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Art

The Art Gallery of Limerick

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HE provision of an Art Gallery for Limerick should have been a natural outcome of the establishment of the School of Art, but, somehow no one seemed to have thought of it for a number of years, until Mr. J. J. Johnson, speaking at a dinner given in honour of a famous Limerick painter, Mr. Dermot O'Brien, P.R.H.A., made the suggestion. The occasion being such a suitable one, the proposal appealed to the imagination of a number of those present, with the result that in 1936 a Committee was formed, having District Justice J. M. Flood as Chairman, Mr. Johnson as Secretary, and Mr. Paul Bernard as Treasurer.

The Committee lost no time in getting to work, and their appeal to well known artists met with a ready and generous response. In a short time Limerick found itself the possessor of examples of the work of almost every member of the Royal Irish Academy, as well as of other well known Irish painters.

The next step was to hold an exhibition, in premises temporarily lent for the purpose, when Mr. Dermot O'Brien, then President of the R.H.A. came from Dublin to supervise personally the hanging of the pictures, and to speak at the opening ceremony.

The Limerick Corporation, through the instrumentality of Mr. T. C. O'Mahony, City Manager, gave a grant towards the further purchase of pictures as opportunity offered. In addition, the Corporation built the gallery as an addition to the Limerick Library and Museum, where it is under the care, as a labour of love, of our City Librarian, Mr. Herbert, who is always so glad to meet visitors, and is ambitious for the future.

Unfortunately the gallery is not sufficiently spacious to enable the whole collection of about 200 paintings to be exhibited at once, but periodically they are changed so that visitors have something new to view from time to time.

The exhibits are confined to Irish Artists or those whose painting was done in Ireland. Needless to say Thomond is very much to the fore in the collection and such well known names as Dermot O'Brien, John Keating, Douglas Alexander, Sir Frederick Burton, Wm. Mulready, as well as Geraldine O'Brien and Mrs. Donough O'Brien, C. M. Doran, Rosemary Coyle, Fergus O'Ryan and others, are prominent on the walls.

Fittingly enough the most representative collection of paintings in the Gallery are the works of a Limerick man. John Keating, a former pupil of Crescent College, President of the Royal Irish Academy. His 'Simple Folk' is a brilliant composition. It is a group of three. The figure of the man on the right arrests one's attention. His countenance portrays the grim struggle of the peasant farmer. The artist has painted the dress of the woman in a striking red reminiscent of Rembrandt's colouring. Her expression is rather non-committal. In the background is the slender figure of a boy, whose features are also finely drawn. The whole composition possesses a fine harmony of colour. It lacks the starkness perhaps of some of the artist's other work. In 'A Country Dance' he paints in a style we do not generally associate with him. A gay mood runs through the setting. His man and women are more frivolous. The feminine figure in the foreground is almost Japanese. The man is a bohemian type. The background is cubist. Altogether it is somewhat unsatisfying, his texture of colour is not pleasing. His ability in another medium is

shown in 'Maria'. This is an outstanding drawing. The finely sensitive expression recalls the drawings of Da Vinci. No. 45 is a self-portrait in the forceful manner with which we are familiar. 'In the Dublin Mountains' is a landscape piece. While there is a restful combination of colour, perhaps the design is a little unbalanced

sombre mood the artist has caught. One regrets that this work does not belong to the Gallery. Sir John Lavery's 'Stars in Sunlight' is a contrast in subject and style and is disappointing. It is small in size, the sense of light is ably conveyed but it is lacking in delicate tones. His two figures are after the style of Boucher



"The Fight Interrupted" by W. Mulready

by the clump of yellow in the foreground. Nos. 143 and 144 are two other striking portraits of Bishop Dwyer and John Daly.

The work to which we inevitably turn next is Orpen's portrait of the 'Man of the West.' Here is a fine example of Orpen's genius. It is a figure that lingers in our mind, for Orpen has finely rendered the grim experience of life. His psychology recalls the penetrative hand of Rembrandt. Perhaps one might wish that the grey colouring had been somewhat relieved by the background, which is in the same colour. It does, however, accentuate the

but without the French painter's elegance.

No. 132 is a sketch of A.E. in death by Sean O'Sullivan. Here is an artist who seldom disappoints. His subjects always possess an interest and significance while his drawing is always sure. His work reminds us of Ingres' saying 'a thing well drawn is well painted.' Another canvas of his No. 73 'A Kerry Pub' is a delightful. The figure on the right is brilliantly drawn, and particularly in the careless swing of the legs, expressive of the good natured ne'r-do-well who feels that the only cure for life's ill is a glass of stout. Perhaps one might desire a less vibrant colouring.

