

A HALLOWED PLACE

Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art

by Turlough McConnell



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"There is something of common race instinct in the work of all original Irish writers today, and it can hardly be absent in the sister art."

Sir Hugh Lane



True to the spirit of its founder, the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art remains dedicated to bringing works of art to public attention. Thanks to Barbara Dawson, the gallery director, and her colleague, Christina Kennedy, the Hugh Lane Gallery will open its doors on June 19th to "America's Eye: Irish Paintings from the Collection of Brian P. Burns" considered one of the most extensive and distinguished collections of Irish paintings in the United States. This American collection of Irish art will hang with other paintings by the same artists, many assembled by Hugh Lane. While still in his twenties, Lane—who had been trained as a painting restorer—became a successful art dealer in London and one of the first collectors of Impressionist art. Though raised in England, Lane spent a considerable time on the Galway estate of his aunt, the Irish dramatist, Lady Augusta Gregory. There he became increasingly influenced by the cultural renaissance taking place in Ireland. In 1901, on a visit to Dublin, Lane viewed an exhibition of the work of young artists. He was so impressed by the quality of their work that he began a campaign to establish a gallery of modern art in Dublin, where these paintings could be seen by the public. In 1904 he organized an exhibition of paintings at the Guildhall, London, which helped to gain recognition for a distinctive school of Irish painting. Lane wrote at that time: "There is something of common race instinct in the work of all original Irish writers today, and it can hardly be absent in the sister art."

Lane purchased the majority of Irish works in that original exhibit as well as a number of

THE MUNICIPAL GALLERY REVISITED

William Butler Yeats



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1

Around me the images of thirty years:
An ambush; pilgrims at the water-side;
Casement upon trail, half hidden by the bars,
Guarded; Griffith staring in hysterical pride;
Kevin O'Higgins' countenance that wears
A gentle-questioning look that cannot hide
A soul incapable of remorse or rest;
A revolutionary soldier kneeling to be blessed;

II

An Abbot or Archbishop with an upraised hand
Blessing the Tricolour: 'This is not' I say,
'The dead Ireland of my youth, but an Ireland
The poets have imagined, terrible and gay.'
Before a woman's portrait suddenly I stand,
Beautiful and gentle in her Venetian way.
I met her all but fifty years ago
For twenty minutes in some studio.

III

Heat emitted with emotion I sink down,
My heart recovering with covered eyes;
Wherever I had looked I had looked upon
My permanent or impermanent images:
Augusta Gregory's son; her sister's son,
Hugh Lane, 'only begotten' of all these;
Hazel Lavery living and dying, that tale
As though some ballad singer had sung it all;

IV

Mencius's portrait of Augusta Gregory,
'Greatest since Rembrandt,' according to John Syngé:
A great ebullient portrait certainly;
But where is the brush that could show everything
Of all that pride and that humility?
And I am in despair that time may bring
Approved patterns of women or of men
But not that selfsame excellence again.

V

My medical knees lack health until they bend,
But in that woman, in that household where
Honour had lived so long, all lacking found.
Childless I thought, 'My children may find here
Deep-rooted things,' but never foresaw its end,
And now that end has come I have not wept;
No fox can foul the lair the badger swept —

VI

(An image out of Spenser and the common tongue),
John Syngé, I and Augusta Gregory, thought
All that we did, all that we said or sang
Must come from contact with the soil, from that
Contact everything Antinous-like grew strong.
We three alone in modern times had brought
Everything down to that sole test again,
Dream of the noble and the beggar-man.

VII

And here's John Syngé himself, that rooted man,
Forgetting human words, 'a grave deep face.
You that would judge me, do not judge alone
This book or that, come to this hallowed place
Where my friends' portraits hang and look thereon;
Ireland's history in their lineaments trace,
Think where man's glory most begins and ends,
And say my glory was I had such friends.

1. Waterloo Bridge 1900
Claude Monet (1840-1926)
2. You in the Garden 1902
Walter Osborne (1878-1903)
3. Portrait of Hugh Lane by
John Syngé Sargent (1856-1925)
4. William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) by
John Butler Yeats (1839-1922)

Cover photograph: John Kellie



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1. Nobel Prize-winning poet Seamus Heaney (center) with his wife, Marie, and artist T. P. Flanagan at the opening of the T. P. Flanagan Retrospective.

2. President of Ireland Mary Robinson (center) with Gallery Director Barbara Dawson at the opening of The Ernest Hayes Exhibition.

