

Sculptured Lives

Helen Hooker, artist (1905-1993)

Ernie O'Malley, soldier / writer (1897-1957)





photo caption
above

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support of Glucksman Ireland House at NYU.*

*Exhibition curated by Cormac O'Malley and
produced by Turlough McConnell*

Preface

Dr. Eileen Reilly

Glucksman Ireland NYU

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Introduction

Helen Hooker was born in 1905 to a very prominent Greenwich, Connecticut family. At an early age she started sculpting and playing tennis with her three sisters. In 1923, when she attained the rank of National Junior Tennis Champion, she decided to pursue a career in art. From 1924 to 1931 she travelled extensively throughout Europe and the USA and established herself as a sculptor in New York City.



Ernie O'Malley was born in 1897 in Castlebar, Co Mayo. While at medical school his nationalist sympathies were aroused during Easter Week, 1916. In 1918-24 Ernie joined the IRA full time, became Commandant-General, went anti-Treaty, was captured and imprisoned. After recovering his health in Europe he showed interest in the arts and travelled to America. In 1928 Eamon de Valera, yet to become president of Ireland, asked him to fundraise in the USA for the *Irish Press* newspaper. Ernie lived in California, New Mexico, Mexico and New York.



The couple met in 1933 in Greenwich and were married two years later in London. When Ernie secured an Irish military pension the couple moved to Ireland. In 1937 Ernie published his memoirs, *On Another Man's Wound* which became an immediate success. The couple left Dublin and moved to the west of Ireland to concentrate on photographing early Christian Ireland. During the war years of 1939-45, they farmed in Co. Mayo before returning to Dublin to educate their three children and to participate in theatre. In 1950 the marriage ended and Helen returned to the USA with her two older children. Helen married Richard Roelofs in 1956, and continued her sculpture and photography. Ernie continued to write. He died in 1957.

In 1971 after the death of her second husband, Helen's work as a poet, sculptor and photographer began to flourish. She moved regularly between Greenwich, Dublin and Mayo. In her last twenty years she produced more than half of her life's work, which was featured in several exhibitions. Helen died in her home town of Greenwich in 1993.

Irish Western Landscape

1936-49, 1970s



When Helen Hooker and Ernie O'Malley traveled around Ireland in the late 1930's, she was interested in recording the rural life in the West of Ireland. In addition to the early monuments, she recorded the details of daily rural life such as a village fair in Newport or hay stacks in Achill or stacks of turf, or when they visited Clare Island off the Mayo coast and saw the currachs lying on the beach or in a race, or the barefooted children just standing there or an old fisherman looking.

In the 1970's Helen Hooker again revisited rural Ireland in Co. Mayo near her home and captured the landscape, mountain-scapes, bog-scapes and seascapes. She greatly enjoyed the art of finding just the right combination of light, contrast in form and subject matter. Her artistic eye was just as sensitive as the old days in catching the mood of the Atlantic waters off Achill, or studying the root of an old tree caught in the time capsule of bog of many hundreds of years ago.

Upon her death a collection of her photographs were given to the National Library of Ireland.

Two Children, Clare Island, Co. Mayo (1938)

Old Man, Clare Island, Co. Mayo (1938)

Fair Day, Newport, Co. Mayo (1938)

Turfstacks, Achill Island, Co. Mayo (1938)

Achill Coastline, Co. Mayo (1973)

Seaweed Grass, Co. Mayo (1973)

Clew Bay Islands, Co. Mayo (1973)

Tree in Bog, Newport, Co. Mayo (1973)

Sculptures

1925-1985

Helen Hooker created more than 400 sculptures. Most reflect her connections with Ireland and Irish life, particularly her friendships within the literary circle of Ernie O'Malley, such as Austin Clarke, Denis Johnston, Frank O'Connor and Liam O'Flaherty. Her head of de Valera was sculpted from memory in 1972 after a 30-minute visit with the then President of Ireland and was completed in a day. Her sculptures of Eavan Boland and Mary Lavin were done in the 1970s.

Some of her Irish heads were exhibited in the first three years of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art (1943-45). Many of these sculptures traveled with her and were included in the various exhibitions she held in Colorado Springs (1953), Greenwich (1957, 1993), Stamford (1979), Birmingham (1981) and the University of Limerick (1992-3).



