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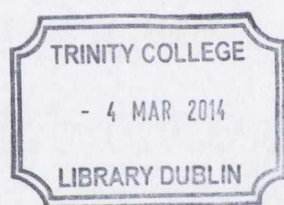
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The Nude in Modern Irish Art:
Tradition and Transgression

An exploration of themes and trends in the
representation of the nude in twentieth century
Irish art.

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PhD thesis
History of Art

Trinity College, Dublin
2013



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Summary

This is a project with the potential to have groundbreaking implications for Irish art. The nude has long been central to the study of art history but has erroneously been thought to have been absent from art in Ireland. It is an unusual subject in Irish art, but while there are few specialists in the genre, there are many individual examples to be found. The reasons for its neglect include lack of resources in art education, social conditions and sexual taboo. While these historical factors no longer influence Irish art, I will show that there are still taboos connected to the representation of the body in contemporary art, issues concerning corporeality and sexuality.

Many Irish artists have made work in response to European artists, and this study interrogates the intentions behind these copies, variants and references. Louis le Brocquy has repeatedly returned to Manet's *Olympia* as a source, first in *The Family* of 1951, and more recently in his series of *Odalisques* from 2005-06, and while Manet was not a knowing participant in this exchange, his audacious modernity nevertheless implicitly demanded a response from future generations of artists. Through comparisons with other artists using similar strategies, including Micheal Farrell, Robert Ballagh and Gerard Dillon, this thesis investigates the extent to which painters see the past as a challenge to reinvent old styles or to break the boundaries of subject and style established by each generation.

The gleaning of ideas often involved the migration of artists from Ireland to study abroad or to see international collections. In the ateliers of Europe there was a much freer attitude to drawing from the model. Well into the 20th century artists continued to travel abroad in order to paint the nude, because of residual sexual taboos in Ireland, and restrictive teaching practices. Artists sometimes experienced emigration as a way of escaping narrow social mores that made creative life difficult in Ireland. These restrictions were especially difficult for artists struggling with their own sexuality. Gerard Dillon's direct quotation from Gauguin's *The Spirit of the Dead Keeps Watch*, 1892, in his painting *The Bedsitting Room*, c.1955, expresses ideas of artistic and sexual repression finding release in new surroundings, ideas that were equally potent for both artists in different times and cultures. The representation of masculinities is a key theme

in this work, and through careful analysis and comparisons of the work of Francis Bacon, Patrick Hennessy and Billy Quinn, this thesis will illustrate the various strategies employed by gay artists to communicate sexual identity in their work, and how these have changed in line with more open social attitudes to sexuality.

While the question of authorial intent is important, in the case of the nude the experience of the model is also relevant, and in recent times has become the focus of much research, largely prompted by the search for the real person behind the model. This approach implies that we must look beyond the artist's formal interests in the work, to the psychological and social realities of the subject. In the case of the nude this is often a woman and much of the literature is informed by a feminist critique, and is concerned largely with the historical barriers in place to limit women's full participation in the making of art, except in the passive and sexualized role of model.

Studio models are often professionals. However, in many cases emotional or sexual relationships exist between artist and model and regardless of whether this relationship formally influences the work, it can influence the viewer's understanding of it. Many Irish artists, including Roderic O'Connor and William Orpen have used their wives, partners and lovers as models.

In cases where the model is named we can consider these works as nude portraits, a subtle distinction from the studio nude, and one which emerges as a separate theme. Here, a distinction must be made between the idea of the sitter, familiar from conventional portraiture with its very specific functions, and studio models for the nude. The nude portrait appears to conflate these types, and Francis Bacon's nude portraits of Anthony Zych and George Dyer, as well as Robert Ballagh's nude portraits of his wife fit this typology.

This study hopes to situate the Irish nude in its proper European context and challenge our understanding of the regionality of Irish art. It aims to show that most of the issues and themes arising in Irish art reflect the same concerns that occupy artists everywhere and that Irish art has gained rather than lost out by being connected to a wider sphere of influence.

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Chapter 1

An Introduction to the Nude in Irish Art

Introduction

In order to introduce the subject of the nude in Irish art, it is necessary to first consider what exactly the nude is and also to define the terms 'Irish art' and 'modern' as they appear in the title of this work.

It seems extraordinary that the nude occupies the place of highest status in art history and theory and yet to some extent it continues to resist definition. It has been variously and, more or less accurately, described as a genre, a subject, a means and a form of art – yet all of these terms are somehow inadequate because although each address aspects of the nude, none entirely encompasses its overall importance.¹ From the time of its inception in ancient Greece, the nude became a vehicle for idealisation of the human form, an aspect of the nude that has become so widely accepted that dictionary definitions still reflect its ethos even though idealisation has long been challenged both in theory and in practice. *The Yale Dictionary of Art and Artists* describes the nude as suppressing 'individual resemblance and particular circumstances in favour of harmonious, or abstract, design and timeless generalisation'.²

The classical origins of the nude also account for its identification with cardinal virtues through representation of the gods. This process began with depictions of Apollo and Venus in 5th century Greece, and developed into a complex range of personifications which led to the nude being contextualized in terms of allegory and rhetoric.³ In the classical era of myth and allegory, the associative meanings inherent in the human form were clearly delineated, accessible and familiar through repeated usage. Among this plethora of personifications *Truth* is especially apposite in the context of this discussion

¹ Clark describes the nude as 'not the subject of art, but a form of art', though elsewhere in the same work he refers to the nude as 'the most serious of all subjects in art'. Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art* (London: John Murray, 1956), p.3, p.25. Mahon concurs with Clark's view. Alyce Mahon, *Eroticism and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.39. McAvera refers to the nude as a genre. Brian McAvera, 'State of Surveillance', *Irish Arts Review*, 27:1, (Spring, 2010), 62-69 (p.69).

² E. Langmuir, and N. Lynton, *The Yale Dictionary of Art and Artists* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p.501.

³ Marcia Pointon refers to the nude as 'a form of rhetoric'. Marcia Pointon, *Naked Authority: The Body in Western Painting 1830-1908* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.14.

because she was always depicted naked.⁴ The figure of *Truth* was invented in the fifteenth century and intertwines classical and Christian ideas; however the linguistic association of truth and disclosure is older, dating from classical times.⁵

The reclining nude, introduced in the sixteenth century, marked a break with antiquity, and introduced sexual desire in place of worship as a motive for the representation of the naked female form.⁶ Despite this alteration to the status quo classical figural types continued in the form of allegorical figures and personifications of virtue, whose meanings were clearly legible, until the nineteenth century. However, from the beginning, differences existed between male and female nudes. ‘Whereas athletes and warriors, gods and heroes in Greek art reveal their naked bodies without primary erotic connotation, the female nude, in its earliest classical manifestations, was assigned to Aphrodite’s sphere’.⁷

In her book *Monuments and Maidens* Marina Warner examines the use of the female form in art as ‘a species of metaphor’... ‘an expression of desiderata and virtues’, in which women belong to the symbolic order.⁸ But the nude woman has always represented a particular type of symbolism. In this context, the depiction of Venus managed to contain within itself, and to somewhat conceal, the dichotomous relationship that existed between allegory and lust.

The rediscovery of antiquity in the Renaissance led to the architect Alberti’s codification of classical principles based on proportion, and thence to Leonardo da Vinci’s *Vitruvian Man*, which related those principles directly to the human body.⁹ Leonardo’s illustration

⁴ For the development of the nude in Greek sculpture see Clark, pp.26-89.

⁵ Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), p.314. For an earlier figure of a similar virtue by Giovanni Pisano on the pulpit in Pisa cathedral, dating to c.1300-10, see Clark, pp.89-90. For the rhetoric of the nude see also Mahon, pp.39-64.

⁶ Clark describes this development as a move from the representation of the Celestial Venus to that of Venus Naturalis. Clark, 1956, pp.112-113. Thus he argues that the establishment of the tradition of the entirely secular sexualized paintings of the female nude intended for the male gaze begins with Giorgione. This idea is examined and elaborated on in chapter three of this thesis.

⁷ Warner, 1985, p.313.

⁸ Warner, 1985, p.xix.

⁹ Alberti’s mathematical proportions of the body were explored in his *De re aedificatoria* (*Ten Books on Architecture*), 1452/1485. His ideas and those of Leonardo derived ultimately from Vitruvius, architect and

demonstrates how Renaissance humanism placed man at the centre of all perception and thought, and in direct, measureable relationship to his material environment. Coupled with Alberti's insistence on 'the harmony of all parts in relation to one another' these ideas influenced the idealized representation of the human form for centuries to follow. Based on the geometry of the ancients, a figure of ideal proportions was considered to be one into which the head would fit seven times. Depending on balance, harmony and pleasure to the eye, this provided a schema for generations of artists to follow, in which drawing from the live model would provide only a starting point, and figures would be routinely manipulated in order to fit a pre-existing idea of perfection.

The codification of rules governing the representation of the nude received further fortification with the establishment of the Academies of art in Europe in the 17th century. Although academies had existed in Italy since the middle of the sixteenth century, it was in 1648 that the first modern European Art Academy was established in Paris, taking authority away from the guilds. By 1768, when the Royal Academy in London opened its doors, national Academies existed in most European capitals.¹⁰ These Academies also established the hierarchy of the various genres of painting, placing history painting at the pinnacle, and, in descending order of importance thereafter, portraiture, genre, landscape and still life. History painting drew its subjects from mythology, religion and ancient history, all areas in which nudity could be seen, to a greater or lesser extent, as appropriate. Classical themes from mythology and ancient history, with their pre-Christian roots and motivations, occupied a position of inviolable innocence and were therefore exempt from the rigours of Christian morality. However, nudity was also deemed suitable to certain specific subjects in Christian art. Although in itself nudity was anathema to Medieval piety, theologians had identified four different kinds of nudity, which allowed for a relaxation of these moral objections: *Nuditas criminalis* (the nakedness of the sinner), *Nuditas naturalis* (nakedness as the natural state of man), *Nuditas temporalis* (the symbolic shedding of goods and status) and finally, *Nuditas*

engineer (active 46-30 BC). Book three of his *Ten Books on Architecture* (*De Architectura libri decem*) deals with symmetry in temples and the human body.

¹⁰ Apart from Paris and London, Academies were established in Berlin in 1697, Vienna in 1705, St. Petersburg in 1724, Stockholm in 1735, Copenhagen in 1738, and Madrid in 1752.

virtualis (the nudity of confession, innocence, redemption and pure truth).¹¹ These categories allowed for the naked or semi-naked representation of certain subjects, including Adam and Eve, the repentant saints Mary Magdalene and Mary of Egypt, St. Sebastian, St. Eugenia, Jonah and Jesus, all subjects that provided either salutary lessons on the fate of the sinner or exemplars of Christian virtue. Such theological fluidity in questions of the morality of nakedness illustrates the 'intrinsic ambivalence, in the Christian tradition, between the innocent natural body and the tainted carnal body'.¹²

Because history painting was elevated to a special status by the academies, whose job it was to train artists, the practice of drawing from life became the focal point of art education. Its importance was emphasised through the laborious processes of copying from prints and from casts of antique sculpture that the student had to complete before being allowed to draw directly from the figure. By the time the aspiring artist arrived at that point, sometimes after years of copying, the feeling of having achieved the summit must have been unavoidable. Little wonder then, that the figure had by then become so laden with significance. The Royal Hibernian Academy was established in 1826, and the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art was not opened until 1877, so Ireland did not enjoy the established art education system of Paris, Antwerp or Rome.¹³ Consequently, many Irish artists went abroad to study, finding in the ateliers of Europe a ready source of nude models and classes that were open to all.

Until the 1960s, when the methods of art education changed completely, most artists drew and painted from the nude in art schools even if they did not go on to specialise in the nude or even in figurative art. Many lesser known artists, who remained undistinguished in their later careers, often produced very accomplished studio nudes in their youthful phase. One Irish artist that falls into this category is Kathleen Mackie, the

¹¹ Warner, 1985, pp.295-300.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.307. St. Eugenia, accused of rape, displayed her sex in order to defend herself. Jonah, swallowed by the whale for three days, was seen as a precursor of Jesus.

¹³ During the second half of the nineteenth century schools of art were also established in Cork, Belfast, Waterford, Limerick, Clonmel and Derry. For a detailed account of art education in Ireland see John Turpin, 'Irish Art and Design Education from the Eighteenth Century to the Present', *Irish Arts Review Yearbook*, 13 (1997), 188-193.

subject of a recent biography, which prominently features a very accomplished nude study, *Standing Female Nude*, 1924 (fig.4.24).¹⁴

Apart from being a didactic tool and a means of achieving the highest ambitions in the field of painting, the nude also became a test of skill and a display of virtuosity, a fact that is attested to in the number of self-portraits in which the artist chooses to depict himself surrounded by the accoutrements of the life studio, as if to stake a claim to academic greatness. Orpen's *Portrait of the Artist*, c.1907, (fig.4.9) makes exactly this connection between the artist and his oeuvre, and specifically his approach to the nude.¹⁵

The irony inherent in the co-existence of sacred and profane associations in representations of Venus was fully exposed and exploited in nineteenth century realism. The nudes of Courbet and Manet purposely conflated the tradition of the reclining nude with the realist depiction of women, with all the social and sexual implications that this process involved. These were nudes for their own sake, to be consumed by the male viewer, and though this was not the first admission of the sexual motive in art, it was its most open acknowledgement to date. From these first modernist experiments in art to the beginning of the Modernist movement proper, theoretical frameworks began to change apace. Realism's early attempts to depict the social reality of the sitter led, in the post Freudian era, to attempts to reveal the inner consciousness of the person portrayed. The body became a metaphor for the self. This process began with Manet's *Olympia*, 1863 (fig.3.2). It is impossible to know for certain whether Manet intended to convey the subjectivity of his model, or whether her unique character managed to impose itself on the painter, or indeed if the identification with the perceived persona of the sitter is due to the strength of the viewer's own self-consciousness. What is certain is that after Manet the figure became more problematic to deal with symbolically. Indeed, it posed particular problems for modernist theory and practice, with its reliance on formalism and its virtual elimination of the figure. It is extremely difficult to apply the modernist dictum 'art for art's sake' to representations of the body, and consequently, in modernism the

¹⁴ Eamonn Mallie and Paddy Mackie, *Kathleen Isabella Metcalfe Mackie 1899-1996* (Belfast: 2009), illustration p.157.

¹⁵ Robert Upstone, (ed.) *William Orpen: Politics, Sex and Death* (London: Imperial War Museum 2005), ill.17, p.90.

nude often becomes a site for subversion and aberration. In particular, three international artists continued to explore the human form and assert its importance in the twentieth century, Francis Bacon, Lucien Freud and Louis le Brocquy. The work of le Brocquy is the focus of chapter three and Bacon is one of the artists discussed in chapter five of this study.

