benefit of painting on board which throws the paint forward.

During the last twenty five years Sean McSweeney has been intimately involved with two landscapes: Wicklow and Sligo. The first painting I wish to examine is from his period in Wicklow, April Hill Fires, (1984).









April Hill Fires: Oil on canvas,  
(1984) 76 x 61 cm'. McSweeney.  
Mr. & Mrs Costello.





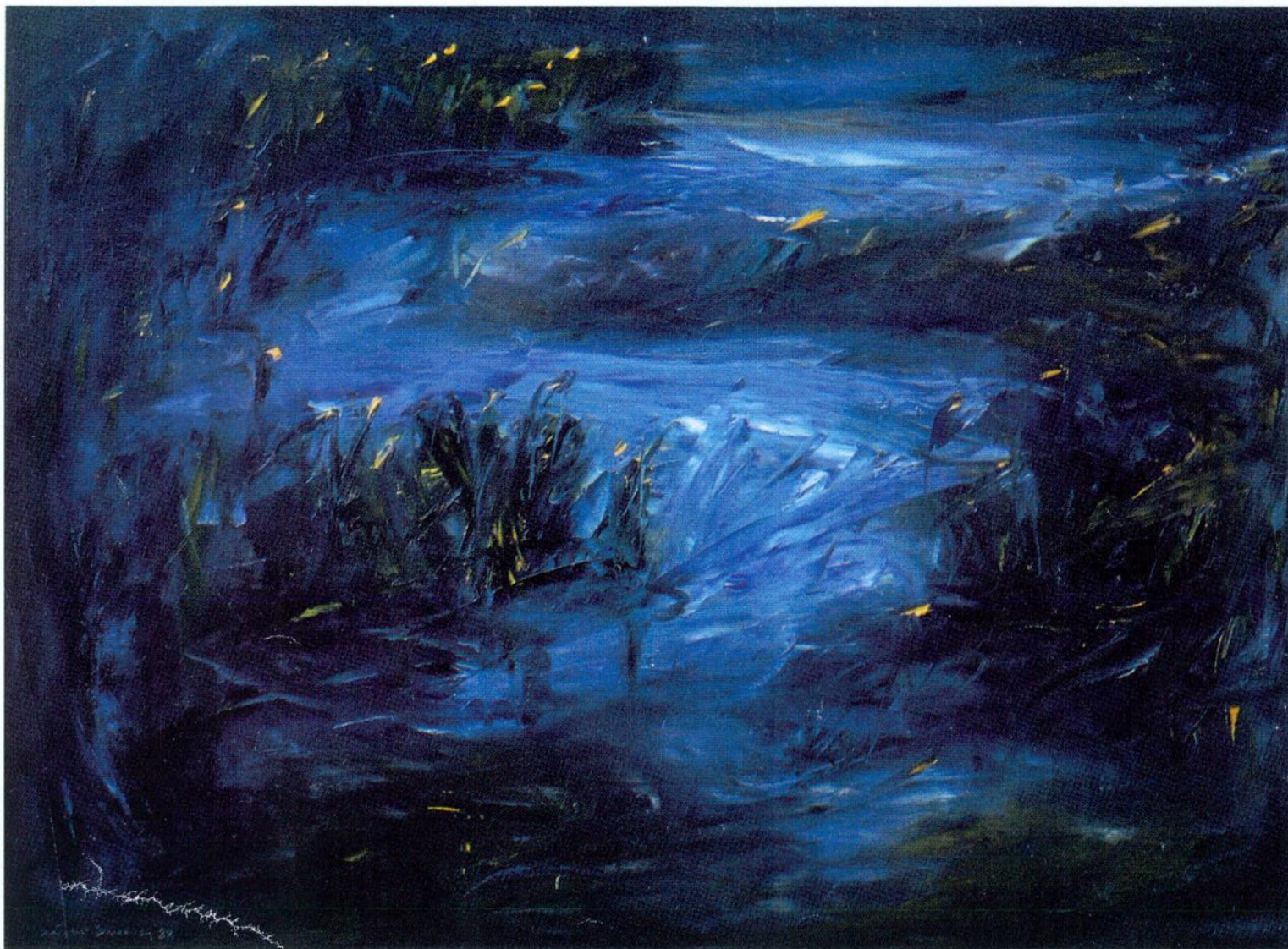


Geographically Wicklow is comprised of mainly mountainous areas covered with large tracts of extensive blanket boglands. During the month of April the scrub on the top surface of these boglands is burnt in preparation for Turf cutting in the summer months. It is this activity which is the stimulus for this painting. The first impression of this piece would suggest the "over all" qualities of Abstract Expressionism, in which all areas of the canvas have roughly the same degree of interest. This, however, is not the case on closer observation. There are definite suggestions of a foreground/background. The composition is central, where masses of richly painted ochres, crimsons and reds are worked in an overall pattern from the centre outwards. The central area of the canvas is dealt with differently, the prussian blues and deep ranges of burnt umbers are applied with less vigour and, hence, create a stillness which allows the eye to rest and examine the dancing spontaneous strokes which hover around the edge of the canvas. This painting is not a realistic representation of a certain image: It is a "mood piece" which is a fine example of McSweeney's work from the Wicklow period. It is generally difficult at times to pin down what is what in some of Sean McSweeney's work from this period because of the lack of clean horizontal divisions of sky, sea and land. However Sean McSweeney has overcome this in his later work from Sligo. This painting should perhaps be judged in a similar manner to a Barrie Cooke painting. Cooke once remarked of his own work " The detail of brushstrokes in themselves," or, in McSweeney's case,









BOGLAND SLIGO:

Oil on canvas 91 x 122 cm.

