

Some FNCCI Acquisitions From 1938

During the 1930s the Friends of the National Collections of Ireland were active in their efforts to acquire works of art by important contemporary artists for the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art. The Council felt it was important to support the Municipal Gallery as it had no public endowment for the purchase of pictures. At the Council meeting of March 25, 1938, Mr C.P. Curran (1880-1975) the respected classicist and scholar, put forward a number of points regarding the acquisitions policy. He suggested that a list of modern painters and sculptors not adequately represented should be drawn up annually and



Pablo Picasso - Les Orchidées
Oil on Cardboard - 25.4 cm x 21.6 cm

purchases should be limited to that list. Artists should include: Picasso, Matisse, Bonnard, Rouault, Vuillard, Vlaminck, Dufy, Utrillo, Braque, Signac and André Dunoyer de Segonzac. He went on to suggest that the Council should nominate a member of the

Council to pursue the purchase of such works. Curran and George Furlong (1898-1987), recently appointed Director of the National Gallery of Ireland, were nominated.

Later that year two oils, a small flower piece by Picasso 'Les Orchidées' and a street scene by Utrillo 'La rue Marcadet', were purchased from the Storrans Gallery in London. The unsigned flower piece, painted on card, has a handwritten note on the verso: 'Picasso Les Orchidées Juin 1934'. It also states that it came from the Paul Guillaume Collection, Guillaume (1891-1934) was a prominent dealer of contemporary and African art in Paris. His wife dispersed some of his collection on his death. There was much forging of Picasso paintings in the 1930s and 40s. Eardley Knollys (1902-91), who ran the Storrans Gallery for many years, told the story of a wealthy client who in the 1940s called saying she had just bought a Picasso for £10,000. The painting was unsigned and the woman asked Knollys if he could ask the artist to sign it. Picasso agreed to rectify the omission, but on examining the painting said that it was not his work. However, on hearing that the woman was a good client of Knollys, Picasso decided to sign the painting and the work went on to be authenticated as a genuine Picasso. (*The Guardian*, 24 May, 2005). It is unclear whether the painting in the Hugh Lane Gallery is by Picasso although it was purchased in good faith by the Council in 1938. The Council minutes of June 10 1938 state that: 'it was most desirable our Modern Gallery should possess a work by so representative an artist. The picture proposed was valuable as being of a transitional period.'

Curran and Furlong found that, in general, prices for works by the artists

they were interested in were too expensive given the funds available to the Council. As a result it was decided that a selection of good quality reproductions of paintings by contemporary 'Paris



Henri Matisse - Woman Seated
Print - 54.6 cm x 36.8 cm

School' artists should be secured in order to 'promote a wider knowledge of the work and standing of contemporary artists'. The French Minister to Éire was asked to advise. The Annual Report of 1939 notes that 16 facsimile colour reproductions of paintings by Cézanne, Picasso, Matisse, Bonnard, Rouault and Lhote (among others) were purchased and presented to the Municipal Gallery who undertook to make them available to members of the Friends, art students and others interested in contemporary art. These reproductions, in simple wooden frames supplied by the Victor Waddington Gallery, still form part of the collection but are kept in storage.

Anne Hodge,
Curator of Prints and Drawings,
The National Gallery of Ireland.

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10. 1995-1998: Alderman Carmencita Hederman
11. 1998-2001: Mr. Brian O'Connor
12. 2001-2004: Mrs. Hilary Carey
13. 2004-2007: Dr. John Maiben Gilmartin

Future Events

Thursday 26th October - **Table Quiz - United Arts Club.**
A quiz is a new departure for FNCCI, but do not be alarmed! This is not going to be a very serious quiz, more an excuse for a sociable evening. Do come and bring anyone you like to join in.

Saturday 25th November - **Christmas Dinner**
The dinner is to be held in the beautiful Kildare St. & University Club where the food is excellent. Do come, there is room for at least eighty of you, and it should be an elegant and sociable event.

Applications for both events enclosed.