Approaches to the body in art underwent radical changes in the twentieth century when artists began to explore the subject in terms of their own embodiment as subjects, rather than the depiction of the body as an object. This was largely due to interventions by feminist artists who had begun to question the ways in which representation of the body contributed to the perpetuation of patriarchal systems of power. According to Sally O'Reilly, the 1970s marked the point at which 'the traditional nude completed its metamorphosis from objectivised or metaphorical image into a confrontational and self-conscious subject'.¹⁶ Some of these artists turned to new media in an attempt to distance their art from existing forms that were irrevocably identified with objectivisation and exploitation. Body Art or Performance Art challenges traditional media and their depictions of the body for consumption by the viewer. By foregrounding the subjective embodied experience of the artist, it is strongly linked to issues of personal identity and selfhood, issues that were themselves often the focus of feminist thought. However, by allowing the equally subjective response of the viewer to contribute to the work it allows a condition of ambiguity to arise, in which meanings and associations can be negotiated and constructed. By virtue of its temporal and spatial specificity it represents the de-materialisation of the artwork and, consequently, the de-commodification of art. In the case of the nude body this may often be linked to the desire to de-commodify the traditional nude and its consumption. In this way it is associated with the radical political views concerning gender and power that emerged from the women's movement in the 1970s.

Performance artist Amanda Coogan rejects the terminology of 'the nude' in relation to her work, which she sees as politically opposed to the idea of making images for the male

¹⁶ Sally O'Reilly, *The Body in Contemporary Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009), p.13.

gaze.¹⁷ Instead, her work explores the idea of the social construction of gender, and seeks to demystify the phallogentric notion and function of the traditional nude. Despite her reservations about the term 'the nude', examples of her work are included in this study. Indeed, for the purposes of this wide-ranging study, and in order to include as many examples as possible of the nude and/or the body in Irish art, the term 'the nude' is used here throughout in its broadest sense, to include works that are as different as Louis le Brocquy's *A Family*, 1951 (fig.3.1) and Amanda Coogan's *Madonna in Blue*, 2001 (fig.4.83).

Because the main aims of this work are to highlight the semiotic meanings attached to the nude body, and to examine the social and political conditions under which it sought expression in Ireland, such a broad understanding of the term is justified.

Similarly it is appropriate to define what is meant here by 'Irish art' and again, in the interests of breadth and inclusivity, the most liberal use of the term has been adopted. Included in the study are examples of work by Irish artists working at home or abroad, work by artists from other countries living in Ireland, and works that represent an Irish subject or theme.

It should be stated also what is meant by 'modern' art. The main focus of the study will be on works dating from the beginning of the twentieth century until the present.

However, in some of the themes dealt with herein, there is an acknowledgement of the beginnings of modernism in the middle of the nineteenth century, and works from this period are therefore included as referents and comparators. In the case of the discussion of Louis le Brocquy's European sources in chapter three, the detailed exploration of influences leads all the way back to antiquity, as does the discussion on aesthetics which follows below in this chapter. These diversions outside of the specific time-frame of modern art are used to situate the subject in its proper historical framework and context. By means of these comparisons it will be demonstrated just how deeply indebted the nude is to art historical approaches, techniques and discourses.

¹⁷ Amanda Coogan, in conversation with the author, 07/03/2012.

Finally, something must be said about the specific nature of Irish modernity in a period of history in which the country was undergoing de-colonisation and the subsequent emergence of a new concept of national identity. Fiona Barber identifies two distinct stands in Irish modernism, which together combined ‘an interest in the processes of modernisation and modernism’ with a ‘primitive fascination with archaic modes of production and ways of life’.¹⁸ She situates this dichotomous approach to modernism within the discourses of post-colonialism, in line with much recent scholarship which is devoted to examining the emergence of nascent nationhood in terms of post-colonial theory. However, the degree to which such theories, developed initially from the non-Western former colonies of European powers, is applicable to the Irish situation, remains a subject of debate within post-colonial discourse. For example, John McLeod and Gregory Castle both acknowledge Ireland as a site of post-colonial cultural production but neither William Walsh nor John Thieme include Ireland in their ‘geographies’ of post-colonialism.¹⁹ McLeod, for instance, argues that the issues central to post-colonialism such as ‘language, representation, resistance, nationalism, gender, migrancy and diaspora – are central in the study of Ireland’.²⁰

However, even within post-colonial theory there are debates concerning the nature of the process of colonisation, and the extent to which the phases of so-called ‘dominant’ or ‘hegemonic’ colonisation relate to ‘very altered states of relationship’ between the coloniser and the colonised.²¹ Post-colonialism has been critiqued for the degree of homogeneity it assumes between radically different colonial experiences and situations. Critics argue that these differences are significant not only between different colonies but also within them. In this context Bill Ashcroft proposes differences ‘between oppositional and complicit forms’ of colonisation. According to this view, opposition occurs in post-independence conditions, while the complicit form of post-colonialism is

¹⁸ Fiona Barber, *Art in Ireland Since 1910* (London: Reaktion, 2013), p.51.

¹⁹ See John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, second edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), William Walsh, *Commonwealth Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), John Thieme (ed.) *The Arnold Anthology of Post-colonial Literatures in English* (London: Arnold, 1996) and Gregory Castle (ed.), *Post-colonial Discourses: An Anthology* (Malden, MA; London: Blackwell, 2001).

²⁰ McLeod, 2010, p.281.

²¹ Abdul Jan Mohammed, ‘The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonial Fiction’, *Critical Inquiry*, 12.1, 1985, cited in *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*, ed. by Peter Childs and R. J. Patrick Williams (London; New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1996), p.3.

‘an always present underside within colonisation itself’.²² This observation could be considered apposite in relation to Ireland’s colonial past. Also, Peter Childs view that ‘the idea that some kinds of post-colonial production may side with the forces of control and exploitation is an interesting, and no doubt necessary corrective to those critics who would see post-colonialism as (all too easily) resistant.’, could be seen to be particularly relevant to the discussion on Ireland’s colonial experience.²³

These views also accord with Declan Kiberd’s explanation of the colonised Irish as ‘both exponents and victims of British Imperialism’, a state possibly best quantifiable by the numbers of Irishmen who fought in the British army, especially in the First World War, or who were employed in the Civil Services, as well as the diminishing numbers who continued to espouse a unionist political viewpoint even after independence.²⁴

Furthermore, that fact that by the time of reaching independence English was the spoken language of the vast majority of Irish people served to perpetuate the cultural ties between Ireland and Britain. This level of political and cultural integration of particular sections of the Irish population, particularly in urban centres, was not unique given the core to periphery structure of most colonial administrations. However, it shows that many Irish people, in common with those of other colonised nations but perhaps more than most others, saw Britain as a source of opportunity rather than an oppressor. The career of William Orpen could be taken as a case in point. Content for most of his life to inhabit a ‘hybrid’ identity of Irish and British, identified by Barber as a ‘precarious duality’, he eventually opted for the one which was most advantageous to him financially, though this event was presaged by a degree of persuasion and anxiety.²⁵

Several other artists referred to in this study were and are also characterised by this type of ‘hybridity’ of identity, including William Mulready, Daniel Maclise, William Orpen,

²² Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge, ‘What is post(-)colonialism?’, *Textual Practice*, 5.3, (1991), cited in Childs and Williams, 1996, p.19.

²³ Childs and Williams, 1996, p.19.

²⁴ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*, kindle edition (London: Vintage, 1995), chapter 1, ‘A New England Called Ireland’, n.p.

²⁵ Ibid. Kiberd maintains that the notion of ‘hybridity’ fits comfortably into the arts whereas politics tends to segregate into oppositional strands. He goes on to elucidate the ‘fear of hybridity’ which emerged after the plantations of the 16th century, and served to maintain the essential separateness of the Irish and the English thereafter. Barber, 2013, p.31.

Sarah Purser, Mainie Jellett, Patrick Hennessy, Francis Bacon, Elizabeth Cope and possibly others.

Childs explains that in post-colonialism 'another level of complexity is added when the territory is arguably decolonised or post-colonial but it may be difficult to regard all the ethnic or cultural groups who inhabit it that way'.²⁶ After independence and amid the forging of a new Irish identity, that of 'Anglo-Irish', often before seen as problematic, began to signify an identity that was outdated and marginalised. It became a term of exclusion. In this regard, Roisín Kennedy points to a sectarianism in Irish art criticism from the 1960s which caricatured Anglo-Irish artists such as Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone as 'leisured and middle class', and thus 'less Irish' than many of their contemporaries.²⁷ By referring to himself as a 'West Belgian' Louis le Brocquy was implicitly satirising the pejorative term 'west Brit', used to describe the Anglo-Irish or those with a strong identification with British identity.²⁸

It is in these terms that the study of identity is enlarged upon in chapter three of this study, in the discussion of international modernism adopted by Louis le Brocquy and Mainie Jellett versus the social realism of Sean Keating. This debate about stylistic differences in art became connected to and confused with the idea of social and class differences within the Irish population and the pursuit of cosmopolitanism became linked to the politics and attitudes of this 'alienated' class, and Irish identity was defined in ever narrower and more exclusive terms. This had implications not only for the Anglo-Irish, but for women and for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people who felt excluded from the norm. The experiences of these groups are considered in depth in chapters four and five.

Although post-colonial theory is more generally applied to written texts than to visual art, it is possible to argue that post-colonialism has impacted on the production of visual art in Ireland in specific ways. Most importantly perhaps was the development of the myth of the western seaboard as an imagined repository of a golden age of pre-colonial purity.

²⁶ Childs and Williams, 1996, p.12.

²⁷ Roisín Kennedy, 'Lhote's Wives - scapegoating women artists, 1962-84', in *Irish Women Artists, 1800-2009: Familiar but Unknown*, ed. by Éimear O'Connor (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), pp.168-178 (pp.170-171).

²⁸ Louis le Brocquy, 'A Painter's Note on his Irishness', *The Recorder*, 42, The American Irish Historical Society (1981), 24-25.

Childs expands the definition of post-colonial cultural practice to include not just ‘a set of discursive practices which are characterised by resistance to colonialism and colonialist ideologies’ but also to ‘their form and legacies’. In the specific and somewhat narrow field of art practice being considered here, that of the nude, it is possible to read into this latter definition an explanation for the abandonment of the study of academic life drawing, and even the subject of the nude altogether, as a subject inappropriate to the cultural needs of the emerging nation.²⁹

So much of the history of the nude depends on the academic study of life drawing, demonstrated here from the discussion on academicism in the first half of the twentieth century, and its recent revival in the Royal Hibernian Academy, in chapter four. This academicism was brought to Ireland from Britain as an integral part of the colonial system of education, though it ultimately derived from the French academy.

If we accept the idea of colonialism as a ‘vision’ or ‘powerful ideology’ which necessitates an element of destruction of the native culture, we would need to look to the native culture to find an alternative, more authentic approach to the representation of the body.³⁰ In Ireland, there is no such alternative artistic ‘vision’. The ancient *Síle na Gig* had an altogether different function and cannot be considered alongside the classical nude. In other words, as Kiberd maintained, there was a notable ‘lack of native forms’ and ‘the want of any foundation on which to shape them’.³¹ If then the nude was essentially a ‘foreign’ concept, a set of imported ideas and practices, this thesis seeks to demonstrate how Irish artist adapted it to their ends and developed it in significant ways.

This study takes many key works of Irish art and other less well-known examples, and attempts to establish thematic connections between them. The risk in focusing primarily on iconic works is that its approach may seem outdated in its allegiance to the canon. However, it also engages with the themes of the new art histories, specifically Marxism and Feminism, albeit critically, and introduces arguments concerned with gender and ethnicity. While acknowledging the relevance of post-colonial theories to the study of

²⁹ Childs and Williams, 1996, p.4.

³⁰ *Ibid*, pp.7-8.

³¹ Kiberd, 1996, chapter 31, Post-Colonial Ireland-“A Quaking Sod”, n.p.

Irish art history, it questions the extent to which these theories can usefully be employed to the study of the nude as a distinct genre within Irish art.

There follows a short summary of the nude in Irish art which addresses the question of why this subject has traditionally been seen as anathema to Irish art.

The chapter will then proceed with an examination of the theoretical approaches to the nude, and an evaluation of the feminist and post-feminist positions apropos the male gaze. Following that is an historical account of aesthetics from antiquity to post-modernism and the implications of that discipline for artistic approaches to the nude.

The Nude in Irish Art

Apart from a seminal article by Brian O'Doherty in 1971, the subject of the nude has been virtually ignored in the scholarship on Irish art to date. The main focus of O'Doherty's article was the denial of the possibility of the nude in Irish art due to the 'puritanism' of the Irish people which allowed them only to approach sensuous subjects 'indirectly'.³² He identified in Irish images of the nude the same 'fierce continence, repression and avoidance through idealization or fantasy so familiar in Irish literature'.³³ He went on to enumerate several versions of the strategy of avoidance found in the work of Irish artists. Of those also discussed in this study, he identified Louis le Brocquy with a 'poeticizing indistinctness' and Patrick Hennessy with elaborate 'distancing'.³⁴ He concluded by suggesting that in relation to the nude there is, in Irish art, 'a politeness of approach that may be a reflex of the Irishman's terror of sex or his approach to women'.³⁵ Allowing for the fact that these words were written over forty years ago and in relation to specific works shown in the Rosc exhibition, these remarks seem very general and even dismissive of the Irish nude. For instance his remark that the nude 'is never naked in Irish art' is simply not true, as this thesis will demonstrate.³⁶ Through the evaluation of

³² O'Doherty, 'The Puritan Nude', *The Irish Imagination, Rosc '71*, (Dublin: Municipal Gallery of Art, 1971), p.22.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

examples of the nude in this study it is hoped to create a more comprehensive picture of the complexities that existed in the genre even then, and those that have emerged in the intervening years. The point about the puritanism of the Irish was reiterated by the artist Mick O'Dea in 2010, and is therefore worth investigating further.³⁷

According to Tom Inglis this was precisely the case until recently. Indeed, he maintains that prudery not only affected the Irish with regard to sexual matters in the past but it is responsible for the continuing dearth of any Irish research on the subject. Inglis argues that Ireland followed Victorian Britain in its adoption of prudery, part of which entailed the idealisation of the wife and mother. He cites economic reasons for this among the post-Famine class of tenant farmers who, in order to make a sufficient living off the land, tended to avoid marriage, a situation which led to a 'cultural contradiction' in which home and motherhood were revered but remained unavailable to many. This, he maintains, led to the repression of sexual desire, especially in women until 'over the course of the nineteenth century external constraints on sexual behaviour slowly became combined with internal self-control', and led to the creation of the myth of Irish purity.³⁸ This mentality lasted longer in Ireland than in Britain or the U.S.A. in the absence of similar struggles for economic and gender rights as existed in those countries. Because of the powerful role of the Catholic Church in the modernization of Ireland, there was no organised opposition to its control, and the denial and suppression of sex became 'part of a wider cultural programme of denying and sacrificing the self'.³⁹

Inglis has noted a rapid change to this state of affairs since the 1960s, during a period of economic growth and social change which led to the fragmentation of the monopoly of the Catholic Church in relation to sexuality and morality, especially in the 1990s. He attributes this diminishment of the Catholic Church's power to feminism, sectional interests and to the mass media. In particular he credits the power of television to generate such change, because of the absence of censorship on imported television

³⁷ Mc Avera, 2010, pp.62-69.