(1988) McSweeney. Coll. Mrs. Ryan.







the knife and finger strokes, or even lumps of pigment straight from the tube.

Bogland Sligo, (1988):

Sean McSweeney's Sligo is near the bed of the Atlantic where there is very little protection from the Western gales, since the landscape towards the sea is almost treeless. Between McSweeney's studio in Ballinconnell and the Atlantic are abandoned bog holes. These bog holes are often filled with saltwater, which gives a clear indication of how the land and sea near Ballinconnell are indispensably linked. This painting for me is about a sombre mood of isolation, pools of dense waterlogged vegetation are abandoned and uninhabitable. It is a close up treatment of the landscape rather than an overall expansion of it. This enhances the Abstract power of the paint, which McSweeney uses with stark intensities of wet, livid magnificent sweeps of blues and greens. The slashes of bright cadmium yellow suggest bog Iris dancing in the windblown grasses. The painting has a basic pictorial vocabulary, where the compositional device of a densely worked series of rhythmic brush strokes move from the centre of the painting, in a mass of tonally worked blues and whites. This also suggests that the colours were mixed on the canvas rather than the palette. This painting is full of wind and the changing play of light, where sheets of water lie on the spongy soggy fields of Ballinconnell, reflecting the almost sinister quality of the bogland light.









EVENING BOG:

Oil on board, 61 x 81 cm'

(1989) McSweeney. Coll. of the Artist.







It is characteristic of McSweeney; unafraid to introduce strong colours of intense blues and greens into the Irish landscape.

Evening Bog, (1989), is a painting which I feel is a genuinely felt and experienced piece, full of atmosphere, as well as being richly painted. It is typically McSweeney; a flooded bogland marsh pool is the stimulus. The paintwork is highly controlled and versatile, treated as if it was as solid and palpable as a lump of wet turf, stroked, piled and dragged with brush, knife and fingers. There is an overall feeling from the painting of McSweeney almost wrestling with the paint. The composition differs from the other paintings mentioned, because in this painting McSweeney introduces an horizon line which creates great depth and expansion. Supported also by his treatment of colour, has greatly manifested the overall depth and directness of this painting. The swirling brushstrokes and painterly marks of the warm orange moves in a circular pattern from the foreground of the painting, through variations of blues and greens before resting its echoing warmth into the deep horizon line, which develops into a beautifully saturated grey, so common with the Irish light and landscape. This painting is a strong example of the contrast and tonal variations that can be achieved by the use of pure complimentary (blue/orange) colours, and is a fine example of Sean McSweeney's ability as a colourist. It is a painting which leaves you with the impression of a personality that is powerfully demonstrated.



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BOGLAND WATER:

Oil on board, 61 x 137 cm'

(1986) McSweeney. Coll. Shelia McSweeney.