Acknowledging the assistance of our Corporate Members

We acknowledge with gratitude the enormous support which we receive from our growing number of Corporate Members. including the following organisations:

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FNCCI

The Friends of the National Collections of Ireland

Editor: Aidan O'Flanagan

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In the academic procession, seen with Professor Emlyn Williams, Director, Burren College of Art & Design, Dr. John Maiben Gilmartin was invited as President of FNCCI to participate in the conferring of Honorary Degrees at University College Galway (NUIG).

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome the arrival of our website. This is an essential piece of equipment nowadays, particularly for a Society such as ours, it allows us to have a shop window wherein the world may learn about the society and view our complete range of activities.

To have this website up and running is no mean achievement and I would like to place on record our great gratitude to FNCCI member Dr. Andreas Boldt of N.U.I. Maynooth and his colleague Mr. Brian Doody for their untiring work over the last couple of years in this regard. Also I would like to thank the sub-committee of the FNCCI Council who supported this venture. When the material is on the website we will give you the address.

Our acquisitions in this period have been few but significant. However we have acquired through purchase in one case, and gift in the other two important pieces. These are, the calligraphic masterpiece by Rasheed Butt (a 20th century Pakistani calligraphic artist) entitled "al-Fatiha and al-Bagara" and the *Portrait of Joseph Edgerly Purser* by John Butler Yeats. One will go to the Chester Beatty Library and the other to The Royal Hibernian Academy.

On Friday 23rd June last as President of the FNCCI I was invited by the authorities of University College Galway to attend the conferring of Honorary Degrees. The authorities of the University it will be recalled invited the FNCCI Council to hold a Council meeting in the College Boardroom last year, the first ever outside Dublin.

We would like to thank Ian Whyte for his help in the distribution and printing of this edition.

WHYTE'S
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FNCCI MEMBERSHIP RATES

Individual membership	€ 40.00
Family membership	€ 60.00
Student membership	€ 20.00
Corporate membership	€600.00
Life membership	€500.00

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Events in Retrospect

Enniskerry Summer Garden Party

At the kind invitation of John and Mary Ronan a large group of Friends attended a Garden Party at Dargle Cottage, Enniskerry on Saturday May 27th. The Dargle Glen was a favourite visitor's site in the 18th and 19th centuries and our visit took us to the heart of its natural beauty. When Sir Basil and Lady Valerie Goulding moved to Dargle Cottage in 1946 they developed the wonderful gardens on the steep banks of the famous Wicklow river. After the Gouldings the gardens were left neglected for over a decade and in recent years have been magnificently restored and enhanced by the Ronans. The Friends were welcomed on arrival in the Summerhouse, an architectural gem in the form of a glazed box which cantilevers over the river. Originally designed in the 60's by Scott, Tallon, Walker it has been carefully and authentically restored.

Leaving the Summerhouse we were taken on a tour of the gardens by Head Gardiner, David Konig, who is not only restoring and developing the gardens but has also documented this botanical treasure in a scholarly way. The gardens contain some magnificent specimens including camelia, azalia, magnolia and maple and the planting is interspersed with sculpture including works by Ian Stuart and Patrick O'Reilly.

We crossed the river by the suspension footbridge to the main house which has been imaginatively remodelled by Jeremy Williams to take full advantage of the river and gardens incorporating french oak wooden floors, floor to ceiling glazed walls and traditional thatch.

We were treated to a sumptuous buffet and took the opportunity to view the Irish and Continental paintings.



L to R. Carmel Kelly, Mary Ronan, Professor John Turpin & Rita Hughes

Dr. John Turpin expressed gratitude on our behalf for this special treat. One was reminded of the Percy French lines referring to such a place, "The Garden of Eden has vanished they say, but I know the lie of it still".

John Kelly

Hamwood, Lucan House and Leixlip Castle.

Thirty-eight members visited the three houses, each of which has its individual charms. Hamwood House, built c. 1775, was the country residence of Charles Hamilton, agent to the Duke of Leinster. Hamwood has continued in family ownership and Mrs. Anne Hamilton, the present owner, acted as guide. Extant photographs confirm that furniture and paintings have remained in situ for over a hundred years. Among the paintings there are works by members of the Hamilton family including Caroline who, in the nineteenth century, also assembled records of the house. Eva and Letitia Hamilton achieved renown in the twentieth century. Jeremy Williams led the members through the Garden.

