



7. Maria Dorothy Webb (1850-1900)

Girl in an Orchard (Under the Apple Blossom)

Oil on panel, 34.25 x 25.5cm

Signed and dated

Exhibited: Irish Painters in Brittany Exhibition. The Crawford Gallery Cork, May – July 2001.

Maria Webb was probably a student at the RDS Schools. She started exhibiting at the RHA in 1873, and won several prizes at the Amateur Artists' Society in 1877. She went to Paris in 1880, becoming a pupil of Robert-Fleury at the Academie Julian. She made regular summer visits to Brittany (c.1881-1885) initially to Pont-Aven, then becoming one of the early foreign members of the artist colony at Concarneau. There she stayed at the Hotel des Voyageurs. She became a close friend of Finnish artist Maria Wilk. She is thought to have met her future husband at Concarneau and they were to later become central figures in the artists' colony at St. Ives, Cornwall. Their house provided studios for friends and visiting artists. Maria exhibited a large number of her Breton paintings, of fishermen and peasant women, of street, market and woodland scenes, at venues in Dublin, London and Liverpool (1881-87) and significantly at the Paris Salon (1883-84).

Today her works are extremely rare. The present small picture is a charming plein air scene of a Breton girl in an orchard, a popular subject in the period. The presence of blossom on the trees and the sprinkling of bluebells and other flowers in the grass indicate that it is springtime.

The painting has a distinctive intensity of colouring in the greens of the orchard, the heightened painting of the girl's face, the red of her scarf and the blue of her apron. Indeed Webb's use of broken brushstrokes and her interest in dappled sunlight and shadow, suggest an interest in Impressionism at this time, particularly in Pissarro's evocative pictures of peasant girls, dating from the early 1880's.

Julian Campbell