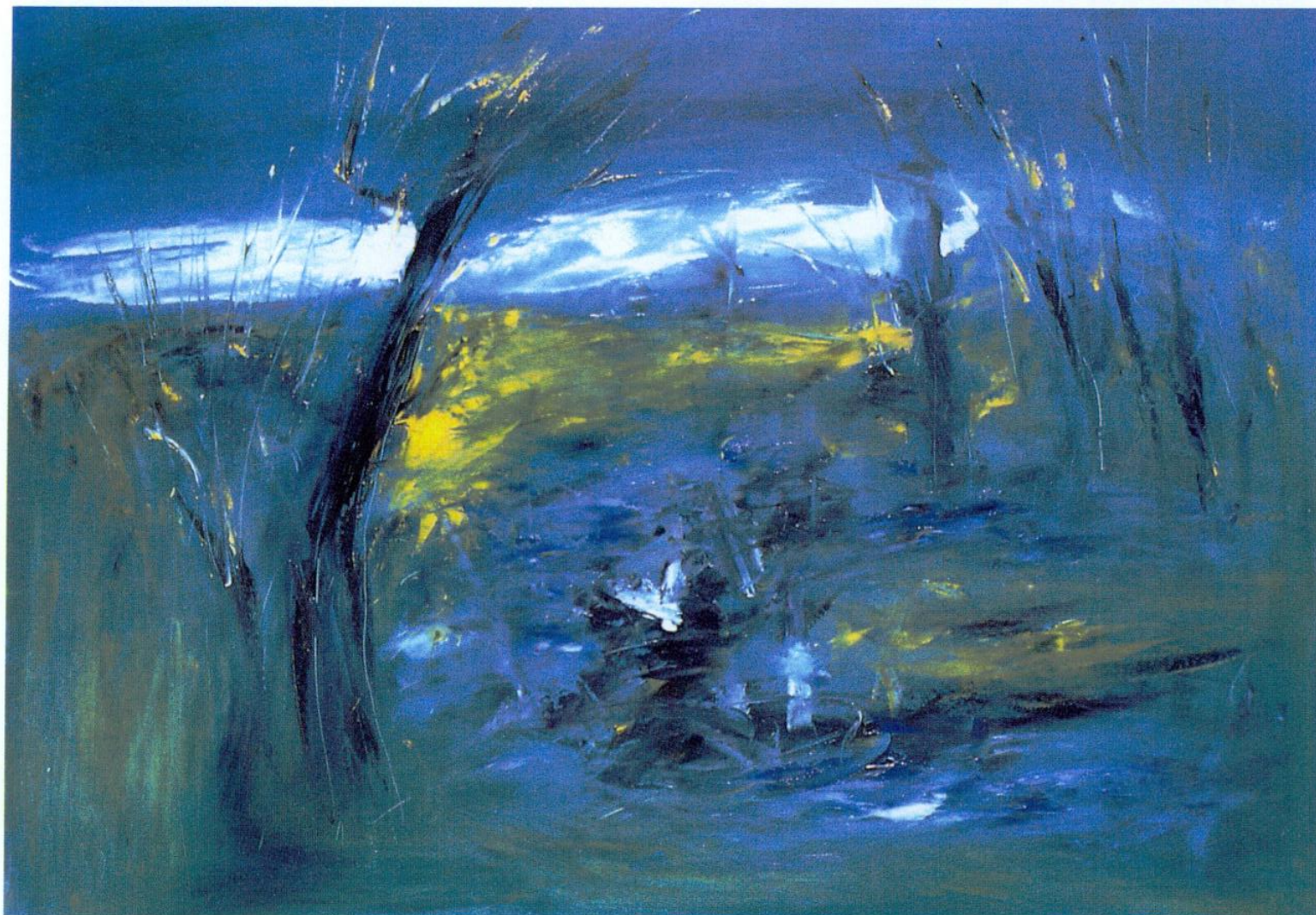


Bogland Water, (1986), is a particularly impressive triptych. It is a typical example of the dampness we Irish usually moan about. Anyone who is familiar with Sean McSweeney's painting's will straight away recognise the swirling patterns of blue pools and windblown grasses. This painting has similarities with some of McSweeney's earlier work from Wicklow, which tended to exclude the horizon line completely, as in this piece. It is a close-up treatment of the landscape. The composition is based entirely on the patterns of the predominantly blue pools, that move with spontaneous excitement and physical vigour across the three panels, almost dragging the surface of one panel into the next. The introduction of lemon yellow in the central panel enhances the overall depth of the painting by giving the viewer the impression of being in the landscape, being almost part of it. Despite this there is a limited combination of harmonies and contrasts of colours. Sean McSweeney has tackled the task in hand, without the painting becoming clotted or overworked, which is always a danger with such a limited palette of colours worked in this manner. It is a painting where the aspects of realism are becoming more important for McSweeney, and shows his early development in retaining this realism, when compared with the aforementioned Bogland sligo and Evening Bog, painted three years later. Bogland Trees (1988) is an example of recurring subject matter in Sean McSweeney's work, which can be traced back to his period in Wicklow "trees." Trees offer a range of shapes and lines, whether at rest or in movement, singular or in a mass.









BOGLAND TREES:

Oil on board, 61 x 81 cm'

(1988) McSweeney. Coll. Shelia McSweeney.







They are for McSweeney, perhaps a measuring rod of the landscape, a method of dividing the different structural elements of land, sea or sky. They can also work in reverse, linking land, sea and sky which is the case with this piece of work. The composition is simple and direct, a singular directional line of black moves from the foreground of the painting, dissecting the white horizontal which, in turn, is complimented with flecks of black verticals suggesting trees in the distance. There is a tonal symphony of blues and yellows that become rather subdued as they reach towards the edges and background of the painting. This in turn enhances the irregular patterns of transparent impressionist flecks of blues, whites and blacks central to the composition. It is a obvious example of McSweeney's build-up of harmonies around the combination of yellows, blues and whites. It also shows McSweeney's capable understanding of an expansive area of space and his ability to convey it to the viewer. The paintings of Sean McSweeney never fail to disconcert. He always finds the energy to force the pace of personal marks and brushstrokes. Sean McSweeney has the nerve to raise the odds with his use of pure colours, built up around contrasts and harmonies of yellows, greens and blues. Sean McSweeney is not afraid of the most obvious effects that can be achieved with a limited palette of colours. What some painters may consider "sweet", however the venhamence, lushness and sensitivity in his work proves otherwise. He is perpetually trying to outdo himself.