Impressionist paintings by artists such as Manet, Degas and Renoir. He obtained donations from many Irish artists, and through his enthusiasm, many people were persuaded to donate works, including the then Prince of Wales, who donated paintings by Constable and Corot.

The Gallery opened in January 1908 in temporary quarters in Dublin's Harcourt Street. In 1933, it moved to its present home, Charlemont House, a building that, even after almost two and a half centuries, is still one of the finest in Dublin.

Unfortunately Sir Hugh, who was knighted for his services to the communities of Ireland and Britain, did not live to see his Gallery per-

manently housed. He died tragically in 1915, shortly after his appointment as Director of the National Gallery of Ireland. He had traveled to New York for Lloyds, the insurance firm, to assess damage caused to paintings aboard a burning ship. This was a risky venture during World War I; on his returning trip, the *Lusitania*, on which he was sailing, was torpedoed off the west coast of Cork. More than twelve hundred people died and Lane was among those lost. Dublin's Municipal Gallery of Modern Art was renamed after it's benefactor in 1975 in honor of the centenary of his birth. Today the Gallery houses the most representative collection of 20th century Irish art including contemporary art practice. The Gallery also possesses an extensive and important collection of international artworks, thereby ensuring the continuum begun by Hugh Lane in 1908.

Just as Hugh Lane attempted to bring together the most significant Irish artists of the period, the passion to collect Irish paintings seems to be increasing every day. Says Nancy Netzer, director of Boston College Museum of Art, "serious collections of Irish art and antiquities are in contrast with those of other societies, relatively recent phenomena." If Lane was the first to collect Ireland's artists, others soon followed. Today, the major art auction houses and dealers report steadily growing sales of Irish paintings. Two major shows planned for Sotheby's and Christie's this year are expected to post record prices.

Brian P. Barnes, a third generation Irish-American, recently made his collection available to American audiences at the Boston College Museum of Art. According to Barbara Dawson, "This is an important exhibition as the century it spans is one of the most interesting periods of Irish art in terms of stylistic diversity, technique and range of subject matter. As well as that, as some of the paintings reveal, this artistic revolution coincided with a period of profound social and political upheaval in Ireland culminating in the War of Independence in 1921 and the emergence of the nation state. America's Eye complements our holdings of Irish art from this period and it also gives our audiences an excellent opportunity to assess the revolutionary developments which occurred during that time." In this "Hallowed Place," as Yeats called the Hugh Lane Gallery, this American collection of Irish paintings will hang with other paintings by the same artists. What a remarkable reunion of art and a fitting tribute to Ireland's foremost collector, Sir Hugh Lane!



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3

1. *F.J. Davis (interior, c. 1845)*
The State Ballroom, St. Patrick's
Hall, Dublin Castle, c. 1845
2. *Jack Butler Yeats (1871-1952)*
Patriotic Aids, c. 1923
3. *Brian P. Burns and his wife, Ellen,*
with their painting, Portrait of Miss
Harroweath by Sir William Orpen
(1878-1931)
4. *Walter Osborne (1859-1903)*
Study from Nature
5. *Sarah Keating (1889-1977)*
King O'Toole
6. *Roderic O'Connor (1860-1940)*
Romeo and Juliet, 1898



PHOTOGRAPH BY COLLEEN







One of many local children who participate in Hugh Lane Gallery activities, this young boy enjoys a recent workshop during the successful exhibit: *Impressionism in Britain and Ireland*. Throughout the year, in addition to the collection and exhibition programs, the Gallery hosts many temporary shows and workshops. Special programs for young people attract many neighborhood children. With students and adults, the Gallery's regular weekend lecture series and Sunday concerts are very popular. This summer, the Gallery will host two exhibitions with an American link: *America's Eye: Irish Works from the Brian P. Burns Collection* opening in June, and, also, *The Merry-Go-Round*, works by American artists Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz. **A**



Liffy Mural Workshop — conducted at the Hugh Lane Gallery by artist Richard Gorman with children from St. Mary's National School for Boys, Dorset Street, the Lourdes Community and the Neighbourhood Youth Project.

HUGH LANE MUNICIPAL GALLERY OF MODERN ART

America's Eye: Irish Paintings from the Collection of Brian P. Burns



Misty Morning • Jack Butler Yeats, 1871-1957
Oil on Panel • The Collection of Brian P. Burns

This exhibition features works of art produced in the
19th and the first half of the 20th centuries.

The exhibition was organized by
The Boston College Museum of Art.

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