Lucan House, built by a member of the Vesey family in 1780, is nowadays the residence of the Italian Ambassador.

Dr. Savoia, accompanied by his wife, and at times assisted by John Gilmartin, proudly indicated the palladian splendour of the lofty rooms and Michael Stapleton's delicate plasterwork. The Wedgwood room with its trompe l'oeil panels and coved ceiling, pulled down the corner like a tent, was a particular attraction. After the inspection of the house, the members were treated to Italian wine and canapés in the Wedgwood room.

Leixlip Castle, home of the Hon Desmond Guinness, is a twelfth century edifice built on a rocky promontory overlooking the river Liffey. A round tower emphasises its medieval origin; King John is reputed to have slept in one of the bedrooms. Despite its antiquity, sturdy outer walls and indoor wood panelling make it a cosy residence. The Hon. Desmond and his daughter Marina pointed out interesting features of the building, the antique furnishings, tapestries and a wealth of family portraits. Before their departure a hospitable glass of wine was offered to the members.

Dr. Patricia McCabe

A Day in East Galway

10 June 2006

The outing to Galway conducted by Peter Harbison, included visits to Tulira Castle, Labane Catholic Church, Loughrea Cathedral and Ballinderry Park. Lunch was provided at Morans on the Weir.

Tulira Castle, former home of Edward Martyn (1889-1923) a well-documented Irish political and cultural activist, is a Victorian mansion annexed to a medieval tower. Ruud and Femmy Bolmeijer the present owners have restored the house and walled gardens. Where possible they purchased furniture, silver and other items originally belonging to the Martyn family. The tower with its winding staircase where Edward had his study and a private chapel is a particular attraction.



A day in East Galway

Under the sponsorship of the Martyn family the stained glass windows in the nearby late nineteenth century Labane Church are some of the most attractive in Ireland. When the windows were commissioned there were no facilities in Ireland to train Irish artists in the skills of stained glass production. Edward, who was a committed supporter of the Celtic Revival, invited Christopher Whall, a disciple of William Morris to show the Irish artists how to design windows for Labane Church. Starting with the medieval style three lights behind the altar, there is an interesting progress in the windows. Decorative birds and plants in *St Brigid* and *St Teresa of Avila* in the chancel suggest the influence of the English arts and crafts movement. A move towards Irish subject matter is apparent in the figures in windows in the nave which are identified by Gaelic script. The windows are mostly the work of English artists but Michael Healy, Catherine O'Brien and Sarah Purser are believed to have had some input.

In 1903, encouraged by Edward Martyn, Sarah Purser founded *An Túr Gloine*, which proved to be the genesis of the Irish stained glass tradition. The earliest flowering of recognisable Irish stained glass is in Loughrea Cathedral where the first window to be created was *St Brendan*

by Sarah Purser. Three windows in the apse are by A.E. Child but otherwise eminent Irish stained glass artists predominate, including Michael Healy, Evie Hone, Beatrice Elvery, Catherine O'Brien and Patrick Pye.



Croíne Magan, Deputy Outings Officer presents Ruud and Femmy Bolmeijer with a reproduction of the portrait of Edward Martyn by John Butler Yeats courtesy of Hugh Lane Gallery.

The final event of the day was the visit to Ballinderry Park, a small, early eighteenth century house. Formerly stripped of its interior by successions of vandalism, the house is in the process of tasteful restoration by Susie and George Gossip. During the inspection of the house the members were treated to wine and canapés which brought a convivial ending to a wonderful, varied day out.

ACQUISITIONS



John Butler Yeats (1839-1922)
Portrait of Joseph Ederly Purser
Pencil Drawing - 40.64 cm x 31.75 cm
Gift of Michael Purser through FNCI

My father's study was sacred. He usually locked the door when inside and we children were never allowed to make any noise near it. In extreme necessity we might knock gently, but if there was no answer we were to go away. He was, amongst other things, a poet, and did not care to have divine inspiration interrupted. Nevertheless he was fond of recounting how Coleridge composed in front of the fire with nappies, stretched out to dry, pinned to his trousers. Perhaps my father found composition harder than did Coleridge.