³⁸ Tom Inglis, 'Origins and Legacies of Irish Prudery: Sexuality and Social Control in Modern Ireland', *Eire-Ireland*, 40.3/4 (Fall/Winter, 2005), 9-37 (p.17).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.24.

channels.⁴⁰ Using Bourdieu's definition of the 'habitus', he describes how Irish sexuality then 'began to change from fear, doubt, suspicion, guilt and shame towards more positive pleasure and enjoyment'.⁴¹

A measure of this new attitude can be seen in the willingness of Irish people to appear naked in public. In June 2008, 1,200 people took part in a nude photo shoot with photographer Spencer Tunick as part of the Cork Midsummer Festival (fig.1.1).

According to the festival's director 'there are few contemporary artists who have so managed to so capture the spirit of an age'.⁴² Four days later another 2,500 volunteers gathered in Dublin's South Wall for a shoot on the beach in the pouring rain (fig.1.2).⁴³

The following day a smaller shoot took place in Dublin's Docklands, when models were photographed on the balconies of a vacant apartment block (fig.1.3). Spencer Tunick has worked all over the world, photographing ordinary people naked in a variety of locations and situations. He did not have any difficulty getting Irish people to participate in the project. His work is so popular that some people follow him all over the world especially in order to participate in events that many find 'liberating, life affirming', 'exhilarating, exciting' and some even experience as 'catharsis'.⁴⁴ The event was heralded in the press as a measure of the new lack of inhibition in the Irish with the headline 'Hooray for the cultural watershed that celebrated our nakedness'.⁴⁵ However, one commentator remarked that 'I had not seen such an unruly crowd since Lyon', which may be explained by the fact that because the shoot began at 5.00am, many of the participants had spent the entire night in the pub.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Tom Inglis, 'Foucault, Bourdieu and the Field of Irish Sexuality', *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 7 (1997), 5-28.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.6.

⁴² William Gallinsky, 'Irish Rose: Spencer Tunick in Ireland'

<www.nydailynews.com/news/world.irish-rose-spencer-tunick-ireland-gallery-1,0898> [accessed 25/01/09].

⁴³ Radio presenter Ray Darcy took part in the Dublin shoot on June 21st 2008 and discussed the event on his radio programme on 23/06/2008.

⁴⁴ These are the comments of some of the participants on the website dedicated to the testimonials of those who took part in Tunick's shoots, Dublin Docklands, June 21 and 22, 2008.

<www.thespencertunickexperience.org/2008.06_Dublin_Docklands/Dublin_Docklands.html> [accessed 25/01/09].

⁴⁵ Kevin Myers, 'Hooray for Cultural Watershed that Celebrated our Nakedness', *Irish Independent*, June 26, 2008.

⁴⁶ A participant named Stephane, whose views are recorded on the Spencer Tunick experience website <www.thespencertunickexperience.org/2008.06_Dublin_Docklands/Dublin_Docklands.html> [accessed 25/01/09].

If Spencer Tunick's photo-shoots represent the public desire to be naked in the service of art, there are many other opportunities for them to undress for fund-raising or for personal empowerment. These are discussed in chapter 4 in the context of the rise in popularity in nude portraiture, which may be in part a reflection of a development of body consciousness and the rejection of sexual inhibitions in modern Ireland.

Aside from these popular events, there has been a resurgence in life drawing classes in Ireland in recent years. The RHA re-started its life class in 2000 and since then classes at all levels have started up all nationwide. An exhibition of nude paintings and drawings in the Powerscourt gallery opened in September 2011, with a free life class open to all visitors regardless of ability or experience. It proved so popular that they subsequently held an open life class every month.⁴⁷ These developments suggest that there is a new attitude to the nude in Ireland and that prudishness is no longer the dominant characteristic, though clearly individual opinions on public nudity in any form would vary widely. Inglis has concluded that the more Ireland became globalized in the latter half of the 20th century, the more it moved 'from a Catholic culture based on practices of chastity humility piety and self-denial to a liberal-individualist consumer culture of self-indulgence'.⁴⁸ The emphasis now, he maintains, is on 'self-realization'.⁴⁹ However, aside from considerations of Puritanism in the Irish character, there are other quantifiable reasons why the nude was not a common subject for Irish artists. It is exceptional to find Irish artists who specialized in the nude historically; it nevertheless did appear in the oeuvres of many Irish painters, either as studies from the life class or as more finished works intended for exhibition and sale. Sometimes it is the very rarity of these works that makes them particularly interesting. Although, in European art, the nude was traditionally valued above any other subject matter as the supreme expression of form in nature, it is not difficult to see why this was not always the case in Ireland. Among the reasons for its neglect were the restrictive practices in art schools which limited access to the live model, the repressive attitude to the body informed by the Catholic church and the climate of censorship which hung over the arts in general. One of the biggest

⁴⁷ The exhibition ran from 23/09/11-08/10/11, and the class continued on a monthly basis until the gallery closed in 2012.

⁴⁸ Tom Inglis, *Global Ireland: Same Difference* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), p.3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.6.

restrictions placed on artists was by the art teaching establishments, and here there is certainly evidence of Puritanism. It was clearly very difficult for art teaching establishments to hire models for life drawing classes, and this was directly related to the dominance of Catholicism and its attitudes to nudity and sexuality in general. The alternative solution was for Irish artists to travel abroad, to Paris and Antwerp, in order to study the nude in the freer atmosphere of the European ateliers, and this became something of a tradition, for generations of artists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One such artist was Roderic O'Connor who became something of a specialist in the nude but because he never returned to Ireland, he exerted no influence on art in Ireland during his lifetime.⁵⁰

Another reason for the dearth of the nude in Irish art is its traditional association with the aims of history painting, a genre in which few Irish artists have been successful. There are notable exceptions, including Daniel Maclise's large scale history paintings and several works by James Barry.⁵¹ Patrick Tuohy briefly and not very successfully turned to history painting but these were largely religious themes in which there was no justification for nudity.⁵²

The relative scarcity of the nude in Irish art can also be related to the decline of the subject internationally during the period under discussion here. Modernism, with its increasing focus on abstraction dominated the art scene in the U.S.A. and Europe for several decades in the middle of the twentieth century and directly influenced the international climate too, though it has been observed that Ireland, with its rich literary history, was naturally too imbued with narrative to really respond enthusiastically to international modernism.⁵³ However, the modernist ethos was reflected in the teaching of art in national institutions in the 1960s, where drawing from life once again went into decline, in favour of a less rigid, multi-disciplinary approach to teaching.

In the post-modern era, where art is characterized by greater subjectivity and discursivity,

⁵⁰ Anne Crookshank and the Knight of Glin, *Ireland's Painters 1600-1949* (New Haven and London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, Yale University Press, 2002), p.265.

⁵¹ Historical works by Maclise include *The Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife* in the NGI, and his murals in the House of Lords in London. Barry also painted easel paintings and murals, such as those in the Society of Arts, London.

⁵² Of course certain subjects in religious painting were traditionally depicted nude, especially the crucified Christ and St. Sebastian, and Mary Magdalene was often depicted semi-nude.

⁵³ Dorothy Walker, *Modern Art in Ireland* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1997).

the figure has regained its relevance, in Ireland as elsewhere. Examples from the end of the last century, such as Billy Quinn's *Billy*, 1991 (fig.5.30) and Amanda Coogan's *Madonna* series (figs 4.83 and 4.84) use the artist's body as material in order to make self-revelatory, socially significant work that directly questions the influence both of religious and sexual norms in Irish society and their effect on the art it produced. In today's more liberal climate the nude, and more importantly, challenges to the classical treatment of the nude in the canon of art history, have once again become the concern of Irish artists. In an important sense this is because questions of nationality have largely been removed from art production. Artists are no longer bound to particular places, subject matter or themes, as the making of art becomes increasingly internationalized. This is made possible by modern modes of communication and production, as well as a different and more pluralist approach to identity.

Theoretical Approaches to the Nude

Kenneth Clark's book *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, published in 1956, remains the only in-depth survey of the nude, and though heavily critiqued in recent times, is still referred to as a seminal work by most writers on the subject.⁵⁴ In it he crucially differentiated the terms nude and naked, positing them in opposition to each other. For Clark the naked body is revealed in its human imperfection, while the nude represents 'the body re-formed' through art, clothed in the perfected 'idea' of human form. In this process of re-formation, the actual physical body is merely 'a point of departure' and so 'the nude remains the most complete example of the transmutation of matter into form'.⁵⁵ John Berger, whose own seminal work, *Ways of Seeing* was in part a refutation of Clark's *Civilisation: A Personal View*, 1969, designated Clark's approach to art as the preserve of the 'relic specialists'.⁵⁶ However, he accepts Clark's dichotomous use of the terms 'naked' and 'nude', inverting those terms qualitatively to reflect his Marxist belief in the

⁵⁴ Clark, 1956. See also Michael Gill, *Image of the Body* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), and Margaret Walters, *The Male Nude: A New Perspective* (London: Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1978), for an invaluable discussion of the male nude in art.

⁵⁵ Clark, pp.1-9, p.23.

⁵⁶ Clark and Berger both produced popular books and television series. Berger maintained that modern reproduction techniques have supplanted Clark's elitist type of image use. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972), p.32.

socio-political conditions of the means of production of all art and specifically of the female nude. In the relationship between 'representer' and 'represented' Berger maintained that the male artist's presence is predicated on power, whether actual, imagined or longed for, while a woman's is predicated on her internalised identity, and is therefore 'intrinsic to herself'.⁵⁷ His distrust of the term 'nude' stems from his belief that its conventions result in the de-personalisation of the subject represented. As he puts it, 'to be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognised for oneself', and the implication of such objectification in art is the perpetuation of objectification of women in society. He maintains that 'the sight of (the nude) as an object stimulates the use of it as an object'.⁵⁸ In contrast to the cultural conventions of the nude, Berger maintains that 'to be naked is to be oneself', and that the chief defining characteristic of nakedness is 'particularity'.⁵⁹ He therefore excluded from the category of the nude about one hundred paintings 'of loved women, more or less naked', that in his view conveyed enough of the artist's personal vision of the woman portrayed to force the spectator into the position of an outsider.⁶⁰ Among these he singles out for particular attention, Rubens's *Het Pelsken*, 1630s (fig.4.47), an intimate nude portrait of the artist's second wife H el ene Fourment.

Several writers have taken up Clark's dichotomous terminology of the naked and the nude. Alyce Mahon accepts Berger's inversion when she writes that in modernity, 'the *naked* erotic body now supplants the *nude*'.⁶¹ Anne Hollander, finding Clarke's terminology 'useful' nevertheless defined his terms differently. Because of its origins in Greek art, for her the nude is defined by the drapery whose folds delineate the structure of the body and fall away to reveal it, while the naked figure is made so by the proximity of her discarded clothing.⁶² Her distinction rests therefore on the difference between 'dressed' and 'undressed'. However, she maintains that the boundary between these two terms is constantly blurred. Whereas Clark attributes the differences between classical and gothic figural types to matters of evolving taste, Hollander examines these

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.46.

⁵⁸ Ibid. p.54.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.57.

⁶¹ Mahon, p.65.

⁶² Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (London: Penguin, 1988), pp.157-8.

differences in terms of the physical effect of clothing on the human body. The naked body, she maintains, always bears a physical imprint of its clothed self, and so the nude will necessarily reflect the fashions and bodily conventions of its time. It is possible to extend this idea of a social imprint on the body even further, to include the effects of socio-political conditions on the body. As Ruth Barcan puts it, 'the nude body is never naked, if naked means stripped of meaning, value and political import.'⁶³ Nell McCafferty echoed this view when she said, in relation to the nude portrait of her by artist Daniel Mark Duffy, that people come 'clothed in their history'.⁶⁴

Others reject Clark's dualism altogether, claiming instead that there is no pure, un-represented truth, in terms of human form. Chief among these is Lynda Nead, who claims that Clark's 'discourse on the naked and the nude...depends upon the theoretical possibility, if not the actuality, of a physical body that is outside of representation and is then given representation, for better or for worse, through art; but even at the most basic levels the body is always produced through representation.'⁶⁵ She goes on to identify Clark's oppositional terms of 'naked' and 'nude' as signifying another set of dichotomous ideas such as mind/body, culture/nature, reason/passion, subject/object, which are rooted in a male/female opposition and have wrongly been expressed as mutually exclusive concepts. Nead is also critical of Berger's inversion of Clark's terminology, and questions his idea that the 'naked' body is freed from the constraints of representation that attach to the nude, and is therefore somehow a truer reflection of the subject depicted.

Few modern readers could doubt the breadth and erudition of Clark's research. However, many may have difficulty with his connoisseurial approach to the subject, and his judgements on the merits of individual works based on attuned personal taste, which in turn is a product of a particular form of elitist education and class. Though it is a scholarly work it is important to remember that it is a work of its time, and as such predates many of the discourses on the body upon which so much recent writing is based.

⁶³ Ruth Barcan, *Nudity: A Cultural Anatomy* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), p.9.

⁶⁴ Nell McCafferty in conversation with the author, 07/07/2012. Duffy's portrait of Nell McCafferty is discussed in chapter four of this thesis.

⁶⁵ Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.16.

While Berger is highly critical of Clark's approach to his subject, in certain important ways he maintains its paternalistic focus. His justification for his re-classification of certain nudes from the canon is based on his perception of the relationship between the painter and the model in very specific images. In attempting to illustrate and even undermine the traditional power structure of the artist's studio, he is in danger of over-sentimentalizing historical relationships of which the modern viewer can, after all, have no reliable knowledge. The relationship between Rubens and H el ene Fourment is indeterminable from his representations of her, and the viewer's perception of any such quality of 'belovedness' in the subject must originate in their own empathetic response to the image. Therefore Berger's assumption of the benign relationship of artist and model in those works marked out by him as exceptional to the canon, is unreliable.⁶⁶ However, Berger's argument can be looked at in another way, in terms of the affectiveness of an image, and Marcia Pointon has argued that this is a quality of 'good' paintings. She sees 'quality' as a necessary characteristic in art that continues to affect people over time, and defends the idea of the 'authority' of canonical works of art, paintings she describes as 'those never out of the canon, those never relegated to the store'.⁶⁷ The power of these works, she believes, rests in their potential for 'communication as intersubjectivity'.⁶⁸ For this process to occur, the term must accommodate the intentions of the artist, the painting's accumulated associations over time, and the subjectivity of the viewer. These are exactly the kinds of paintings that Berger singles out in his argument. The potential for exploitation in the relationship between painter and model has been well documented.⁶⁹ At the same time, modern discourses on human agency allow that power shifts along a line rather than existing in a fixed and un-changing relationship.⁷⁰ Berger's thesis implies a tacit acceptance of the inequality of power between (male) artist and (female) model as long as it is wielded benignly. His essentialist remarks about the

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.15.