The link with the landscape he describes is no straight, representational one. It is something more direct and subjective "I feel that the more I paint and the deeper I go into the land, the more I am only scraping at the surface."<sup>10</sup>

There are those who find Sean McSweeney's paintings repetitive. Over the Year's critics of McSweeney's painting have had some difficulty with what they considered the "Apparent lack of structure in his work."<sup>11</sup> They found it rather formless. "No bones"<sup>12</sup> was the dismissive verdict of one distinguished commentator. It seemed to have affected McSweeney, because twenty years ago he did not paint for a long time. He existed in what he describes as a "black hole". He now works all the time. He is a "natural", a prolific artist who likes to get the most out of his ideas. There is in fact much more variety in his work than is usually allowed, once you go looking for it and realise that he likes to repeat a subject with tonal variations and contrasts of light.

Sean McSweeney's retrospective in the R.H.A. Gallagher gallery in January 1991 was surely a testament that as a painter he is not prepared to sit still. There were enough vintage paintings in the exhibition to prove that the freshness and energy of his work from the Wicklow period is being carried on with a new stimulus, the Sligo landscape.



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I remain convinced that the next time I visit Sligo I will see nothing but "Sean McSweeney's landscapes" melted in blues and greens.

The well known American painter Willem de Kooning wrote in 1960 about his sensual abstracted landscapes and what he hoped to achieve through his work of that period: "and then there is a time you just take a walk, and you walk in your own landscape."<sup>13</sup> It is I think Sean McSweeney's dream.

T.P. Flanagan is the foremost Irish landscape water-colourist; he is very much a specialist in his treatment of the medium of watercolour which dominates much of his work. He is a superb technician whose ghostly images find their way on to the surface of either canvas or paper in a fusillade of jabs and darts. "It's the surface quality of a painting, the physical quality, weight of the paint, its comparative depth and thickness, the fluidity of it - it's all these things that work on the eye of an artist or anyone who knows paint and it assists in their enjoyment and understanding of its content."<sup>14</sup>

T.P. Flanagan's paintings do not represent nature in literal terms. Nothing he paints exists except in the way he paints it. In his work he attempts to capture the essence of a place rather than the place itself, what Flanagan would consider, "a synthesis of all the aspects of landscape."<sup>15</sup> Therefore Donegal, Fermanagh and Sligo are not topographical landscapes or should I say analytical representations of same, but are evocations



2000  
2001



rather than descriptions. T.P. Flanagan has always tended to paint in serial images, offering several treatments of the same subject, from his first serial paintings, "men in a muddy field," in 1962, to his most recent series of paintings of meadowlands, wetlands, peatlands and woodlands. Because Flanagan works in serial forms there is always the danger of them becoming hackneyed and formulaic. But they are always invariably rescued by Flanagan's strong, instinctive grasp of his subject, a kind of privileged link with the landscape.

T.P. Flanagan is especially good at conveying the feeling of moments of transition; that which contains the trace of a presence that has gone, what Seamus Heaney would call "the after-life of experience."

T.P. Flanagan's restricted colour and tonal simplifications would not be considered glamorous; all of his colours are in the range of "earth colours": "all my colours are earth colours, the old colours, the colours that are natural rather than synthetic; the original ochres and umbers and siennas that come out of the living ground."<sup>16</sup>

Although T.P. Flanagan has lived and worked in Northern Ireland all his life, there is only one example where his work has been influenced by the so-called troubles, a drawing intitled Victim (1975) based on Poussin's Echo and Narcissus. It was a tribute to a friend Martin McBirney, Q.C. who was murdered,







"It was the only time, I was conscious of my work being influenced by the so-called troubles."<sup>17</sup> He also thinks that "the splendid visual reporting of newspapers, photographers and T.V. cameramen, make figurative painting about Northern Ireland's predicament seem redundant."<sup>18</sup>

Unlike McSweeney, Flanagan has an eminently more cool, civilised, leafy, delicate approach, whereas McSweeney on the other hand, is more broad, brash and energetic in producing his results. However, to some extent this is dictated by the materials used, each demanding different considerations (watercolour as opposed to oil). T.P. Flanagan's working method of consecutive drawings before a final series of paintings, has similarities with McSweeney who also draws repeatedly before starting a painting. Unlike Flanagan, McSweeney draws to recollect his thoughts or responses of a particular place, but Flanagan draws for the purpose of analysis and definition. "I draw principally to record the information I need for the immediate purposes of picture making."<sup>19</sup>

T.P. Flanagan to a large extent would be considered an academic artist or possibly a traditional one. This has probably been derived from the fact that Flanagan's principal medium is watercolour. Also, he has been strongly associated with the R.H.A. over the past twenty five years, and is a past president of the R.U.A.









GORTAHORK (2):

Oil and arcylic on canvas, 69½ x 120 cm' Flanagan,  
Coll. of the Ulster Museum (1969).