Accordingly when I received such gifts, even as an adult, I was usually too overawed by being at his study door to ask much about them. However I did gather that the Yeats drawings had come from my aunt, the artist, Miss Sarah Purser. She died in 1943, and my father was one of her executors and a residual legate. He gave me the drawings in the early 1970s.

The drawings were all portraits of members of the Purser family, in particular of Miss Purser's brothers of which she had seven. Some were already identified in writing on the back by my father, and some I wrote on myself according to what little he told me about them. None were identified by the artist nor by my aunt Sarah herself - if I remember rightly. They have all now been dispersed amongst the family or others (such as the FNCI) except for one that I still hold. It is of her brother Louis Claude Purser, a famous classicist and Vice Provost of TCD. It is clearly dated 1898. This is just when Miss Purser was starting to plan an exhibition to honour John B. Yeats and Nathaniel Hone. No doubt the artist visited her, and probably most if not all of these drawings were made at that period.

That brings us to the portrait of Joseph Ederly Purser. There were two such gentlemen - father and son. The father, Miss Purser's uncle, was born in 1820 and died in 1900. Does the portrait look to be someone in his late seventies? Surely it must be the son, born 1851 - except that he predeceased his father by nineteen years, dying in 1881. Let others judge this matter, assessing the apparent age of the sitter and the possibly changing style (and location) of the artist, and then estimate the date at which the drawing was made, if not 1898. As for the potentially interesting achievements of either the father or the son I believe that they were modest and conventional, even non-existent. The father was a land agent, or at least involved with property, in Westmeath. He held a BA degree from TCD and no doubt had some professional skill. The son who died aged thirty was Justice of the Peace. More I know not.

Miss Purser must have thought the drawings good enough to preserve. Knowing my aunt's reputation for a strange combination of generosity and parsimony it is not unlikely that she commissioned these family portraits, looking for a way in which she could help the impecunious John B. Yeats to earn some money other than by pure charity. That could also explain why the drawings were so carefully preserved. She would probably not have bothered so with her own sketches. But that is conjecture.

Michael Purser
2006

Note. If anyone would like more anecdotal reminiscences about Miss Sarah Purser, or indeed my aunt Mainie Jellett, my book *'Jellett, O'Brien, Purser & Stokes - Seven Generations, Four Families'* ISBN 0-9548462-0-6 is available from the Library Bookshop, Trinity College.)

BEA ORPEN: Boats Beached at Mornington

In April, the Friends of the National Collections purchased a gouache of Mornington Strand by Bea Orpen at Whyte's auction. The artist painted several views of the area, which is near the entrance to the harbour of Drogheda, on the south bank of the River Boyne in Meath, one of which - a gouache of a farmyard at Mornington, at the artist's retrospective exhibition (1995 at Droichead Arts Centre) - is dated 1956. Bea Orpen HRHA (1913-1980) and her husband, late FNCI Council member Chalmers (Terry) Trench, lived at Slane in Co. Meath. Daughter of the architect and painter Richard Orpen, and niece of Sir William Orpen, she studied first in Dublin under Lilian Davidson, enrolling at the Metropolitan School of Art and the life schools of the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1932 where Sean O'Sullivan was her master, and moving to the Slade School in London three years later to train as a textile designer.

Her skill as a designer lent a piquancy to the small landscapes which are the main body of her work. Irish women artists of the period were breaking academic moulds and evolving personal styles, and Bea Orpen was no exception, painting fresh, immediate aspects of the countryside she knew in Ireland and abroad, on low toned paper of various colours, where her economic, confident handling of colour and space assisted her individuality of touch. Figures in her landscapes are relatively rare; however she painted interior studies



Bea Orpen (191-1980) - Boats Beached at Mornington
Oil on Canvas - 36 cm x 51 cm

centred on her own children. She also designed tea cloths for the Irish Countrywomen's Association, of which she was an active member, she designed book covers, and she made a number of lithographs.

Hilary Carey.