⁶⁷ Pointon, 1990, p.3.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.6.

⁶⁹ See especially Carol Duncan, 'Virility and Domination in early 20th century Painting', in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, edited by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), pp.293-314, and 'The MOMA's Hot Mamas' in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, ed. by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), pp.347-358. Duncan's arguments are discussed in the introduction to chapter five in this thesis.

⁷⁰ Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power' in *Art After Modernism*, ed. by Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), pp.417-434.

differences between men and women, so that '*men act and women appear*', arguably reinforces the traditional understanding of societal gender roles⁷¹, and does not allow for the possibility of a female artist directing her gaze at a male subject. Moreover his choice of the exceptional works no longer to be called nudes is a personal and subjective one, and in this respect his methodological approach resembles Clark's in that it privileges the 'expert' view over the experience of the general viewer and places the male (in this case) commentator in a position of arbitration.

Theorizing the Male Gaze

The idea of the male gaze has come to have a negative connotation in art history because of its association with pleasurable looking and the fact that it is perceived to operate 'in the service of issues of power, manipulation, and desire'. Much influential scholarship on the specifically male gaze originated in modern film studies. In her essay on the subject, Laura Mulvey examines the patriarchal nature of the Hollywood film industry and the way in which 'mainstream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order', until the partial dismantling of the studio system in the 1970s.⁷² Her thesis that 'pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female', is substantially in agreement with Berger's assertion that 'men look at women, women watch themselves being looked at'.⁷³ She refers to Freud's idea of *Scopophilia*, or extreme pleasure in looking, as a fetish used by the film industry to foster voyeuristic looking or narcissistic looking, depending on the gender of the viewer. In such a scenario, she maintains, 'the determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly'.⁷⁴ During this process, women become exhibitionists who conspire in their own '*to-be-looked-at-ness*', by playing 'to the male gaze'.⁷⁵ In his turn the male deals with her presence by demystifying her in a sadistic fashion or by

⁷¹ Berger, 1972, p.47.

⁷² Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* 16.3, 1975, 6-18 (p.16).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.19. Berger 1972, p.47. Berger points out that in art the idea of being looked at is often the subject of paintings of the nude, in subjects such as *Susannah and the Elders*, or *The Judgement of Paris*.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.19

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

fetishizing her beauty as a satisfying entity in itself.⁷⁶ On this subject, Berger's emphasis is slightly different. In paintings made for the male gaze, he maintains, the subject's nakedness is 'not an expression of her own feelings; it is a sign of her submission to the owner's feelings or demands'.⁷⁷ There is a large measure of agreement between Berger and Mulvey, but whereas his focus is, as ever, materialistic, concerned as it is with the economic power of ownership, hers is on the patriarchal nature of the socially constructed image of femininity.

Like Mulvey, Ann E. Kaplan uses a psychoanalytical approach to the question of the male gaze in her article entitled *Is the gaze necessarily male?*⁷⁸ In this work she deliberates on the nature of the female spectator and the possibility of her re-structuring the viewing process so that women could come to 'own the gaze?'⁷⁹ In an attempt to steer a middle course between an essentialist and a constructivist stance she acknowledges that 'the dominance-submission patterns are apparently a crucial part of *both* male and female sexuality in western civilization'.⁸⁰ Hence, for her, the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' are myths which revolve first on a complex gaze apparatus and second on dominance-submission patterns', rather than fixed characteristics of actual men and women.⁸¹ Her conclusion that 'the gaze is not necessarily male (literally)' is mitigated by her insistence that in order for women to control it they must themselves occupy the dominant 'masculine' position'.⁸² The inference is that the condition of power is masculine, and that the male gaze 'carries with it the power of action and of possession which is lacking in the female gaze'.⁸³

Feminist theory, such as that of Mulvey and Kaplan has been critiqued for failing to take account of the 'internal differences' in the male viewpoint that may make such ideological assumptions untenable.⁸⁴ Edward Snow posits the possibility of replacing the

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Berger, 1972, p.52.

⁷⁸ Ann E. Kaplan, 'Is the Gaze Male', in *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (New York and London, Methuen, 1983) pp.25-35.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp.24-5.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 1983, p.27 (my italics).

⁸¹ Ibid., p.29.

⁸² Ibid., p.30.

⁸³ Ibid., p.31.

⁸⁴ Edward Snow, 'Theorizing the Male Gaze: Some Problems', *Representations*, 25, 1989, 30-41

terms 'male' and 'female' with 'masculine' and 'feminine' in an attempt to define the inequality of power relations without relating these to biological determinism. His fear is that in assigning specific, immutable attitudes to each gender we run the 'risk of occluding whatever in the gaze *resists* being understood in those terms'.⁸⁵ His concern seems not so much that women can own the gaze, as that men might be able to disown it. Marcia Pointon has critiqued Berger for what she calls the 'limitations of the left in dealing with images and pleasure', and she might have levelled the same criticism at Laura Mulvey, whose avowed intention is to destroy the pleasure principle.⁸⁶ While she accepts that patriarchy may be the condition of production for the female nude, she argues that it shouldn't be allowed to frame the discourse, arguing instead that the work should be allowed to 'speak for itself'.⁸⁷ She questions whether gender became 'a stick with which to beat art and artists' in feminist art history, and whether the complex process of viewing art became over-simplified in arguments about the male gaze.⁸⁸ If Snow's opinion was simply a contrary male view one might question its contribution to a feminist discourse which attempts to restore the voice of the represented female. However, some feminist writers also contest the view that the gaze operates in one direction only.

One critique of Mulvey's theory is that she fails to account for the female gaze, the gay gaze or 'multiple identifications'.⁸⁹ Olin defines the term Suture, used in film making, to illustrate that the gaze is often used selectively because the viewpoint of the camera fixes itself on a particular character in the narrative and the viewer is free to identify with her or not. She maintains that the usefulness of the gaze lies in its ability to be

(p.31). His article attempts to re-interpret the male gaze, specifically in relation to Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus*.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.31.

⁸⁶ Pointon, 1990, p.4. Mulvey, 1975, p.16. In a similar vein, Peter Fuller has written that Berger's *Ways of Seeing* 'suffers from the limitations of polemics'. Peter Fuller, *Seeing Through Berger* (London and Lexington: The Claridge Press, 1988), p.15.

⁸⁷ Pointon, 1990, p.4.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.5.

⁸⁹ Margaret Olin, 'Gaze' in *Critical Terms for Art History*, second edition, ed. by Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp.318-129 (p.323).

'reciprocated'.⁹⁰ The reciprocated gaze 'whether evaluated positively or negatively', contains within it 'the sense of a human presence who is alive to our own presence that constitutes the encounter theorized as the gaze'.⁹¹

Furthermore, Carol Ockman questions the feminist assumption that paintings of naked women are always intended for the male gaze and examines the potential for female pleasure in 'objectified' female nudes.⁹² She cites in particular the case of Caroline Bonaparte who, as Queen of Naples, commissioned *La Grande Odalisque*, from Ingres in 1814.⁹³ The painting was intended as a pendant to *Sleeper of Naples* by Ingres (now lost), purchased in 1809, and in the second composition the figures were reversed, showing the nude from behind, making not just a complementary pair, but 'a chaste antipode to its unabashedly sexy pendent'.⁹⁴ In this account of female patronage of erotic images she examines the motivation behind such collecting practices, and raises the question of whether social and political position inure a female collector from the implications of an eroticized image. In other words, the woman buying the picture is not the one being objectified. Looked at from Berger's point of view, this equates to the economic power of the patron and even in the somewhat unusual circumstances of that power being wielded by a woman, the commodification process is unchanged; both the painting, and the woman represented in it, are up for sale. In Kaplan's terms, Queen Caroline in this instance occupies a masculine position, regardless of her biological gender. Mulvey might argue that the patriarchal society into which she was born (then so much more than now) had conditioned her to identify with, accept, and even enjoy such objectification of women.

Notwithstanding Kaplan's acknowledgement of the complexities of sexual difference, and Snow's refutation of the inherently male gaze, the notion of gender itself bears some

⁹⁰ Olin cites Walker Evans' photograph *Sharecropper's Wife*, 1941 as an example of a reciprocated gaze. Manet's *Olympia* is another case in point.

⁹¹ Olin, p.328.

⁹² Carol Ockman, 'A Woman's Pleasure: Ingres's Grande Odalisque', in *Reclaiming Female Agency*, ed. by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1995), pp.187-201.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.187. Caroline Bonaparte Murat was the youngest sister of Napoleon Bonaparte and married to Joachim Murat, his aide-de-camp. Together they were King and Queen of Naples from 1808-15.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

examination. The emergence of gay culture into the mainstream, coupled with a general awareness of alternative sexualities, has contributed to a much more complex understanding of gender and sexuality in recent times. In the 1980s Hudson identified sixteen different types of gender identity arraigned along a scale ranging from female to male. At either end, he writes, are 'the man and woman whom the Victorians would have recognised as 'normal' and whose solutions are internally consistent'.⁹⁵ While biology is usually clear from birth, along this scale gender identity varies from weak to strong, and admits of doubts, depending on 'object-choice' and sexual orientation, both of which can be latent, and emerge in adulthood.⁹⁶ There are sexual dissonances within people and between them, he maintains, which are revealed in the subconscious and in fiction and art. Taking this theory into account, the terms masculine and feminine may ultimately prove just as problematic as male and female.

In *Gender Trouble, Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 1989, Judith Butler calls for gender 'troubling', or the un-doing of inherited gender assumptions. She maintains that feminists have been too focussed on the issue of gender difference, to the extent that they have risked reinforcing traditional gender oppositions. Alternatively she views gender not as natural but 'performed'.⁹⁷ For Pointon too, gender in the viewer is 'a set of possibilities' rather than a fixed state, and meanings reside in the 'intersubjectivity' of artists and viewers.⁹⁸ That heterosexual gender norms have already lost some of their assumptions is due in part to the influence of Queer theory, which as well as theorizing masculinities has also questioned the assumptions of the straight role in society and the binary oppositions, masculine/feminine, identity/difference, private/public etc., that enforce them.⁹⁹ These new approaches to the performance of identity and its fluidity inform the discussion on the representation of masculinities in chapter 5.

⁹⁵ Liam Hudson, *Bodies of Knowledge: The Psychological Significance of the Nude in Art* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982), p.29.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.25-7.

⁹⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1989). See also Mahon, 2007, p.264 for her account of gender that is 'fluid'.

⁹⁸ Pointon, 1990, p.8.

⁹⁹ Mahon, 2007, p.262.

Aesthetic Responses to the Nude

The dependence on Kantian aesthetics in the work of Clark and others has led to a prolonged insistence on a separation of the aesthetic function of art from its erotic function. However, this separation is historically inaccurate, as any examination of patterns of patronage from the sixteenth century up to and including contemporary times, will demonstrate. The Kantian idea of disinterestedness can also be seen to have influenced modernist approaches to art and ultimately the repression of the body in favour of abstraction. However, the re-instatement of the cultural discourse on beauty at the end of the twentieth century reflects the fact that in the minds of viewers, the concepts of beauty (or ugliness) and eroticism are often inextricably bound up in their responses to representations of the nude. There follows an appraisal of aesthetics from antiquity to post-modernism and an attempt to relate these theoretical viewpoints to ways in which the nude body has been conceptualized and represented in art.

Perhaps the most limiting aspect of Clark's interpretation of the nude is his failure to escape the bounds of an understanding of beauty that was arguably already dated in the 1950s. He maintained that the prototype of beauty developed by the Greeks, based on body worship, proportion, the *dipendenza* of body to architecture, and the embodiment of objects and ideas, remained relevant in his own time.¹⁰⁰ For the Greeks, the achievement of beauty entailed the harmonious combination of matter and imagination. However, beauty is also 'an elusive category', often discussed in terms of form and expression, and in ancient times generally allied to mimesis, the representation of nature.¹⁰¹

A divergence of views on the mind/body dichotomy has been part of the Western philosophical tradition from Plato, through Descartes, to Kant. The first mature formulated aesthetic theory derives from Plato, who envisioned reality in parallel to a supra-temporal world of ideas, so that objects in the material world can be seen as mere physical copies of eternal ideas.¹⁰² To illustrate this concept, Plato described the perfect

¹⁰⁰ Clark, 1956.

¹⁰¹ Mahon, 2007, p.39.

¹⁰² Hugh Bredin and Liberato Santoro-Brienza, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Introducing Aesthetics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).

couch made by God, then considered the couch made by carpenter, which is a functional object, and lastly a representation of the carpenter's couch painted by an artist, which is, in essence, a copy of the carpenter's couch. Hence for Plato the work of the artist exists at two removes from nature, or God.¹⁰³ As Mahon observes, 'if we replace Plato's couch with the representation of the figure, or the female nude, it is twice removed from the divine, however idealized it is, and thus more likely to tempt and distract the viewer from the divine than to lead to self-improvement'.¹⁰⁴ Plato defined beauty, goodness and truth as co-extensional terms, and beauty as being independent of function. In other words, a thing is not good and beautiful because we like it, rather we like it because it is good and beautiful. Therefore beauty, in Platonic terms, is an intrinsic characteristic of the object.¹⁰⁵

Aristotle did not believe in the necessity for art to be representational, nor did he accept Plato's definition of art as the production of simulacra. In Aristotelian terms, art does not consist in copying a pre-existing state of affairs, but in forming an ideal state of affairs, in which utility was accidental rather than essential. However, his definition of beauty as 'order, symmetry and definiteness' was in line with Plato's thinking. Together Plato and Aristotle formed the basis for all subsequent Western thought on aesthetics, which would be linked to notions of the divine until secularized by Hegel in the eighteenth century. Hegel accepted the ancient definition of beauty as symmetry, order and revelation of the spiritual, but identified a crisis in the harmony between art of his time and the absolute values of idealism and universality, and with his thinking the idea of beauty as a condition of art began to decline.¹⁰⁶

The idea of beauty changed in the eighteenth century, when it ceased to be seen as an inherent quality of the object and came to be understood as an idea in the mind of the viewer, and therefore entirely subjective. Since then the idea of beauty has been highly contested.