T.P. Flanagan has been synonymous with watercolour painting in this country over the past decade. His leafy, romantic serial paintings of lakes and landscapes have proved steadily popular with the public throughout those years. His light fluid style is immediately recognisable, what Seamus Heaney has described as "haunting the canvas like luminous mists".

Flanagan's paintings take their departures from areas of Donegal, Sligo and Fermanagh. In choosing to discuss Flanagan's work, each painting will be discussed as an individual piece rather than part of a culmulative series of paintings.

Gortahork (2), 1969 is part of a series of paintings entitled "The Gortahork sequence" painted during the period of 1966 - 69, according to Flanagan, "These paintings grew out of a reaction to the precise and strongly formal structures of the North Donegal landscape, with its insistence on graphic clarity".<sup>19</sup> This painting takes its departure from the areas of North Donegal particularly The Bloody Foreland, which circles the Falcarragh beaches. It is an example of Flanagan's interest in the regular designs and patterns which are so commonly associated with large tracts of boglands. In this painting there is a strong balance between flat blocks of deep brown and black forms. They move to the background of the piece, as opposed to the deep brown swirling forms of the foreground, which co-exist with the sinuous line that fragments the structure of the central elements of this landscape.









"ROUGHRA MORNING":

Oil on canvas, 62 cm x 76 cm',

Coll. of the Bank of Ireland. (1971) Flanagan.







T.P. Flanagan's earlier concern with elemental mirrors of water and sky, e.g. Autumn Lough, (1961) is again reasserted. In this piece however, it is bog pools in the foreground reflecting the brooding skies of the North Donegal area, wedged between the expansive areas of stripped bare turf. The colour content of this piece is very limited. Blacks, browns and greys are worked in tonal variations. One critic described it as Flanagan like Renoir "re-discovering the virtue of black - black is the queen of colours."<sup>20</sup> It is an interesting example of Flanagan's use of oil paint, a medium he rarely uses, although its handling in this piece is quite eloquent. "Roughra Morning" (1971) is part of a series of paintings which were done during the summer months of 1971 in the townland of Roughra near Ardara in South Donegal. This painting is more of a summary, and is possibly more of an oil sketch than a finished work. The structure is slightly indicated, although there is definite placing of foreground, middleground and distance. The depth in this piece is emphasised by the soft linear strokes which lead from the foreground into almost ambiguity. To the viewer these strokes suggest a roadway leading into a mountainous area of blanket bogland. The strokes in the middleground give the impression of turf cuttings captured at early morning. The washes of pale browns and greens seem to float on the canvas with relative softness. It is in this soft treatment of the pigment, which takes its colour from the harmony of local









BEN BULBIN AND AN OLD BYRE:

Oil on canvas, 90 x 120 cm,  
Coll. The Earl of Belmore (1979) Flanagan.







shades rather than the local light. According to Flanagan, this painting resulted from "my more permanent residency in South Donegal, proffer elements of landscape configuration, possibly of a more symbolic and personal nature."<sup>21</sup>

Ben Bulben and an Old Byre (1979), unlike the others mentioned, is not part of a series. It is also an example of some of the work Flanagan has produced from his many trips outside the six counties, to Sligo where he spent more of his formative years. This painting predates the "Lisadell sequence" of 1977, when Flanagan was concerned with recording the ancestral home of the Gore-Booth house of Lissadell.

This painting is typically Flanagan, the foreground is rather dense with foliage and a mass of waving vegetation, painted in an almost impressionistic manner. The eye is moved in the direction of Ben Bulben in the distance by the pattern of brushstrokes in the foreground. The brush strokes move in a similar direction throughout which is rather repeditive. The treatment of colour is subdued. Areas of pale blues pinks and green overlap before receding into subtle tones, often rather washy variations of the foreground colours, before resting in the depths of the background. The piece would have been perhaps more interesting if there was more of a variation of brushstrokes and a stronger use of the medium, which is treated with the same seductive transparency of watercolour.









MORNING IN THE MOUNTAIN:

Watercolour on paper, 40 x 75 cm,

Coll. of Shellagh Flanagan, (1984) Flanagan.







Morning in the Mountain, (1984) is built up around a simple straightforward composition. Again, there is a meticulous placing of foreground, middleground, distance. This structure of composition is, however, broken up by the placement of a tree in the foreground which leads outwards to infinity. The painting has an almost abstract character. Areas are suggested with jabs and darts of opaque colours of a very limited palette, blue, greens and browns with a touch of burnt sienna. The pigment is carried in an unnaturally slow manner across the picture plane. The heaviest most solid area is the tree, which does help the weakness in structure of the other elements of mountain and foliage. It also, to a large extent, heightens the effectiveness of depth, which is the strength of this work combined with a steady subtle feeling for light. There is a curious unwillingness to define too strongly the extent of different areas. The shapes are there, the curve, the cross of a mark - but they are open-ended. It is perhaps what Flanagan would consider "a fleeting glimpse of the countryside, an ability to impart a memory."<sup>22</sup>

Donegal Morning, (1987) in many ways uses the same devices as the aforementioned paintings. It has a similar palette of colours and a definite foreground, middleground etc. The painting, however, is more structured and better understood. The medium of watercolour shows Flanagan's technical fluency and draughtsmanship at its best. There is a fine air of spontaneity in this piece.