Samuel Beckett (1906-1992) *Bonded bronze, 1985, h. 20"*

Dramatist, novelist and poet, Beckett was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. Born in Dublin, he studied modern languages at Trinity College, Dublin and lectured there briefly. Beckett lived in Paris from 1928 to 1930 and settled there permanently in 1932. From 1945 on he wrote mainly in French. His first novel, *Murphy*, was published in 1938. Beckett was an experimental writer who abandoned traditional forms; he was one of the chief exponents of the Theater of the Absurd. His first play, *Waiting for Godot*, was produced in Paris in 1953. Other works include *End Game* (1957), *Krapp's Last Tape* (1960), and *Happy Days* (1961). Ernie O'Malley knew Beckett in Dublin and Paris and had asked him to do reviews for *The Bell* when he was Books Editor in 1947-8.

Eavan Boland (b. 1944) *Bonded bronze, 1972, h. 20"*

Born in Dublin, Eavan Boland is the daughter of Frederick Boland, a diplomat, and Judy Kelly, a painter. She studied English at Trinity College, Dublin, and after graduation became a junior lecturer. She has published poetry since the age of 17. Much of her work has been based in suburbia where, in her own words, "everything is surreally domestic, oppressive, noticeable." Her publications include *New Territory*, *The War Horse*, *Journey Nigh Feed* and *WB Yeats and his World*, with Mícheál MacLiammóir. Helen Hooker knew the Boland's in New York City and Dublin.

Austin Clarke (1896-1974) *Plastercast, 1972, h. 25"*

One of Ireland's most distinguished poets, Clarke studied at University College Dublin, and later lectured there. In addition to publishing many volumes of poetry, he wrote novels, verse plays, critical essays and reviews. He also broadcast weekly programs of poetry on RTE, Ireland's national radio and television network. He was awarded the Gregory Medal in 1968. In 1941 he formed the Dublin Verse-Speaking Society. He was a founding member and later President of the Irish Academy of Letters and President of the Irish PEN. He printed much of his poetry on his own hand-set press. Ernie O'Malley knew Clarke during the War of Independence and stayed loosely in touch with him. Helen Hooker knew him in Dublin.

Denis Johnston (1901-1984) *Plastercast, 1944, h. 20"*

Born in Dublin, Johnston practiced law for ten years. An original and controversial playwright, his first play, *The Old Lady Says No*, was produced at the Gate Theatre between 1931 and 1936. In the 1930's he joined the BBC and pursued a career as a scriptwriter, drama producer, war correspondent (for which he received the OBE) and finally, Director of Programs. *Nine Rivers to Jordan* recounts his wartime experiences. In 1952 he moved to America where he lectured at Holyoke College, Smith College and New York University. He was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1955. Helen Hooker knew Johnston in Irish theatre circles in which she was involved in Dublin and London in the 1940s-1950s.

Mary Lavin (1912-1996) *Plastercast, 1971, h. 25"*

Born in Massachusetts, Lavin moved to Ireland as a child and studied at University College Dublin. Her first collection of short stories, *Tales from Bective Hill*, was published in 1942 and won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. A prolific writer, her collections include *The Long Ago*, *A Single Lady*, *The Shrine and A Memory*. Lavin received many literary awards, including the Gregory Medal, three Guggenheim Awards and the Eire Society Award in 1975. In 1992 she was elected 'Saoi' by Aosdána, an affiliation of artists in whose work had made an outstanding contribution to the arts in Ireland. She was a regular contributor to *The New Yorker*, and was President of the Irish Academy of Letters from 1972 to 1974. Mary Lavin was a next-door neighbor of Ernie O'Malley's in Dublin in the 1950s and Helen Hooker got to know her well in the 1960's and 1970's.

Sculptures

continued

Frank O'Connor (1903-1966) Plastercast, 1943, h. 20"

O'Connor, pseudonym for Michael O'Donovan, was born in Cork and is regarded as one of the great masters of short story writing. *Guests of the Nation*, his first collection of short stories, was published in 1931, and was followed the next year by a novel, *The Saint and Mary Kate*. He was also a playwright and translator of early Irish verse. He spent thirteen years as a librarian and was director of the Abbey Theatre between 1935 and 1939, after which he embarked on a career as a visiting lecturer at several American universities, including Harvard and Chicago, but returned to Ireland in the 1960s. Frank O'Connor was a friend of Ernie O'Malley from the civil war period and when he worked as a librarian in Dublin in the 1930s.