¹⁰³ Plato, *The Republic*, book 10, cited in Mahon, 2007, pp.39-40.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.40.

¹⁰⁵ Bredin and Santoro-Brienza, 2000.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

The discipline of Aesthetics can be said to have begun with Plato and Aristotle, in whose works art and beauty were discussed in tandem. However the term was not formally introduced until 1750 when Alexander Baumgarten used it in his *Aesthetica*, and defined it as ‘inferior, non-rational cognition that one attains through beautiful objects and art’.¹⁰⁷ Baumgarten was indebted to the ideas of Johann Wincklemann (1717-1768) who is often credited with the invention of the academic discipline of the history of art. He related ‘beauty’ to a strict set of criteria, and particular works, while, at the same time, acknowledging it as experienced by the viewer. In these terms beauty can be understood to have both an objective and a subjective reality, to be arrived at through contemplation and reflection, and derived from an ‘idea’ rather than specific form.¹⁰⁸ Baumgarten expanded the original Greek term, which meant ‘sense perception’, to mean ‘a general study of a sense of beauty or taste’. The term was adopted by Kant in his *Critique of Judgement*, and has been endlessly interrogated for its precise meaning ever since, especially since ‘under this usage the boundary between criticism and philosophy becomes blurry’.¹⁰⁹

In modern discourses on the body an attempt has been made to reclaim the more corporeal meaning of the original term. Terry Eagleton maintains that ‘aesthetics is born as a discourse of the body’ because its root, the Greek *aisthesis* relates to the entire field of human perception and sensation, and not just to art or to conceptual thought.¹¹⁰ Another view sees the twenty-first century as ‘Aristotelian in spirit; for, like Aristotle, we are interested primarily in the structures and semiotics of art’.¹¹¹

Whereas Plato had imagined the body as the ‘exterior environment’ for the soul, Descartes sought to separate the body from the mind theoretically.¹¹² Descartes’ rationalism, with its proviso of *Cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am) emphasized the subjectivity of taste, ingenuity, wit, and sensibility in human perception and thought. In

¹⁰⁷ Carolyn Korsmeyer, ‘Introduction: Philosophy, Aesthetics and Feminist Scholarship’ in *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective*, ed. by Hilde Hein and Carolyn Korsmeyer (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), note 4, p.xv.

¹⁰⁸ Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Beauty and Art 1750-2000*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, World of Art Series, 2005).

¹⁰⁹ Korsmeyer, p.ix.

¹¹⁰ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1990), p.13.

¹¹¹ Bredin and Santoro-Brienza, 2000, p.34.

¹¹² Amelia Jones, ‘Body’, in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. by Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) pp.251-266 (p.251).

it can also be found the root of the conceptual separation of male and female. Before Descartes the natural world was seen as female, but Descartes has been seen to recast knowledge and reason as positivist and masculine, in 'an aggressive intellectual flight from the feminine'.¹¹³ It was Descartes who created the condition of 'separation of knower from known', which was adopted by modern philosophy and science. According to that system the human and natural worlds were separated into 'two distinct substances – the spiritual and the corporeal – that share no qualities (other than being created), permit an interaction but no merging, and, indeed, are each defined precisely in opposition to the other'.¹¹⁴ This development allowed for the scientific exploration and categorization of the natural world; as 'she' became 'it' the positivist quantification of nature became the norm.¹¹⁵ Within this division 'masculine' came to be described not as a biological category but 'a cognitive style, an epistemological stance' whose 'key term is detachment: from the emotional life, from the particularities of time and place, from personal quirks, prejudices, and interests, and most centrally, from the object itself'.¹¹⁶

For many feminists Cartesian thought represented an exclusion of the feminine from intellectual life, and a relegation of the female to the realm of matter. This thinking was both reflected in, and conditioned responses to, the representation of the female nude. For some 'the goal of Cartesian thought is the creation of distinct boundaries to one's sense of self, the creation of an absolute distinction between the spiritual and the corporeal with the complete transcendence of mind over body'.¹¹⁷ Mahon argues that such traditional oppositions between male (rationality, logic, linearity, solidity, contemplation) and female (emotionality, irrationality, fluidity, sensual pleasure) set up in antiquity, and consolidated in Cartesian thought, account for our view of the female nude and 'calls for a *contemplative* visual experience even when faced with a representation of a desirable erotic female'. In this way, Cartesian thought advocates control of the body by the mind, and denies the possibility of eroticism in the female

¹¹³ Susan Bordo, 'The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought', *Signs*, II.3, Spring 1986, 439-456 (p.441).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.450.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.452.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.451.

¹¹⁷ Nead, 1997, p.23.

nude.¹¹⁸

The theoretical split between body and mind established by Descartes had begun to be questioned by Nietzsche's time, at the end of the nineteenth century, and this challenge heralded the beginning of the end of the sway of Cartesian thought over Western conceptions of self.¹¹⁹ For Nietzsche, the 'death of God' removed the boundary between body and mind, as there was no longer any necessity for an outward identification of the soul to balance the animal body. Art history and aesthetics emanating from the enlightenment accepted the 'Cartesian notion of a disembodied, disinterested, empowered subject', but post-Cartesian thinking expanded 'the understanding of the person or subject as embodied and intersubjective: the subject as a body/self always contingent on others rather than full within itself'.¹²⁰

If in Cartesian thought the body had to be transcended, Freudian thinking saw its repression as the root cause of most forms of psychosis. Feminists have argued that both systems excluded the feminine, and that 'by virtue of the very obsessive desire to eradicate the body it became a ubiquitous-if repressed-subtext for all Western philosophy, including aesthetics'.¹²¹

Immanuel Kant in his *'Critique of Judgement'* marks a new beginning in Aesthetics with the birth of Idealism. He imagined a third faculty, between knowledge and will, in the ability to experience the feeling of pleasure or displeasure in art and to express delight. It is to Kant's view of aesthetics that Clark is most indebted in his descriptions of the idealized body, yet this is problematic because the two ideas most central to Kant's thesis, are 'subjectivity' and 'disinterested pleasure', and the degree to which these ideas can be applied to the human body is highly contentious. Kant maintained that beauty, because un-provable, is not an objective quality that is inherent in the object. Rather, the experience of beauty is subjective, and therefore taste belongs in the realm of the emotions rather than the intellect. Expressed in these terms the formation of an Aesthetic

¹¹⁸ Mahon, 2007, p.40.

¹¹⁹ Jones points out that the Cartesian separation of body and mind had already been challenged contemporaneously by Julien Offray de la Mettrie in his 1748 treatise *L'homme machine*, in which he maintained that mind and body were linked. Jones, 1996, p.251.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.252-3.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

judgement implies an understanding, rather than knowledge of, the object under consideration, which results in a harmony between the imagination and understanding. Such judgements are made on the basis of disinterested pleasure. By this Kant meant that beauty is contemplative, rather than gratifying or desirous, and therefore nothing can be gained by it. He believed that only such objects that were thus defined could be called beautiful. He further qualified this idea by his use of the terms 'free' and 'dependent' beauty, free beauty being a condition of any thing of which the beholder can have no interest in its material qualities, and is thus more characteristic of a conceptual idea than a material object. The making of art is thus, in itself, too 'purposeful' to be compatible with Kant's idea of free beauty. Indeed, few works of art can be considered 'free' in these terms, and any that are idealized or perfect, and especially 'anything involving the human figure can only be a dependent beauty'.¹²²

The question arises, then, whether beauty was, for Kant, entirely subjective. Taste, he argued, was subjective and at the same time universal, because all minds are alike and agree on it. This argument, 'that the basis of a judgement of beauty is disinterested pleasure and should be conceived of as universal because the basis of the experience of beauty is perceptual form and is intersubjective' is widely critiqued.¹²³ Kant, according to Jones, 'pushed Cartesianism to its logical extreme'. She sees his oversimplification of the central idea of disinterestedness as a strategy for steering a middle course between potentially conflicting universal and particular judgements of taste.¹²⁴ One of the implications of such a position was that 'the body was repressed and became strategically invisible in art critical discourses informed by Kantian aesthetics'.¹²⁵ It is precisely these Kantian ideas of 'disinterestedness' and 'taste' that characterise Clark's approach to the nude, and perhaps explain his distaste for or avoidance of the corporeal and the abject, and render his writing somewhat archaic compared to contemporary philosophical approaches to the nude. Conversely, it has been argued that it is particularly the category of the female nude that strains this idea of universal judgement being possible, because it

¹²² Prettejohn, 2005, p.52. She points out the contradiction of Winckelmann's view that the body is the source of the highest beauty in art.

¹²³ Ivan Gaskell, 'Beauty', in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. by Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp.267-280.

¹²⁴ Jones, 1996, p.253.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.254.

belongs simultaneously to the two opposed spheres of art and obscenity, the sexual body being outside the sphere of art, while the nude is the body contained and regulated within it. Nead draws a comparison to the opposition set up by Kant and Burke between beauty and the sublime, which, forces us to 'recognize the limits of reason'.¹²⁶ The sublime, she writes, is 'a disturbing category, for in its promise of form without limits it shatters the form/matter duality and reminds us of the social nature of all categories and boundaries', and is therefore better suited to discussions on the representation of the female nude.¹²⁷ Similarly, for James Elkins, looking is never innocuous and he discounts the possibility of disinterested seeing. He writes, 'I cannot look at *anything* – any object, any person – without the shadow of the thought of possessing that thing. Those appetites don't just accompany looking: they are looking itself.'¹²⁸ Instead he sees looking as a two way process, in which the viewer, the process of looking and the object all exist in a fluid interrelationship to each other. Furthermore, he maintains that to equate seeing with desire is to suggest that there is ordinary looking and reflective looking, and by indulging in the latter, art historians are wont to deny their own subjectivity in their attempt to become disinterested viewers.¹²⁹ This point is reiterated in chapter five, below, by Christopher Reed, in the context of the discussion on the representation of masculinities, when he remarks on the habitual blindness of art historians to the sexuality of homosexual artists and their images. For Elkins seeing can never be fully objective because the viewer is wholly involved in the world. Furthermore, because Kant supplied a law for determining beauty but he didn't supply the necessary conditions for beauty, and because nobody else has since, beauty remains a problematic concept.

Twentieth century aesthetics became the philosophy of art, not beauty. One strand of thought, nominalism, viewed works of art as diverse and not indicative of a single class of objects. Further, it is thought that the class is never complete as new forms of art are constantly emerging and therefore art is an open concept. Alternately, the institutional

¹²⁶ Nead, 1992, p.26.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ James Elkins, *The Object Stares Back* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), pp.22-4.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p.24.

theory of art regards all works of art as artifacts which have their status conferred on them by the institutionalized art world.

Early modernism represented a departure from mimesis and from 'aesthetic rectitude'.¹³⁰ However, in modernist theory the idea that art is detached from utilitarian and moral considerations is reflected in the maxim 'form over content', which implies a tacit acceptance of Kant's theory of disinterestedness, and a belief in the possibility of 'an objective – disembodied, logical, "correct" – evaluation of the aesthetic value and meaning of artworks'.¹³¹ These views were encapsulated in the influential writings of Clement Greenberg, whose very function as the 'disinterested' critic has been critiqued for his disavowal of subjectivity. As Jones writes, 'Because disinterestedness requires the suppression of those bodily functions that would serve to point to the specificity of the critic's subjectivity and his openness to or desire for others, this aspect of Greenberg's model perpetuates the unspoken privilege of the white male subject in Western patriarchy'.¹³² Because modernism sprang conceptually from the Enlightenment it came to be seen as a rarefied culture, which provoked the counter-project of the avant-garde. The suppressed 'surrealist revolt' would re-emerge in post-modern art.¹³³

Post-Modern Aesthetics

Hal Foster defines post-modernism as a break with aesthetics, one of the 'master narratives' of modernity, which resulted in its maxim 'art for art's sake'.¹³⁴ Modernism, once oppositional, had become culturally dominant, and needed to be exceeded. Others refer to this development in late modernism as critical modernism.¹³⁵ In post-modernism, with its reliance on structuralism and semiotics, 'the unique, symbolic, visionary' *work* of modernism became instead the text of post-modernism – "already written", allegorical, contingent'.¹³⁶ Foster identifies two post-modernisms, one of resistance and one of

¹³⁰ Arthur Danto, *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art* (Chicago and La Salle, Ill.: Open court, 2003), p.27.

¹³¹ Jones, 1996, pp.251-266.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.254.

¹³³ Hal Foster, *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays in Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1985), p.viii.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.xiii.

¹³⁵ Charles Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-modernism Going* (London: John Wiley, 1977).

¹³⁶ Foster, 1985, pp.viii-ix.

reaction. The former, he maintains, 'is concerned with a critical deconstruction of tradition, not an instrumental pastiche of pop or pseudo- historical forms, with a critique of origins, not a return to them'. This he calls the anti-aesthetic, wherein the very idea of an aesthetic experience that is outside of history and of social and political influences in 'in question'. The post-modernism of reaction repudiates modernism, celebrates the status quo, and represents a neo-conservative, strategic return to tradition.¹³⁷ The arguments for and against the restitution of beauty have changed. In the anti-aesthetic of 1960s the argument mainly concerned 'the dematerialization of the art commodity and its perceptual pleasures', while critical post-modernism of the 1980s was indebted to structuralist and post-structuralist theory, and therefore saw 'subjectivity as historically contingent and aesthetic affect as socially produced'.¹³⁸

During the 1990s the idea of beauty re-surfaced. The attempt to revive the idea of beauty has been labelled as nostalgic, ahistorical, anti-modernist and anti-political. Certainly, it may be anti-leftist, as the debate is characterized by a strong left-right divide, with those on the conservative side favouring the re-introduction of the concept of beauty as a return to traditional cultural values, while those on the left remain convinced in their opposition to such norms. Their stance has been labelled the anti-aesthetic, as it questions the viability of 'concepts derived from Enlightenment aesthetics and their frequent alignment with conservative interests'.¹³⁹ Frederick Jameson resists the restitution of beauty as ideologically motivated, and associated with the 'spectacle' of capitalism, and commodification.¹⁴⁰ In contrast, Roger Scruton proposes an alternative reading of modernism – one which allows that beauty has a place and 'sees the goal of the modern artist not as a break with tradition, but as a recapturing of tradition, in circumstances for which the artistic legacy has made little or no provision'.¹⁴¹ He believes that the denial of beauty in contemporary art 'cultivates a posture of transgression, matching the ugliness of the things it portrays with an ugliness of its own', and that 'the art of desecration... lies

¹³⁷ Foster, 1985, p.x-xiii.

