

The same can be said for Grace Henry (born in Scotland in 1868). Although she has in the past been overshadowed by her more famous husband Paul, in fact her paintings provide a refreshing insight into life on Achill Island, where they stayed for years. She had lived an itinerant lifestyle, travelling through Holland, Belgium and France before settling in London with Paul, and moving to Achill in 1910. Her work developed while on the island, starting with Whistler-inspired nocturnal scenes with muted colour and simple compositions, becoming stronger as she grew in artistic confidence into the 1920s. Her painting style became more expressive and free, and her brushstrokes grew fluid and loose, as in *The Balcony* which was probably painted while she travelled in France and Italy in the 1930s. It also includes an image she favoured of a seagull, depicting freedom¹³. Despite being instrumental in setting up The Society of Dublin Painters in 1920 which provided exhibition space for many of the modernist painters discussed here, her reputation suffered from her separation from her husband, who omitted any reference to her in his two autobiographies.

The Dublin Painters' Society was successful however in providing a venue for young artists including Eva and Letitia Hamilton, Mainie Jellett, Nano Reid and Mary Swanzy to regularly show their work in solo and group exhibitions, and became synonymous with the best of Irish avant-garde painting in Ireland until the early 1940s, when its *raison d'être* was taken over by the Irish Exhibition of Living Art¹⁴. Again, women played a key role in this progressive organisation. Harriet Kirkwood (1880-1953) joined the Society in 1922 and held her first one-woman exhibition there that year. She soon became a prominent member, being elected Hon. Secretary in 1930 and President in 1936, a position she held until 1948 when she was succeeded by Eva Hamilton. She was opposed to the narrow outlook of nationalism in so much Irish art of the time, and instead felt artists should endeavour to reflect the spirit of the times in their work¹⁵.

Certainly the progress of modernism in Ireland can be found in the establishment of this Society and traced back to a handful of strong-willed female artists. Despite a popular belief that no awareness of modernism had existed in Ireland before Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone introduced Cubism to a hostile public, in fact artists such as Braque, Gris and de Chirico had been shown in Ireland in the 1920s¹⁶. Mary Swanzy and May Guinness are considered to be the first home-grown artists to display a modernist outlook. Guinness adopted a post-Impressionist style and later had a Cubist phase, influenced by artist and teacher André Lhote. She experimented with different methods and influences but vivid colour and later stylisation came to characterise her work. Mary Swanzy was an explorer whose travels took her to the Balkans, Czechoslovakia and Samoa. Trained in several academies in Paris, she was a European painter, not confined to nationalist boundaries. She worked mostly in oils and her abstract style preceded that of Hone and Jellett. In *Le Village* the careful arrangement of curved and angular forms, and skilful use of colour and light, create a sense of movement and vitality. The paint is thickly applied and the shapes are rhythmically arranged via a selection of curved lines into a balanced and attractive composition.

Cont. p38

¹³ Cruikshank, J.G., Grace Henry. p.174-178. In: Irish Arts Review Yearbook (1993). Dublin.

¹⁴ Kennedy, S.B., The Society of Dublin Painters 1920-32. p.20. In: Irish Art & Modernism, Queens University Belfast (1991).

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.30

¹⁶ Barrett, C. Mainie Jellett and Irish Modernism. p.167-173 In: Irish Arts Review Yearbook (1993) Vol.9