Liam O'Flaherty (1896-1984) Plastercast, 1937, h. 21"

Born on Inismór in the Aran Islands, O'Flaherty was brought up in an Irish-speaking community. He studied at University College Dublin, fought in World War I, and returned to Ireland in 1917, when he joined the Communist Party. He travelled widely, especially in South America, and settled in London in 1922. In 1925 he was awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for *The Informer*, which was later made into a successful film by John Ford. His best work took the form of over one hundred and fifty short stories, mostly concerned with the West of Ireland. He was a founder member of the Irish Academy of Letters to which Ernie O'Malley was elected in 1937 after the publication of his first memoir, *On Another Man's Wound*. Helen Hooker got to know Liam O'Flaherty socially in Dublin.

Ernie O'Malley (1897-1957) Plastercast, 1934, h. 20"

Born in Castlebar, County Mayo, he interrupted his medical studies to join the Irish Volunteers full time in 1918. He was appointed Commandant General in 1920 and later fought as Assistant Chief of Staff on the Republican side in the Civil War. In July 1924, after almost 20 months in prison and forty-one days of hunger strike, he was released. He travelled in Europe and resumed medical studies in 1926, interrupting them again in 1928 when asked by Eamon de Valera to raise funds for *The Irish Press* in the United States. He subsequently travelled in America and Mexico for six years, writing, lecturing and working on a variety of projects. *On Another Man's Wound* was published in 1936, and other works published posthumously were: *The*

Singing Flame (1978), *Raids and Rallies* (1979), *Prisoners: The Civil War Letters of Ernie O'Malley* (1991), and more recently *No Surrender Here: The Civil War Papers of Ernie O'Malley* (2007) and *Rising Out: Sean Connolly of Longford, 1890-1921* (2007). He was elected to the Irish Academy of Letters in 1937 and was Book Review Editor of *The Bell*, 1947-48 under Peadar O'Donnell.

Eamon de Valera (1882-1975) *Plastercast, 1972, h. 24"*

Born in New York of an Irish mother and Spanish father, de Valera was raised in Knockmore, County Limerick. He spent several years teaching and lecturing in mathematics. He was devoted to the Irish language and in 1908 joined the Gaelic League, beginning a life-long commitment to the Irish Cultural Revival. He took part in the Easter Rising and served many prison sentences. He was elected President of Sinn Féin in 1917, formed the Fianna Fáil party in 1926, and became Ireland's Taoiseach in 1932. He was president of Ireland between 1959 and 1973. The artist sculpted de Valera from memory after having tea with him at Áras an Uachtaráin with her son Cormac O'Malley in 1972.

Fawn *Bronze, 1925, h. 26"*

Done as the artist's first and only commissioned work for the owner of a garden in Greenwich, Connecticut.

County Mayo Man *Bronze, 1985, h. 26"*

Done to create an image of a country farmer character who would have been similar to one that Jack B Yeats might have encountered walking along the roads in County Mayo.

Homeless in Grand Central Station *Bonded bronze, 1974, 11.5"*

Inspired by a homeless person looking forlorn in Grand Central Station, New York.

Photographic Portraits

1934-1985

Helen Hooker was a photographer in her teenage years and developed into a fine photographer who could not only catch the specific aspect but the general setting or overview.

Helen arrived in Ireland in 1935. As she started to sculpt her friends there, she thought it wise also to record through a photograph the face of the character she was trying to catch. The six photographs of individuals in this exhibition reflect her effective use of the photograph to help recall the image that she wished to create. Several of these photographic subjects also have their sculptured images in this exhibition.

Patrick Carey (1916-1994)

Irish documentary film director and cinematographer. Born in London, educated in Ireland at Trinity College and National College of Art and Design, he worked in theatre and radio until 1943 and later worked in England and Canada. He made *Sky* in 1952 for the National Film Board of Canada. He also made four award winning films: *The Yeats Country* (1965), *Errigal* (1968), *Mists of Time* (1968 – on County Clare) and *Oisín Flamingo-Variations on a Theme* (1970) and *The Algonquin Trilogy* (1975-83). He visited the artist in her home in Mayo in 1973 where she photographed him and sculpted his head. He left Ireland in 1974 and later settled in Canada.