¹³⁸ Alexander Alberro, 'Beauty Knows No Pain', *Art Journal*, 63.2, (Summer, 2004), 36-41 (p.21).

¹³⁹ James Meyer and Toni Ross, 'Aesthetic/Anti-Aesthetic: An Introduction', *Art Journal*, 63.2 (Summer, 2004), 20-23 (p.20).

¹⁴⁰ Frederick Jameson, 'Transformation of the Image in Postmodernity', in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern*, (London: Verso, 1998).

¹⁴¹ Roger Scruton, *Beauty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.171.

at the centre of the postmodern experience'.¹⁴² Meanwhile, Terry Eagleton is critical of the right for refusing to see the link between aesthetics and ideology and of the left for dismissing aesthetics as mere 'bourgeois ideology' in their turn.¹⁴³

Arthur Danto attempts to find a middle way between these ideological extremes by way of his concept of 'internal beauty'. To ascertain whether a work has internal beauty one must enquire if the object is intrinsically beautiful. The object that Danto uses to illustrate his thesis is Duchamp's *Fountain*, 1917. Assuming the viewer can identify some intrinsic beauty in that object, he then asks, is the work beautiful? To which the answer must be no, if the viewer has any awareness of Duchamp's intentions in its making. For Danto, internal beauty is present in art, when its presence is part of the meaning of the art. Beauty that is incidental to the work, or the artist's intentions, is merely external beauty. Danto also challenges Foster's view of the postmodern as an era of 'radical openness in which everything is possible in art', when he writes, 'what is perhaps less evident is that the pluralism extends to aesthetics itself. If everything is possible in art, everything is possible in aesthetics as well'. This, he maintains, is the ironic legacy of the 'intractable avant-garde'.¹⁴⁴ Kant's notion of subjectivity as particular but universal is a contentious issue for both sides and the modern debate hinges on the importance of subjectivity and on broader socio-cultural formations.

Danto's assertion that 'beauty is always easy to see', suggests that certain objects do indeed have intrinsic beauty.¹⁴⁵ If that is the case and if it is also true that 'beautiful art sells' in the commercial marketplace, this would infer that Kant's idea of subjectivity being at once personal and universal is possible, while at the same time it would explain the critical disavowal of beauty in modernist theory, which opens a gap between popular consumption of art and critical discourse.¹⁴⁶ The problem, as identified by Alberro, is that if beauty is to have a meaningful social role, it needs to be reconnected to the political.

Danto argues that there is 'no reason, internal to the concept of art, for artists to confine

¹⁴² Ibid., pp.168-76.

¹⁴³ Eagleton, 1990, p.8.

¹⁴⁴ Danto, 2003, p.27.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.28.

¹⁴⁶ Dave Hickey, *The Invisible Dragon: Essays on Beauty* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

themselves to beauty or such other of the aesthetic qualities that evoke visual pleasure'. For him good art can even be ugly, yet at the same time he insists that art that is beautiful does not necessarily exclude the political.¹⁴⁷

Feminist aesthetics critiques Kant's theory, particularly when it considers his idea of disinterestedness. It argues that an 'apprehension of aesthetic qualities transcends personal interests and concentrates one's attention on the object of appreciation itself', and is therefore incompatible with other moral and social values pertaining to the subject.¹⁴⁸ Rather, awareness of gender leads to attention being put on the act of perception and on the social and political condition of the beholder. This in turn infers a wider range of conditions and perspectives than the feminist. Rather it proposes the inclusion of 'a complex model of readers and beholders whose particular genders, histories and other "differences" such as race and cultural situation frame interpretation and the ascription of value'.¹⁴⁹ This approach places the emphasis on the particular rather than the general, and has obvious implications for the representation of the nude. Furthermore, this move away from the possibility of 'disinterest' is not confined to feminist literature.¹⁵⁰ Feminists also critique traditional dominative dualisms, which are perceived to have their roots in 'somatophobic dualism', and favour openness and self-reflexive innovation instead. In this vein Hein advocates the promotion of a 'feminist aesthetics' not a 'feminist aesthetic', arguing for a pluralist and inclusive approach.¹⁵¹ Another strain of feminist thought calls for a repositioning of the idea of the sublime. Alexander Alberro has observed that 'the idea of the beautiful has been suppressed whether by the incursion of the sublime or the dimension of the political'.¹⁵² The idea of

¹⁴⁷ By ugly art Danto specifically refers to Dieter Roth's *Tibidabo*, 1978 a sound piece which consists of twenty four hours of unrelenting dog barking. The work he cites as beautiful political art is David's *Á Marat*. Danto, 2003, p.33.

¹⁴⁸ Korsmeyer, 1993, pp.vii-viii.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.viii.

¹⁵⁰ See Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University Press, 2001, George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis*, (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1974) and Joseph Margolis, *Art and Philosophy* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980).

¹⁵¹ Hilde Hein, 'Refining Feminist Theory: Lessons from Aesthetics', in *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective*, ed. by Hilde Hein and Carolyn Korsmeyer (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp.3-20.

¹⁵² Alberro, 2004, p.37.

the sublime was revived in the 1980s and became something of a postmodern buzz word, even as its corollary, beauty, was being dismissed.¹⁵³

Kant defined the sublime in opposition to the beautiful; the beautiful encapsulating formal order, proportion and harmony, while the sublime exceeds order, measure and sense.¹⁵⁴ It therefore awakens in the viewer the sense of her limitations, it challenges rather than comforts. Modern art concentrated on the sublime at the expense of the beautiful, as it sought for the 'unrepresentable in representation'.¹⁵⁵ This was also problematic because it perpetuated the idea found in eighteenth century discourses of the sublime as masculine and beauty as feminine. Many feminists, notably Nead, have argued for the necessity of a revision of these terms to allow for the feminine sublime, a concept which, she believes, may present new ways to create a feminist aesthetic on the female body and subjectivities. Unlike beauty, traditionally a female attribute at least in modernism, the sublime 'is also where a certain deviant or transgressive form of femininity is played out. It is where woman goes beyond her proper boundaries and gets out of place'.¹⁵⁶

In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva investigates the abject, discovering in it the inability to achieve a fixed and stable identity, and for this reason finds it to be conceptually linked to the feminine.¹⁵⁷ For her, female subjectivity depends on an awareness of the duality inherent in the subject/object duality of the body, between exterior and interior. The exterior social body controls the impure aspects of the self, such as the bodily functions, which properly belong to the interior body. The abject is the space between subject and object, a place of desire and danger, related to the sublime, where bodily fluids compromise female identity. It is in this marginal space, she maintains, that personal, corporeal identity is formed, called into question and challenged. A concrete example of

¹⁵³ However, it should be noted that beauty maintains its force in popular culture and in the beauty industry and arguably now more than ever influences women's view of themselves. See especially Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (London: Vintage, 1991).

¹⁵⁴ Alberro, 2004, p.38.

¹⁵⁵ Nead, 1992, p.29.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

abjection is, for Kristeva, the pregnant body, subsumed as it is by its biological necessity.¹⁵⁸

Representing the Sexualized Body

In western philosophy from Plato to Kant, 'Eros was contained and subjugated because of its association with the baser, sensuous faculties and appetites of the individual, and because of the privileging of a much 'higher' faculty – reason'.¹⁵⁹ In Kant's philosophy 'sexuality, sexual desire and the body are all proposed as a *threat* to rational, civilized society'.¹⁶⁰ Clark, in his espousal of Kant's thinking, avoids dealing directly with the sexuality of the nude. While, on the one hand, he asserts the erotic nature of the nude, and celebrates it, his response is always carefully couched to convey a certain detachment (disinterestedness perhaps) from the sensual impact of the works discussed, resulting in a distance in the writing, as he struggles to achieve a balance between formal and erotic appreciation.

Lynda Nead's critique of Clark's account of the female nude, and by extension the traditional Western academic approach to the genre, centres on his consistent use of the language of control in his writing, evidence, she says that 'one of the principal goals of the female nude has been the containment and regulation of the female sexual body'. The forms, conventions and poses of art have worked metaphorically to shore up the female body – to seal orifices and to prevent marginal matter from transgressing the boundary dividing the inside of the body and the outside, the self from the space of the other'¹⁶¹. She contrasts the reality of the unregulated corporeal body with the ideal of art imposed upon it through a classical system of measurement and containment in terms of matter and form. 'The female nude encapsulates art's transformation of unformed matter into integral form'.¹⁶² Furthermore, this 'act of regulation of the female body' extends also to the 'potentially wayward viewer whose wandering eye is disciplined by the conventions

¹⁵⁸ The representation of naked pregnant women became fashionable in the 1980s and 90s, one example being the photographer Annie Leibowitz's photograph of Demi Moore which appeared on the cover of Time magazine in 1991.

¹⁵⁹ Mahon, 2007, pp.11.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p.12.

¹⁶¹ Nead, 1992, p.6.

¹⁶² Ibid., p.19.

and protocols of art'.¹⁶³ Clark identifies two types of nude, the Celestial Venus, (Crystalline) who symbolises divine beauty or contemplative love and the Earthly Venus (Venus Vulgaris) who symbolises earthly beauty or active love. These were codified in Medieval and Renaissance times and Nead maintains that the same thinking still permeates discourses on the representation of the nude. Clark insists that even the earthly Venus is never obscene, a characteristic that he defined as 'excess'.¹⁶⁴ However, Nead writes; 'Contrary to its representation as the nude, the physical female body is a messy entity, seeping and leaking before art regulates it by imposing classical order on it, yet 'the margins remain dangerous, needing to be repeatedly disciplined by art so that 'the western tradition of the female nude is thus a kind of discourse on the subject, echoing structures of thinking across many areas of the human sciences'.¹⁶⁵

It would seem, then, a cause for celebration that 'a recovery of the importance of the body has been one of the most precious achievements of recent radical thought', as Terry Eagleton suggests. However, he criticises the work of Barthes and Foucault on this subject for dealing with 'pleasures and surfaces, zones and techniques...a convenient displacement of a less immediately corporeal politics. There is a privileged, privatized hedonism about such discourse'.¹⁶⁶ If that is the case in theory, in art practice from the beginning of the twentieth century artists have utilized the body and especially its erotic nature as a means of 'challenging and transgressing the accepted categories of high art, particularly the tradition of the nude'. A shift in emphasis occurred as 'artists replaced the ideal body with the real body in their art practice'.¹⁶⁷

However, if the body can be said to have been previously repressed to the extent that it 'became strategically invisible in art critical discourses informed by Kantian aesthetics', then the contemporary situation may be seen as similarly problematic. Jones suggests that 'the body has become increasingly-and aggressively-visible within more recent practices and theories (since, say, around 1960) to the point where its obviousness, as a site of manipulation, identification, projection, and display, is just as problematic and conflicted as its previous occlusion. We have now begun to take the body for granted as a

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Clark, 1956, p.21.

¹⁶⁵ Nead, 1992, p.7.

¹⁶⁶ Eagleton, 1990, p.7.

¹⁶⁷ Mahon, 2007, p.36.

ubiquitous presence, an attitude just as limiting in its assumptions as earlier generations' insistence on ignoring or suppressing the role of the flesh in determining aesthetic meaning and value'.¹⁶⁸

One of the areas of contention, especially amongst feminist art historians, is the validity of the representations of the overtly eroticized body and the terms and conditions under which such representation can and should be expressed. Mahon's thesis, that 'eroticism is a site of power', in which such power is 'both produced and challenged as a subversive strategy' in modern and postmodern art. It thereby functions in the progressive and oppositional politics of modernism, as a means of 'undermining social, political, sexual, gender and racial stereotypes and orthodoxies'.¹⁶⁹

In the 1970s the slogan of the women's movement, 'the personal is political', encouraged women artists to use their own bodies, which had been traditionally objectified, fetishized, and tabooed in Western art and society, as the material basis of their art, with the body acting as a 'canvas' or in performance. This strategy was designed as a means of both reclaiming the female body and empowering it, and for 'celebrating its unruly, biological and desiring qualities so threatening to Western masculinity and civilization'.¹⁷⁰ In so doing they attracted the criticism of certain feminist voices who interpreted these practices as essentialist and separatist in nature. Nevertheless, these strategies gained momentum again in the gay activist art of the 1990s, which focused on bodily abjection to highlight the crisis that AIDS presented to the gay art scene.¹⁷¹

Drawing on Kristeva's theory of the abject, Mahon remarks that 'while often denoting the marginal and the impure', the abject is also 'where intimate suffering and loss can also join intimate sexual desire and excess as the body and mind, physical and psychic come together'.¹⁷² With its 'peculiar mixture of disgust and intimacy' the abject reflects a tension between Eros and Thanatos that is almost pseudo-religious. These complementary characteristics, abjection and religiosity, are found in the work of Billy Quinn which forms part of the discussion on the representation of masculinities in chapter 5.

¹⁶⁸ Jones, 2003, pp.251-266.

¹⁶⁹ Mahon, 2007, p.37.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p.208.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p.273-4.

¹⁷² Ibid., p.272.

The Nude as Personification of National Identity

In looking at the nude in Irish art this thesis will address issues concerned with identity. This is not to suggest that there are sufficient examples of the genre to make general assumptions about the nature of the Irish psyche or to construct a picture of Irish life in the twentieth century from images of the nude. Rather, it intends to suggest that these images reveal a great deal about changes in social attitudes to the body and its representation in art. Furthermore, by operating as signs within the linguistic order they can be said to have contributed to the emergence of personal, social and political identities, especially when those identities are non-normative or transgressive.

Two images depicting the personification of Ireland broadly enclose the period under discussion here. Daniel Maclise's *The Origin of the Harp*, 1842, (fig.1.4) and Andrew Folan's *Autopsy*, 2010 (fig.1.5)

Maclise's *The Origin of the Harp* represents the transformation of a woman suffering from unrequited love into the symbol of Ireland and was based on a poem by Thomas Moore.¹⁷³ Ireland is depicted as a naked nymph dripping in seaweed, the fronds of which form themselves into her harp strings. Moore's poem stipulates that her hair is 'golden', but by making her dark-haired Maclise has transformed her into a more recognisably Irish 'type'.¹⁷⁴ Maclise's aim was to represent Ireland to a British audience as feminine, desirable, cultured and mythical but at the same time assuming a subordinate political and cultural position in relation to the colonial power. Indeed his illustrations for Moore's Irish melodies have been described as 'the quintessential demonstration of the shaping of Irish fashionability to English purposes'.¹⁷⁵ As part of this process of 'shaping' Maclise appropriated a much older and more politically contentious image. According to Moore's own account he had written the poem after he had visited the prison cell of the musician Edward Hudson, who was jailed for his participation in the 1798 rebellion. Moore recounted that he 'found that Hudson had made a large drawing with charcoal on

¹⁷³ The harp has been the symbol of Ireland since at least the seventeenth century. See Fintan Cullen and Roy Foster, *Conquering England: Ireland in Victorian London* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2005), p.57.