Harry Kernoff has two portraits. His subjects, if they do not show any great depth, are nevertheless pleasant types. No. 153 'Turf Girl' is full of vitality, and the poise and mouth convey the spirit of arch gaiety. In No. 43 'Portrait of an Italian workman' he has achieved an agreeable combination of colour, and the flesh tints are admirably toned. Mulready's

Perhaps it is time to turn to the pictures of Jack Yeats. Frankly I find them disappointing. In No. 84 'Death for one only,' one's attention is held by the brilliant colouring, but it does not compensate for lack of form in the figure in the foreground. The same criticism may be made of 'The flaming Dawn' where the figure of the man is too impressionistic. No. 89 is still more



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work 'The fight interrupted' which is here illustrated needs no commentary. It is a dramatic composition, and his talent is shown by his interpretative studies of the various characters. His talent in draughtsmanship is revealed by the drawing and detail. The painting has a mellow colouring. No. 70 'Portrait of a girl' by Sarah Purser, is after the manner of Rossetti and Burne-Jones. It is a dreamy study of a girl with the lips sensitively drawn. Mary Swanzy has an arresting portrait of Miss Russell. It radiates a spirit of exuberance and good nature. Two talented landscapes by Mulcahy show a richness of colouring and a restrained use of light.

extreme, and is rather a surrealist study. No. 85, 'Derrynane' is in the more traditional style, but it does not recapture the light and beauty of a charming place. 'Western Boatmen' by Lilian Davidson, is interesting on account of the realistic drawing of the bending boatman in the foreground. The colour pattern is individualistic, but the white splash of the boatman's shirt provides an effective contrast. Margaret Clarke's 'Christmas Gifts' is an appealing study of a young girl caught in a pensive yet expectant mood. There is a natural touch in the flow of linear design.

Mrs. Donough O'Brien has a striking

impressionistic study of Alexandra Docks, Dublin. The changing colours and shadows on the water are well rendered. Light suffuses the picture in the manner of the French school. Hone's landscapes with their rich deep colouring show the influence of the English landscape painters. Frank McKelvey's paintings are an agreeable blending of light, colour and shadow. Simon Coleman's 'City Street' exemplifies Daubigny's saying that we can never paint light enough. I liked George Collie's 'Volunteer.' He has captured the rugged determination, and honesty of purpose of the Volunteer spirit. No. 76 is a self portrait by Richard Rothwell after the style of Laurence. The features are moulded with precision, and attention is focussed on the face by the dark background. It has a more individual character than some of Laurence's work. Charles Lamb is best represented by 'Country people at prayer.' The three types are perhaps a little statuesque, but he has painted a striking meditative figure of a man. There are decorative studies of still life by Crampton Gore, Geraldine O'Brien, and Grace Henry. The last named artist is also represented by an informal portrait of Stephen Gwynn, and 'The Top of the Hill'. In the latter picture, the red shawl rather crowds the picture, and the human

interest is diminished. An introduction to more modern trends is provided by the work of the late Maimie Jellett.

I should not like to omit a reference to Cecil Salkeld's 'Evening Twilight.' It is a picture that holds a strong appeal. The lighted windows, the half light of the streets, the reflection on the brick walls and the figure in the foreground, make a dreamy, nostalgic melody all their own.

I may appropriately close this sketch with a tribute to a distinguished painter of Limerick who has always taken an interest in our cultural life, the late Dermot O'Brien, who was President of the Royal Irish Academy. His portrait of Joseph O'Mara reveals the high souled character of a great Limerick singer. Accurate drawing is also displayed in this canvas. His Co. Limerick landscape show a subject with which he was familiar, and reveals his talent as a painter of the countryside.

There is some fine sculptural work by Oliver Shepherd, Jerome O'Connor, and Jones Doyle, on view also. The Galleries are well patronised, and are open to the public daily from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Visitors to Limerick who can manage to spare a little time will enjoy a visit. A catalogue may be obtained from the Curator or one of his assistants.

The Retreat for the Past

The week-end Retreat for the Past was held in Milltown Park early in February. The response was very satisfying, and all those who attended were glad to have been present for the occasion. Those leaving Mungret this year and going to Dublin for studies or business if they wish to make next years Retreat should send a line to Rev. J. Fitzgerald, S.J.