Austin Clarke (1896-1974)

One of Ireland's most distinguished poets, he studied at University College, Dublin, and later lectured there. In addition to publishing many volumes of poetry, he wrote novels, verse plays, critical essays and reviews. He also broadcast weekly programs of poetry on RTE, Ireland's national radio and television network. He was awarded the Gregory Medal in 1968. In 1941 he formed the Dublin Verse-Speaking Society. He was a founder member and later President of the Irish Academy of Letters and President of the Irish PEN. He printed much of his poetry on his own hand-set press. Ernie O'Malley knew Clarke during the War of Independence and stayed loosely in touch with him. Helen Hooker knew him in Dublin.



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Peadar O'Donnell (1893-1986)

Born in Meenmore, Co. Donegal, he began his career as a school teacher on the islands of Aranmore and Inishere, Co. Galway. In 1916 he became an organizer for the Irish Transport and General Workers Union. He joined the IRA in 1920 but broke away in 1934 to form the Republican Congress which aimed at establishing a Workers' Republic. He began writing while in jail for opposition to the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, publishing his first novel, *Storm*, in 1925. His best known work is *Islanders* in which he explored the plight of farmer-fishermen in the West of Ireland. Between 1946 and 1954, he was editor of *The Bell*. Ernie O'Malley had known Peadar O'Donnell in jail during the Irish civil war and along with Frank Gallagher had even then dreamed of publishing a literary magazine such as *The Bell*.

Liam O'Flaherty (1896-1984)

Born on Inismór in the Aran Islands, he was brought up in an Irish-speaking community. He studied at University College, Dublin, fought in World War I, and returned to Ireland in 1917 where he joined the Communist Party. He travelled widely, especially in South America, and settled in London in 1922. In 1925 he was awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for *The Informer*, which was later made into a successful film by John Ford. His best work took the form of over one hundred and fifty short stories, mostly concerned with the West of Ireland. He was a founder mem-

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Two Ladies, *Duke Street, Dublin* (c. 1970)

Mother and Child, *Westport train* (c. 1970)

Early Christian Monuments

1936-8 & 1970s

In the early years after Helen and Ernie O'Malley were first married, they would go around Ireland visiting early Irish Christian monuments and churches whose cloisters and sculptures sometimes incorporated the more recent pagan tradition not to mention the round towers, high crosses, fairy forts, duns and the many forms of archaeological finds that proliferate on the Irish landscape. They were both inspired by the awesome majesty and solemnity of these monuments and decided to spend several years photographing them.

During the 1970's Helen set out once again to visit some of the sites she had visited almost 40 years before with Ernie.



Corofin Abbey, *Co. Clare (1937)*

Galway Abbey, *Co. Galway (1937)*

Kilteel Abbey, *Co. Kildare (1937)*

Ennis Abbey, *Co. Clare (1937)*

Jerpoint Abbey, *Co. Kilkenny (1973)*

Kilteel Abbey, *Co. Kildare (1973)*

Moyne Abbey, *Kilalla, Co. Mayo (1973)*

Kilteel Abbey, *Co. Kildare (1973)*

Paintings

1925-1985

Helen Hooker sketched in pencil and painted from her early years. She painted in oils but was more successful in watercolor. She trained at The Art Student's League in NYC, and worked on her own; she also studied with Pavel Filonov in St. Petersburg, Russia from 1928-29. She painted many monasteries and monks and on her travels throughout Europe, and upon return from Russia, had an art exhibition in Darien and illustrated *Good Housekeeping* articles on her travels. As she moved from the USA to Europe, she continued to paint and to exhibit her work. When she returned to the USA, she continued to paint while living out West.