¹⁷⁴ Nancy Weston, *Daniel Maclise: Irish Artist in Victorian London* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), p.157. See also the discussion of Irishness as a desirable type for models in chapter four of the same volume.

¹⁷⁵ Cullen and Foster, 2005, p.31.

the wall of his prison, representing the fancied origin of the Irish Harp, which, some years later, I adopted as the subject of one of the melodies'.¹⁷⁶ However, as Weston points out, the image had an even older provenance than that, being 'an old and familiar Irish image' which had been illustrated by Brooks in a story about a blind Irish piper and a mermaid earlier in the century. The illustration had depicted a mermaid up to her middle in water, with her hair hanging down over her extended right arm to represent the strings of a harp.¹⁷⁷ Weston acknowledges this appropriation and re-positioning of the original image when she observes that 'it is highly characteristic of both artists that Moore and Maclise could take the naked graffiti from the cell of an Irish political prisoner and transform it into an image that pleased English viewers'.¹⁷⁸ This implies a good deal of circumspection in the artist, which he applied to the nudity in the image as much as to any possible political interpretation. In the printed illustration for the 1846 volume of Moore's *Irish Melodies*, the female figure was more covered and less sexualized.¹⁷⁹ Aside from being an academic nude and thus representing the highest aspiration of art, Maclise's painting represented the myth of national origins that was a common trope at that period in history with the rise of nationalism and the emergence of nation states.¹⁸⁰ Representing Ireland as an ancient and honourable land, characterized by a rich poetic and musical heritage, it marked a new seriousness in the artist's depiction of Irish subjects from that time onwards. Although representations of *Erin* had appeared prior to this date, *The Origin of the Harp* was the first such work to be given prominence in Victorian London when it was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1842.¹⁸¹ Moore and Maclise were both Romantic proto nationalists, practitioners of what John Turpin has called 'shamrock and harp artistic nationalism', which defined the earliest phase of the Celtic revival.¹⁸² In the later, separatist phase of Irish nationalism, this attitude would be

¹⁷⁶ T. Moore, *The Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* (London: 1831), pp.301-2, cited in Weston, 2001, p.157.

¹⁷⁷ Thomas Crofton Croker, 'Legends of the Merrow: The Lady of Gollerus' in *Fairy Legends and Traditions in the South of Ireland* (London: John Murray, 1834) pp.17-185.

¹⁷⁸ Weston, 2001, p.157.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, note 49, p.296.

¹⁸⁰ Cullen and Foster 2005, p.57.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Turpin, 'Irish Art and Design Education from the Eighteenth Century to the Present', *Irish Arts Review Yearbook*, 10, (1994) 209-216, (p.211).

derided by many, including James Joyce, who referred to Moore's works disparagingly as *The Irish Maladies*.

In his photographic work *Autopsy*, 2010, Andrew Folan references this type of 'shamrock and harp' aesthetic as utilized in personifications of the nation. He takes the image of Ireland as longed-for woman in the earlier revivalist idiom, and transforms her into a corpse on a mortuary slab. Though far from an appropriation of the earlier work, in several ways the figure resembles Maclise's. Her hair retains the appearance of fronds of seaweed and her outstretched arm rests on the harp that is her symbol. The body on the slab is still that of a young woman, intimating that her death has been untimely and tragic. This woman represents a nation whose birth was anticipated with joy, but who died without ever reaching maturity.

This image can be interpreted in several ways. The death can be seen to represent that of independent Ireland, gestating in 1842 just as nationalism was gaining ground, dying in 2010 as the sovereignty of the country is seceded to political powers outside of the nation state. Looked at in another way the death can be read as the inevitable outcome of a longing for nationhood which locates its *raison d'être* in the romantic idealization of poetry and song. A third reading might suggest a critique of the desire to map national identity onto the female body, whether she is seen as seductive or transgressive. Such identifications of the idea of the nation as motherland are perhaps inevitably doomed to occasion disillusionment and frustration. Whichever reading the viewer opts for, with these two images, *The Origin of the Harp* and *Autopsy* we witness the progression from nubile youth to death on a slab in the space of 168 years. Situated chronologically between these two images are two more that deal with the identification of the nation as a naked woman, specifically a prostitute, Michael Farrell's *Madonna Irlanda* or *The Very First Real Irish Political Picture*, 1977, (fig.1.6) and Patrick Graham's *My Darkish Rosaleen*, 1982 (fig.1.7)

Michael Farrell's *Madonna Irlanda* or *The Very First Real Irish Political Picture*, 1977, conflates the young courtesan with the allegorical mother of Ireland Cathleen Ni

Houlihan to come up with an image that combines the sacred and the profane.¹⁸³

Symbolising the young state, and positioned as she is between the lascivious gaze of the artist's self-portrait on the right and the distorted version of Leonardo's Vitruvian man (c.1487) on the left (here signifying dis-harmony) the woman is presented as young, inexperienced, immature and threatened by violence and inertia.

Farrell's critique remains ambiguous. In appropriating an image from Boucher he draws attention to the sensual imperative in the history of the reclining nude, and perhaps also to its inherent contradictions. He seems to be acknowledging that the eighteenth century use of the nude is outdated and uses this aspect of it to critique Irish political life and its perceived lack of independence. But the image can not be read in any way as a proto-feminist image, because in his acceptance of Ireland's identification with the feminine as read, both in the image and in his writings on it, in a sense he perpetuates the practice of imposing ideas about territory and ownership, and lack of autonomy, onto the female body.

The title of Graham's picture is taken from James Clarence Mangan's translation of *My Dark Rosaleen*, a traditional song supposedly based on Hugh O'Donnell's address to Ireland when the Irish chiefs were hoping for military help from Spain and the Pope. It couches love of the country in terms of a romantic love for Black Róisín, (Róisín Dubh) a name that was often used a code name for Ireland. Graham uses this text and traditional images of Mother Ireland in a subversive way, by ironically juxtaposing the idea of Ireland as pure in heart with the brutal depiction of a half naked prostitute. His desecration of the image of Mother Ireland goes further than Farrell's in that the violent application of the paint echoes the violence of the sentiment, which is the loss of identity and integrity in the woman and, by inference, in the nation. The marginalization of the figure is amplified by the obliteration of the face and the focus on her sexual availability. The image attests to the artist's complicated and ambiguous feelings for his country, whose identity can be bought. However, she is not entirely to blame. The canvas is littered with iconographical references to the political and religious institutions of the state, which have brought about this lamentable situation.

¹⁸³ This painting forms part of a series of three paintings, eight lithographs, an etching and some preliminary drawings.

In a country where the nude is not usually thought to form an important part of its visual aesthetic, it is noteworthy to find a group of images that conflate the personification of the nation with the depiction of the nude. Further, these images seem to be indicative of ambivalent and contradictory feelings about the state of the nation in Irish history.

Introduction to chapters

The themes and issues introduced here will be addressed at greater length and detail in the substantive text. Chapter two looks at the effects of censorship on the visual arts in Ireland from the inception of the 1929 Censorship of Publications Act until the present day. Aside from cases of official state censorship, it also examines those cases initiated by private individuals, and questions whether these are indicative of a more general public opinion. It charts developments and changes in attitudes to censorship over time, as new concerns such as child protection come to the fore in public discourse.

The works of Louis le Brocquy provide the main focus for chapter three. In particular it will examine several paintings which were made with reference to Eduard Manet's *Olympia*, over the course of his long career. This discussion will consider the purposes and types of borrowing in art practice, from homage to appropriation. In order to illustrate these different approaches le Brocquy's works will be compared to those of several other artists who have used similar strategies in their work. This discussion questions the ways in which artists seek to establish new ways of imagining the self and society by utilizing images that are already imbued with significant meanings in other contexts.

Chapter four deals with the relationship between the artist and the model and interrogates the degree to which the model can ever be said to be a collaborator in the art making process. Through historical sources it examines the very real changes that have come about in societal attitudes to the model, and questions the assumptions of sexual licence which have long been associated with nude modelling. It looks at the social position of models in relations to issues of gender class and ethnicity. It also deals with the

relatively new phenomenon of nude portraiture which has formed part of the oeuvre of Irish artists in recent years.

The final chapter addresses the representation of masculinities in images of the male nude by male and female artists, but focuses on three artists in particular, Francis Bacon, Patrick Hennessy and Colin Middleton. It explores new approaches to gender and sexuality and suggests that, using these texts, it is possible to read historical images in new and illuminating ways. Central to this chapter is the question of the blindness to sexual difference in the field of art history and curatorship, and it questions whether this is a viable position in the light of greater awareness of sexual difference in society.

Chapter 2

Censorship of the Visual Arts in Ireland

Introduction

This chapter looks at the history of censorship and its effects on the arts in Ireland during the twentieth century, and up to the present day. By ascertaining the nature of the censorship laws and the strictness of their application, it may be possible to see whether official Irish attitudes towards the representation of the nude were measurably different from those in other countries. Apart from the legislative restrictions, unofficial objections to images may also arise due to alleged transgressions of personal boundaries of taste. As it is only possible to quantify those cases that have come to public attention through the press, this type of regulation of images remains somewhat anecdotal. However, they are useful in assessing the limits of what kinds of images may be considered acceptable in society.

There is a wealth of literature dealing with the Irish experience of censorship, largely related to the fairly draconian legislation passed in *The Censorship of Publications Act* in 1929, and its damaging effects on Irish literature and, to a lesser extent, on theatre and cinema.¹ It is much more difficult to assess the effect of the legislation on the visual arts, because these were not directly targeted by the legislation. Nevertheless, they not only suffered the effects of its influence but came under suspicion due to the general climate of fear and repression that was precipitated by the 1929 legislation. This chapter analyses the approach to censorship in Ireland in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It will also examine the way in which the application of censorship changes as societies develop and religious and political orthodoxies are superseded by a greater emphasis on individual freedoms.

¹ See especially Michael Adams, *Censorship: The Irish Experience* (Dublin: Scepter, 1968), Julia Carlson, *Banned in Ireland: Censorship and the Irish Writer* (London: Routledge, 1990) and Patrick Smyth and Ellen Hazelkorn (eds) *Let in the Light: Censorship, Secrecy and Democracy*, (Dingle: Brandon Books: 1993).

The Oxford English dictionary defines censorship as to 'examine (a book, film, etc.) officially and suppress unacceptable parts of it'.² This apparently simple definition is complicated by the fact that what is considered 'unacceptable' is determined by social, political and religious ideas that are often contested within societies and that are subject to constant change and redefinition. Societies that are homogenous in religion or ideology seek to 'embrace and control art' in line with their particular orthodoxy, while pluralistic societies tend to suppress only those tastes which fall outside of accepted norms.³

Until the 1980s, censorship was generally defined in terms of a regulatory action performed by an external authority, usually state or church, on an individual or group of subjects. The only form of censorship that was thought to derive from the writer or artist was conscious self-censorship. More recent scholarship suggests that the process of self-censorship is more insidious and that apart from institutionalized, interventionist censorship, all social interaction and communication 'is affected by 'constitutive' or 'structural' censorship: forms of discourse regulation which influence what can be said by whom, how, and in which context'.⁴ According to this structuralist approach, it is precisely these forms of linguistic controls that formulate norms 'by which the speakable is differentiated from the unspeakable'.⁵ This argument suggests that in all human communication, censorship is unavoidable and inevitable, because it pervades all forms of speech, from parental authority regulating acceptable speech in children to the exclusivity of professional jargon. Müller makes the point that this latter approach can erroneously be used to explain all forms of social control and prefers to define censorship as 'an authoritarian control over what reaches the public sphere by someone other than the sender and the intended receiver of a message'.⁶ This chapter adheres to Müller's definition of censorship, and looks at examples of censorship that fit this rubric.

² Oxford English Dictionary, http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/censor?q=censorship#censor_18 [accessed 14 May 2009].

³ Derek Jones (ed.) *Censorship: A World Encyclopaedia*, vol.1 (London; Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), p.102.

⁴ Beate Müller, *Censorship and Cultural Regulation in the Modern Age*, Critical Studies, 22 (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2004), p.1.

⁵ Butler 1989, p.255, Müller, 2004, p.6.

⁶ Müller, 2004, p.12.

However, taking her caveat into consideration, it is nevertheless the case that any society can develop a particular ethos that chooses to deal with dissenting voices through exclusion and this chapter will also therefore assess the degree to which this has been the case in Ireland.

Looking at censorship of images in a specifically Irish context it seems evident that, because of the anomalies involved, one must analyse the issue in the broadest possible way. Because the 1929 Act was aimed at the written word and film but not the visual arts, it is necessary to consider the ways in which the legislative situation contributed to a general climate of fear and avoidance. In this chapter therefore attention is given to the regulatory form of official censorship, then to the tendency to self-censorship, and finally including the broader context of social norms and 'what is speakable and what is unspeakable'.⁷

Censorship is a universal phenomenon and has existed as long as man has kept written accounts of matters of church and state, and religion was its first target.⁸ The words most closely connected with censorship reflect this ancient association. Profane derives from the Greek *pro* (in front of) and *fanum* (temple), and obscene from *ob* (in the way of) and *scena* (a stage, as in one for religious rites).⁹ Therefore the offence of obscenity was originally held to be the 'putting in a worldly context and therefore cheapening what was held to be sacred'.¹⁰ Even the word pornography, with its very specific modern meaning, derives from religious usage, and means 'writing about harlots', these women being attached to the temple.¹¹

In Roman times the chief function of censorship was 'to reward the brave and virtuous with marks of honour and distinction, and to brand the degenerate and corrupt with

⁷ Butler, 1989, p.255.

⁸ David Tribe, *Questions of Censorship* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1973), p.19.

⁹ Also *obscaenus*, meaning adverse or ill-omened. Ibid.

¹⁰ Tribe, 1973, p.20.

¹¹ Ibid.

dishonour and ignominy'.¹² Plato, in *The Republic*, called for strict censorship of artists in order to promote such virtue.¹³

Wherever there are new ideas, there will be a conception of an orthodoxy that is being challenged and the dominant power will act to protect itself. Therefore censorship has always been most severe when societies' norms are most severely threatened.¹⁴ Tribe cites many examples of this phenomenon from the Spanish Inquisition up to and including the Troubles in Northern Ireland which began in the 1960s, when political censorship was much more extreme than would be acceptable in normal circumstances. Accordingly, he attributes the rise in moral censorship in the Victorian period in Britain to its relative political stability, so that the censor's attention could be directed towards sexual and moral questions.¹⁵ Of course, politics and morality are closely linked in the sense that politics includes issues such as family and property inheritance, which depend on socially accepted norms of sexual behaviour.¹⁶

Censorship Legislation in Ireland

The introduction of censorship legislation in the newly independent state of Ireland was preceded by the establishment by the minister for Justice, Kevin O'Higgins, of the Committee on Evil Literature in 1926. It received submissions from Catholic associations, newsagents, booksellers and stationers, the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, Customs and Excise officers and the Gardaí. Their main concern was to stop the importation of Sunday newspapers and other publications from Britain, in particular because these carried information on birth control, sex education, divorce and abortion.¹⁷ Despite the presence of two Protestants on the five-man panel, the committee reflected a Catholic ethos in its deliberations, and the only Protestant representative body to make a

¹² Quote from Walter Mayce, *An Essay upon the Constitution of the Roman Government*, 1726, cited in Tribe, 1973, p.18.