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DONEGAL MORNING:

Watercolour on paper, 40 x 75 cm! Flanagan  
Coll of Shellagh Flanagan (1987)







The washes in the background seem to float on the paper so that the charm inherent in the medium is enhanced. Compared to Flanagan's earlier work there is more of a rhythm of movement, a stronger overall impression of colour, and a soft suffused use of light. T.P. Flanagan's paintings are romantic in feel and they produce a similar response in the viewer. They are arrived at by a method which Flanagan considers an "analysis and synthesis".<sup>23</sup>

When Flanagan paints his approach is basically tonal, his colours are always spare, controlled, toned towards white. The setting down of the individual subject he describes as, "a set of marks not mimetics but based on selective simplicity". Flanagan does achieve this selective simplicity through his work, but unfortunately his compositional sense is rather predictable and there is a risk of his painting drifting into a cosy mannerism. However, it would be most interesting to see him take on more different areas of the landscape, and emerge more strongly. There are elements of this happening in his very recent work, "Irish Rain" series.

After all every artist is his own critic, and is consistently equipping himself with the information needed for the purpose of picture making. Therefore, true painting has to be a personal and intense way of feeling or seeing something, so that what is presented to the viewer deepens and enriches his or her awareness of a similar situation, art is about communication.



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MEMBERS

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It's about one person appealing to another. The appeal and success of T.P. Flanagan's work lies in his ability to convey the feeling of moments of transition, the instant when a breeze stirs foliage, when a still scene is animated by a sudden gust of wind or drenched by a summer rainstorm.

With so much of the Irish countryside giving way to development, Flanagan gloomily anticipates a future in which fields may no longer exist. "You'll be dependent on paintings like mine for a day in the country."<sup>25</sup>

T.P. Flanagan shows a fundamental awareness of one aspect of the artistic thought of our time. Perhaps poetry in paint evokes the spirit of his painting. Seamus Heaney captures it best of all in his poem entitled "Bogland" dedicated to T.P. Flanagan.

We have no prairies  
to slice a big sun at evening -  
everywhere the eye concedes to  
encroaching horizon,

Is wooed into the cyclops' eye  
of a tarn. Our unfenced country  
is bog that keeps crusting  
between the sights of the sun.

They've taken the skeleton  
of the Great Irish Elk  
out of the peat, set it up  
an astounding crate full of air,







Butter sunk under  
more than a hundred years  
was recovered salty and white.  
The ground itself is kind, black butter.

Melting and opening underfoot,  
missing its last definition  
by millions of years.  
They'll never dig coal here,

Only the waterlogged trunks  
of great firs, soft as pulp.  
Our pioneers keep striking  
inwards and downwards,

Every layer they strip  
seems camped on before.  
The bogholes might be Atlantic seepage  
the wet centre is bottomless.







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CHAPTER THREE

POST-WAR IRISH LANDSCAPE TRADITION

SEAN MCSWEENEY / T.P. FLANAGAN.

In this chapter I wish to consider how T.P. Flanagan and Sean McSweeney fit into a post-war Irish landscape tradition. In doing so I will discuss briefly the development of Irish landscape painting in this country from 1920, in order to fit Flanagan and McSweeney into the context of their time.

The Irish landscape has been a major preoccupation of painters, poets and patrons. Since the foundation of the state, and previously. In the early years of the state the painters of the period (1922 - 1932), were touched by the prevailing rural understanding of Irish identity, as Bruce Arnold has remarked, there is, in the work of painters in the 'twenties and 'thirties such as Paul Henry, William Conor, etc. "Often an uncomfortable feeling of strain, a self consciousness about what being Irish meant." <sup>1</sup> From the painters of this period whom Arnold has broadly defined as comprising of a school of "Irish Academic Realism" come those pictures of country men and women, fishermen etc. (e.g. Lough Altan, Co. Donegal by Paul Henry). All seemed so representative of the early years of independence. Cultural life in the new state was dominated by a vision of Ireland, maybe inherited from the period of the literary revival, as a rural Gaelic civilisation that retained an ancient pastoral distinctiveness.