Church, Bavaria, Germany Watercolor (1928)

Old man, Russia Pencil (1928)

Church interior, Russia Watercolor (1928)

Yosemite, California Watercolor (1931)

Church, Greece Watercolor (1930)

Races at Roonah, Co. Mayo Watercolor (1939)

Mountains, Connemara, Co. Galway Watercolor (1939)

Taos Pueblo, New Mexico Oil (1952)



Index

Helen Hooker

- H-1. Helen (youngest sister), Barbara, Adelaide and Blanche F. Hooker (1908).
- H-2. Helen's sculpture of a rabbit at age 6 (1911).
- H-3. Photograph of Helen sculpting (1917).
- H-4. Helen playing tennis (1922).
- H-5. Helen's design for a dress at age 18 (1923).
- H-6. Helen Russian painting exhibition, Darien (1929).
- H-7. Helen dancing in Greece (1931).
- H-8. Helen and Ernie in New York (1934)
- H-9. Announcement card printed by Helen Hooker's family for the marriage of Helen to Ernie in London on 25 September 1935.
- H-10. Helen with her camera in Ireland (1937).
- H-11. Helen's Christmas card of Newport, Co Mayo (1939).
- H-12. Helen's Players Theatre Program, Dublin (1945).
- H-13. Photograph of Helen with Ernie and children (1947).
- H-14. Newspaper headlines upon Helen's Return to USA (1950).
- H-15. Helen in 1973.

Index

Ernie O'Malley

1. Ernie's books: *On Another Man's Wound*, published by Rich & Gown, London, 1936, then by Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1937 as *Army Without Banners*, and then in Germany, 1937 as *Rebellen in Irland*, Alfred Metzner, Berlin; *The Singing Flame*, Anvil Books, Dublin, 1978; *Raids and Rallies*, Anvil Books, 1982. And *Ernie O'Malley: IRA Intellectual* by Richard English, Oxford University Press, 1996.
2. Ernie's Irish Military Service Pension Act, 1934, Service Certificate (1935, photocopy).
3. Ernie's Independence War medals, awarded in 1936 and 1941 for active service during the Easter Rising, the War of Independence and the Civil War (photocopy).
4. *War News* No 86 of Poblacht na h-Eireann, dated Tuesday, 7 November 1922, the Seventh Year of the Republic, with a story about the wounding and capture of Commandant General Earnan O'Maille by the Irish Free State National Army, referred to in the article as 'the British King's Ministers in Ireland'.
5. Sinn Féin, UCD Chapter, Membership card, 1925-6, signed by Ernie.
6. Article about the 'Irish Patriot' Ernie O'Malley in the Philadelphia Public Ledger, of 26 November 1928, when he went to Philadelphia to raise funds for *The Irish Press* as an independent newspaper in Ireland (photocopy).
7. Ernie's business card, Irish Press Ltd, New York City (1928, photocopy).
8. Letter from Eamon de Valera, dated 30 November 1928, to Ernie regarding *Irish Press*. The Irish Press Ltd. had a NYC office at Room 3907 in the Transportation Building at 255 Broadway.
9. Photograph of Hart Crane in Mexico in 1931, sent by him to Ernie.
10. Photograph of Ernie by Edward Weston in May 1929 in Carmel, California (photocopy).

11. Photograph of Ernie, in late 1929 at Taos Pueblo, New Mexico, by Helen Merriam Golden, the widow of Irish actor and Republican nationalist, Peter Golden of Cork.
12. Photograph of Ernie by Paul Strand in May 1932 in Taos, New Mexico (photocopy).
13. Letter from Jack B Yeats, dated 8 April 1949, to Ernie, acknowledging receipt by Yeats of O'Malley's check to pay for his painting "Death for Only One" and referring to the recent visit to his home by Helen and Ernie.
14. Photograph of Jack B Yeats and Earnan O'Malley visiting an art exhibition in Dublin, published by the Capuchin Annual journal in 1948.
15. Photograph of Ernie, Maureen O'Hara and John Ford at Ashford Castle, in June-July 1951, while working on the 'fight scene' in *The Quiet Man*, for which Ernie was a technical advisor.
16. Photograph of John Ford and Ernie in 1956 while John Ford was directing a trilogy of short films entitled "The Rising of the Moon", for which Ernie was a technical advisor.
17. Letter from Sam Beckett to Ernie (photocopy, 1955).
18. Sean Lemass, Eamon de Valera, and Frank Aiken, attending Ernie's funeral, 27 March 1957.
19. New York Times Obituary for 'Ernie O'Malley, Irish Rebel, Dies at 59; 27 March 1957.