According to Brian Fallon, "Irish art was not tied in with nationalism, as so many writers were, painters after all, cannot plug into a vernacular language, as poets and novelists can do. Unlike the French, Irish artists did not have a long visual tradition to give them identity and a sense of continuity."<sup>2</sup>

In the darkness of the war years perhaps the first real Irish School emerged with the foundation of the Irish Exhibition of Living <sup>A</sup>art in September of 1943. It was in Paris that Irish artists had discovered the French style of Cubism. After this it was no longer possible to pretend that Irish art and modernism were separate because for a time it had responded to a modern movement. It was in Ireland during this period of modernism that the visual arts were contained both within and without by conservative forces as represented in the R.H.A. annual shows. ~~One~~ commentator suggests "the reasons for the break with even latent modernism, was partly because of nationalist commitment and an absence of artistic direction."<sup>3</sup> Although it did flourish for a period of time, and it was a breakthrough in its own way, French styled Cubism never really caught on here, apart from a few individual talents, men and women with something of their own to say. According to Brian Fallon, "Few people then bought modern pictures, so the visual arts flourished as a kind of sub culture, but it did so with a vitality and sheer obstinacy."<sup>4</sup> The Irish Republic in the 1960's went through a certain amount of social and culture change.



because people



Irish artists had more access to late modernism than their earlier counterparts had to early modernism, possibly because of the developments in cheaper printing methods and a greater expansion of colour reproductions. "Colour reproductions and circulating exhibitions have done more for pictorial ideas than what printing did for free enquiry in the sixteenth century, and remember that the gem of an idea can infect a whole group".<sup>5</sup> This gave Irish artists an awareness of international styles and concepts, which at this time were very much American (abstraction and minimalism).

It was during this period (late '50s early '60s) that Sean McSweeney began to find himself as an artist and it seems he functioned quite happily with the framework of the Irish Living Art Exhibition, exhibiting there from 1965 onwards. But contrary to this, he did not accommodate the prevailing international climate of thought. However his style has developed on the wing of Abstract Expressionism with a search for a more "individual and more spartan solution."<sup>6</sup> with an emphasis on a "sense of place" (e.g. Hollywood in Wicklow and Ballinconell in Sligo.)

Sean McSweeney has continually pursued without interruption a set of pronounced rural, organic concerns. These have set him quite apart from any urban scene and made him, despite his apparent conservatism, a non-conformist.



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✕ McSweeney has tended to discount outside influences, but surely success in Irish Art lies with success of local artists like McSweeney. More recently one critic namely Brian Fallon, has declared that "what matters in the long run is not whether an artist works in a National or International style but his or her "personal Stature.""<sup>7</sup> This "personal stature" Fallon talks about may isolate McSweeney from the very outmoded and short lived pop and New Realism trends (essentially urban ones in most cases) making him look a rather isolated figure to most eyes. But surely Sean McSweeney's presence in Irish Art has been consistent over the past twenty five years. He has had numerous one man exhibitions, touring exhibitions and is included in public collections. He has earned himself a staunch reputation among those who take an interest in Irish landscape painting both for his lively painterliness and the authenticity of his vision.

T.P. Flanagan's own artistic background in coming to painting through literature rather than art is unusual. "It was quite a deliberate decision I knew that I couldn't give sufficient time and concentration to both. In the paintings that coincided with the poetry there was a literary penumbra that was to their detriment: a painting is not something that can be satisfactorily defined in words, and if you try to articulate your aims too much you can talk a painting out of yourself. So I decided for painterly images."<sup>8</sup>







Because of his great interest in literature, "profitable literature", Flanagan is often placed in a "celtic tradition." One hesitates to use such a term with all its literary and mythological associations. Possibly "a celtic love of place" as Heaney describes it, would be more appropriate.

Throughout his career T.P. Flanagan has shied away from the most latent influences of modernism and has continued within the spectrum of a traditional academic approach, what he considers a more "purposeful academicism."

T.P. Flanagan has been a member of the Royal Hibernian Academy over the past twenty five years, and a past president of the Royal Ulster Academy (1979). He is regarded as one of the most significant of that group of Irish Artists which includes Basil Blackshaw, Tom Carr and Colin Middleton, especially in the field of watercolour painting, where his contribution has been seen as major in the development of that medium in Irish Art. He is perhaps a lyrical landscape painter with his own strain of pastoral poetry.







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CONCLUSION.

The Irish landscape should be understood as a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolising our surroundings.

Both Sean McSweeney and T.P. Flanagan have been synonymous with Irish landscape painting over the past twenty five years. They now occupy an unassailable position in the middle generation of Irish painters.

The characteristics of each artist's background before coming to art is considerably different. T.P. Flanagan grew up amidst an abundance of artistic creativity, and it was inevitable he would choose either literature or painting as a chosen career. The early influences of his maiden aunts and art teacher, Kathleen Bridle shaped his decision, so basically his artistic direction was formed at an early period in his life. This subsequently lead to his enrolment at the Belfast College of Art, where he studied under Romeo Toogood. Unlike Flanagan, Sean McSweeney held numerous positions of employment before arriving at a decision to become a painter, he is largely self-taught, his influences have been developed from looking at other painters and nature. His choice of career as an artist, was made at a later stage in his life than was Flanagan's.

The Chosen works of each artistare also quite dissimilar. T.P. Flanagan's work tends to be quite repetitive and predictable. His chosen medium of watercolour is worked in the same manner in his oil paintings. Flanagan's oil paintings are less rich in substance than is usually the



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case with this medium. His work throughout his career has also been in serial forms; his paintings would possibly have had more impact had a lesser number (seven) of works been used rather than the cumulative series of twenty. However, he has an ability to convey a feeling of air, mist and light through his work. In contrast Sean McSweeney's work has an abundance of subtle variations of colours, tones and forms. In Sean McSweeney's work I was especially impressed by his exuberant handling of paint it gave the impression of a personality which was more strongly manifested. I am sure his conquest of landscape will continue to progress into even more vibrant forms in the future.

The tragedy of this insular island of ours is the lack of publicity on the visual arts, information which should be more readily available to the general public. There is no need for something as universal as the visual arts not to be enjoyed and understood by all. The sooner that Ireland overcomes the legacy of the Celtic Heritage, the sooner the artists working in this island get the recognition they deserve; not as artists defined by their nationality, but as artists defined by their contribution to the raising of human consciousness.







APPENDICES

QUESTIONNAIRE TO T.P. FLANAGAN, 14th JANUARY 1992.

NOEL SHEEHAN, Does the political situation in Northern Ireland effect you, or your work?

T.P. FLANAGAN, Like most people, I find it impossible to understand the motivation behind much of what is currently happening in Northern Ireland's political life; but this question has become such a cliché that I feel inclined to resent or ignore it - shall we say, it would be much more pleasant, I'm sure to be living and painting in Paris (or Dublin) for instance.

NOEL SHEEHAN, Do you think that most Irish artists today are internationally influenced or do we have a particularly Irish way of thinking and dealing with images?

T.P. FLANAGAN, Any artist, if he's at all involved, must be aware of international trends in the visual arts - the mass media see to that. The first requirement of a committed artist is to know about the history of the art of his own country. He may, then wish to see himself in a continuing tradition to which he adds his contribution and helps extend things. There are underlying excellence in drawing, the mastery of form, and the understanding of colour which are general to all Western art. The inflexions we give to our application of them will be moderated by our national temperament.







NOEL SHEEHAN,

When you travel abroad are you fascinated by landscape? What aspect of the Irish landscape is distinctive? What fascinates you about it.

T.P. FLANAGAN,

I remember reading some-where that to begin with when the English artist, Turner started his European journies it was the scale of the landscape that threw him. In his British Studies he has, as it were, worked out a set of proportions for the natural forms and a prespective in presenting them, that would convey his concept of the "sublime"; he found himself confronted by a vastly different sequence of heights and depths. This still applies in a way - look, for instance, at David Bomberg's Italian paintings.

NOEL SHEEHAN,

If your work was shown abroad do you think that an outsider looking at it would consider it typically Irish? If so what elements do you think would shape their response.

T.P. FLANAGAN,

My work has been seen in U.S.A., Russia China and Europe. There should be a quality about landscape painting that avoids the parochial, I don't set much importance to pictures being typically German, French or Irish (whatever that means).







NOEL SHEEHAN,

To what does the post-war, post modernism Irish landscape tradition effect you and your work?

T.P. FLANAGAN,

I paint the pictures I feel inclined to, in the way that comes to me naturally. Just as handwriting differs from individual to individual, so my marking on a canvas or a sheet of paper is instinctive and natural. It is only when one is practising to master a skill that one is much aware of it. Possibly the person least aware of his own style is the artist himself. Although he has it. After all it is true that forms follow content. This is what I meant earlier about knowing how the history of a tradition evolved, if you do, you enjoy different individual examples of excellence, but you put this aside when you do your own thing. You are living in the present, so whatever you do will be coloured, by that whether you like it or not. For the landscape painter, as much as any other type of painter, its what he feels that matters. What his response to a recurring motif to the observer as if he were seeing it for the first time, not how he manages it. Andre Malraux, argues that art is inspired by other art, possibly even more than by the reality of its subject.







NOEL SHEEHAN,

Do you think that your response to the landscape, has been influenced by any particular environmental concerns you may have? e.g. The Gortahork paintings, 1966 - 1969.

T.P. FLANAGAN,

The Gortahork Paintings were the result of the great visual stimulation I experienced when I first visited that area during the frosty days of October and November in the mid sixties, I stayed at McFadden's Hotel and spent each day driving around the Bloody Foreland and by the Fallcarragh beaches. It had been a hot summer, the landscape was now in Autumn, the colour of marmalade, and the peat bogs dramatically black. The poet Seamus Heaney drove me some days and patiently sat while I made sketches in pastel. Tory Island was anchored in the grey sea and America was the next landfall. Heaney eventually got poems out of the experience as well; I don't know whether being with me helped that along or not.







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SPECIAL THANKS TO:

T.P. Flanagan for his help and co-operation.

Dr. Brian Kennedy, Curator, Twentieth Century Art, Ulster Museum, Belfast.

Elaine, R. Hogg, Arts Officer, Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Belfast.

Helena Gorey, Visual Arts Assistant, Arts Council, Merrion Square, Dublin.

Patricia McLean, Photographic Officer, Ulster Museum, Belfast.



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