¹³ Marjorie Heins, *Not in Front of the Children: "Indecency". Censorship and the Innocence of Youth*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey; London: Rutgers University Press, 2007), pp.15-16.

¹⁴ Tribe, 1973, p.298.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.299.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ The circulation of British papers had increased rapidly in Ireland between 1918 and 1926. Elizabeth Russell, 'Holy Crosses, Guns and Roses: Themes in Popular Reading Material' in *Ireland in the 1930s*, ed. by Aujasteijn Joost (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), p.18.

submission was *The Dublin Christian Citizenship Council*. Michael Adams has suggested that this was because there was a 'divergence of opinion' on the issue of birth control among Protestants, while the view of Catholics was expected to be informed by their church.¹⁸

The Irish enactment of censorship at the time was not exceptional and there are clear parallels between the situation in Ireland and that of many other European countries. The League of Nations in Geneva had passed the *International Convention for the Suppression of Circulation and Traffic in Obscene Publications* in 1923.¹⁹ The Irish approach, in specifically targeting those publications which carried information on birth control and abortion, was 'reflective of a European pro-natalist discourse', that was echoed especially in Italy, Holland, France, Germany and Austria after the devastation of the first world war, and the perceived need to re-build populations.²⁰ Even outside Europe this view held sway and 'Australia had one of the strictest censorship systems in the world in the 1920s'.²¹ However, as Diarmuid Ferriter has noted, there was an 'extremely centralised' censorship process in the Free State, which undoubtedly strengthened its effect.²²

Between the publication of the report of the *Committee on Evil Literature* in the Spring of 1927 and the first reading of the *Censorship Bill* in the Dáil in August, 1928, the only voices raised in opposition to it were those of the literary fraternity, who waged a campaign through the pages of the liberal press, specifically the *Irish Statesman*, and the *Irish Times*. However, their opinions did not carry much weight with the Irish public.²³ Writers were naturally concerned about the implications of the legislation for their work, and some of the most prominent campaigners worried about its potential effect on the visual arts too. Their concern was exacerbated by the legislators' desire to define the term 'indecent' in law as 'calculated to excite sexual passion, or to suggest or to incite to

¹⁸ Adams, 1968.

¹⁹ Adams, 1968, p.23.

²⁰ Diarmuid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland* (London: Profile, 2009), pp.191-2.

²¹ *Ibid.* p.185.

²² *Ibid.* p.186.

²³ John Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980), p.61.

sexual immorality, or in any other way to corrupt or deprave'.²⁴ In the final Act this definition was rewritten as 'suggestive of, or inciting to sexual immorality or unnatural vice or likely in any other similar way to corrupt or deprave'.²⁵ W.B. Yeats cited Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love*, as a work that was 'bound' to excite sexual passion.²⁶ Thomas MacGreevy tells us that a copy of that painting by Nathaniel Hone was in a private collection in Galway.²⁷ Meanwhile, George Bernard Shaw worried that even religious pictures would not be spared judgement by the censor unless 'the Mother of God herself...be made repulsively ugly lest she should excite sexual passions', and expressed concern for the future of the National Gallery.²⁸

Censorship of the cinema had already been in place since the passing of *The Censorship of Films Act* in 1923, while the theatre remained free from official censorship. Under the new legislation 1,200 books and 140 periodicals were banned in the 1930s, but there were few repercussions for the visual arts. However, two cases in particular are noteworthy.

Official Censorship of the Arts in Ireland

One of the few cases of official state censorship in the visual arts concerned Harry Clarke's *Geneva Window* (fig.2.1) In 1925 Clarke (1889-1931) was commissioned to design a window, intended to be presented as a gift from the Irish nation to the International Labour Office of the United Nations in Geneva. For his design he took inspiration from texts by fifteen Irish writers of his own choosing.²⁹ On completion of the window it was inspected by members of the Executive Council at Clarke's Dublin studio in September 1930.³⁰

²⁴ Section 2, *Censorship of Publications Bill*, 1928.

²⁵ Section 2, *Censorship of Publications Act*, 1929.

²⁶ William Butler Yeats, 'The Censorship and St. Thomas Aquinas' in *Irish Statesman*, 11, (1928) 47-8.

²⁷ Thomas MacGreevy, '50 Years of Irish Painting', *Capuchin Annual*, (1949), 497-512.

²⁸ George Bernard Shaw, 'The Censorship', *Irish Statesman*, 11.11 (November, 1928), p.207.

²⁹ The writers represented were Patrick Pearse, Lady Gregory, G.B. Shaw, James Stephens, Sean O'Casey, Liam O'Flaherty, George Russell, É, Seumas O'Kelly, James Joyce, Padraic Colum, George Fitzmaurice, Lennox Robinson, W.B. Yeats, J.M. Synge and Seumas O'Sullivan. Nicola Gordon Bowe, *The Life and Work of Harry Clarke* (Blackrock: Irish Academic Press, 1989), p.204. She maintains that W.B. Yeats had some influence on Clarke's literary selection. Michael Clarke concurs with this view, based on his father's correspondence.

³⁰ Bowe, 1989, p.214. Bowe maintains that the window was effectively finished since 'soon after Christmas' 1928 but that Clarke's absence due to ill health had postponed its official unveiling. According

At this point opinion about the exact nature of events is divided. In one version of events the window was initially deemed 'a remarkable and successful achievement' by the president of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State, W.T. Cosgrave, until something happened to change his mind.³¹ However, according to Andrew J. Heggarty, there were problems from the outset, and Cosgrave immediately wrote to Clarke saying that 'for several reasons it would not be desirable to include the panel which contains a representation from the works of Mr. Liam O'Flaherty'.³² Lennox Robinson had foreseen the possibility of controversy, writing to Clarke to advise him to send the window directly to Geneva if the figures could be considered 'too sensual', anticipating that the president and his colleagues in government would 'throw at least nine fits'.³³ Robinson was referring in particular to the panel depicting Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, (fig.2.2) and the female figure in the Liam O'Flaherty's *Mr. Gilhooley* (fig.2.3) panel as potentially the most contentious.³⁴ This latter figure, in Brian Fallon's opinion, 'seems to belong to Wilde's Salome rather than to O'Flaherty's relatively primitive emotional world'.³⁵

Clarke, unwilling to replace the panel, offered another compromise in a letter to Mr. Cosgrave but this offer was not acknowledged, and the President wrote again at the end of September effectively admitting that the government was displeased with certain subjects associated with the representations in the design. Clarke was eventually paid for the window in January 1931, the same month in which he died of tuberculosis, aged forty-one, but the window was never sent to Geneva, and was installed instead in the offices of the Executive Council in Merrion Street, well out of public view.

It hardly seems coincidental that the window, commissioned in 1927 and completed in 1930, almost exactly spanned the entire period of the debate on the 1929 *Censorship of*

to Heggarty some minor repairs were also necessary in the summer of 1930. See Andrew J. Heggarty, 'Stained Glass and Censorship: The Suppression of Harry Clarke's Geneva Window, 1931', *New Hibernia Review*, (1999), 98-117.

³¹ John J. Doherty, *Harry Clarke: Darkness in Light*, T.V. documentary, Camel Productions, 2003.

³² Letter from W.T. Cosgrave to Harry Clarke dated 25th September, 1930, cited in Michael Lawrence Clarke, 'The Geneva Window' in *The Stained Glass of Harry Clarke*, ed. by James White (Dublin: Fine Art Society, 1988), p.65.

³³ Undated letter from Lennox Robinson to Clarke, quoted in Bowe, 1989, note 69, p.214.

³⁴ Lennox Robinson, *Curtain Up* (London: Michael Joseph, 1942), p.214.

³⁵ Brian Fallon, *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture 1930-1960* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1999), p.244.

Publications Act; from the initial establishment of the *Committee on Evil Literature*, through the long and bitter debate on the proposed *Censorship Bill*, the eventual enactment of the legislation, and the publication of its first list of banned books and periodicals in May 1930.³⁶ It is fairly safe to assume that many or all of the fifteen writers whose work was interpreted in the window were considered unsuitable representatives of the Irish state. Seven of them were founder members of the Irish Academy of Letters, established by Yeats and Shaw to facilitate the censorship debate after the *Irish Statesman*, formerly the main voice of opposition to censorship, folded in 1930. In addition to these obvious concerns, Liam O'Flaherty was a known Communist, and was having a relationship with a married woman, giving the censors more than sufficient reasons for his vilification. W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory and Oliver St. John Gogarty were all Anglo-Irish Protestants, and, as such, may not have been seen as proper representatives of the new, Catholic, state. So it appears that the reasons for the rejection of Clarke's window were many, and some of them were purposely veiled as Cosgrave, caught between extreme opinions, had decided to tread a careful path. He may have feared that allowing the window to be put in place would amount to a de facto endorsement of the writers represented in it and led to protests from a number of groups who might have disapproved.

The church's position is no more transparent. *The Catholic Bulletin*, edited by Patrick Keohane, condemned the window 'solely on the basis of its hatred of the authors involved'.³⁷ However, other Catholic bishops gave the work their luke-warm approval, but the clergy were selective in what they wanted to be seen and by whom. While they were capable of appreciating art and even defending it against its detractors, they had a vested interest in maintaining the masses in ignorance. As Sean O'Faolain said, 'only the few, usually economically independent, are given free access to ideas...and intellectual indifference is encouraged as a virtue in the masses'.³⁸ Padraic Colum also recognised

³⁶ The *Censorship of Publications Act* became law in July 1929 and its first Board was appointed on 13th February 1930. Its members were Canon Patrick Boylan – chair, (scriptural scholar and professor of Eastern languages at UCD), Prof. W.E. Thrift of the Evil Literature Committee, Dáil for Dublin University, later Provost of Trinity College, Mr.W.J. O'Reilly, Mr.W.B. Joyce, and Mr. Patrick J. Kerwell, M.A.

³⁷ Heggarty, 1999, p.112.

³⁸ Séan O'Faolain, 'The Mart of Ideas', *The Bell*, 4, (June, 1942), 153-7.

that 'it was not the bishops or the important clergy' who were behind the Censorship Bill.³⁹ Therefore the main target of clerical disapproval was the mass media such as magazines, journals, books and films.

At the time of the Geneva Window episode John Charles McQuaid was Dean of Studies at Blackrock College,⁴⁰ where he taught art appreciation and literary criticism. In his literature classes he refused to teach the work of Protestant writers such as Jonathan Swift, W.B. Yeats or Sean O'Casey, but he especially reviled James Joyce whom he called 'the Clongowes renegade', Austin Clarke, and Liam O'Flaherty, whom he styled 'the Blackrock rebel'. This bias presumably reflects a wider clerical opinion about some of Ireland's leading literary figures.⁴¹

A similar ambivalence can be seen in the church's attitude to the controversy surrounding Rouault's *Christ and the Soldier* (fig.2.4) which was offered as a donation to the Municipal Gallery by the Friends of the National Collection in 1942. The gallery's art advisory committee refused the gift on the basis that it was 'offensive to Christian sentiment', according to one committee member, former Lord Mayor Kathleen Clarke.⁴² Clarke, as the widow of Thomas Clarke, one of the signatories to the Proclamation of the Republic, executed in 1916, was clearly allowed a position of influence in deciding what would be considered appropriate imagery for an art museum in the new republic. Other conservative forces, including some artists, concurred with her views. Leo Whelan declared the painting to be 'decadent', while Sean Keating, though one of the most ardent opponents of acceptance of the picture, was more careful to avoid emotive language by declaring it to be artistically 'incompetent'.⁴³ The painting had previously been exhibited in London at the Leicester Galleries in 1942 where it was very positively reviewed by Count Michael de la Bedoyère and John Piper.

³⁹ Padraic Colum, editorial, *Irish Statesman* (1928), 107-8.

⁴⁰ McQuaid served as Dean from 1925-30, as President from 1930-39, and finally as Director from 1939-40.

⁴¹ John Cooney, *John Charles McQuaid: The Ruler of Catholic Ireland*, (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1999), p.62.

⁴² Bruce Arnold, *Mainie Jellett and the Modern Movement in Ireland*, (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1991), p.187. The Art Advisory Committee came under the auspices of the city manager, as there was no board of management in the gallery. John F. Kelly was the curator at the time.

⁴³ Arnold, 1991, p.187. For Keating's remark see Dorothy Walker, *Modern Art in Ireland* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1997), p.24.

Dermod O'Brien, then president of the RHA, challenged the gallery's decision to refuse the picture and Mainie Jellett, as one of the organisers of the Friends and also a member of the Art Advisory Committee, organised a series of lectures on Rouault in the College of Surgeons. The intended speakers were Jellett, Evie Hone and Thomas McGreevy, but on the night of the first lecture an unexpected contribution was made by Father Edward Leen, president of Blackrock College. His address was subsequently published as 'À propos of Rouault' in *The Irish Art Handbook*, 1943.⁴⁴ Leen's defence of Rouault acknowledged that he was a profoundly spiritual artist, and he placed him among the highest order of artists who could, in his view, convey eternal truth and beauty through interpretation rather than mere imitation.⁴⁵ He insisted that 'the truth cannot be blasphemous even when it lays bare relentlessly, even cruelly, the inner sense of a reality which rashes through our miserable conventionality'.⁴⁶

He was influenced by the Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, who 'constructed a philosophy of art derived from his understanding of St. Thomas Aquinas', and for this reason was greatly appreciated by the Catholic intelligentsia. According to Arnold the influence of Maritain 'probably accounts for the decision for Maynooth to accept the painting'.⁴⁷ Ten years later the gallery again refused to take possession of the painting and it remained in the Catholic seminary at Maynooth until 1956 when it was finally accepted into the gallery's collection.

The Rouault episode demonstrates above all a wide gap in intellectualism between certain members of the clergy and others within the political establishment. It also highlights the problems inherent in any art organisation being administered by a bureaucracy with little understanding of the aims and intentions of art, especially when their decisions impact on the kinds of images that are considered appropriate to the nation's sensibility. It is ironic that the very reason that Hugh Lane had sought to found a gallery of modern art in Dublin was to educate the Irish populace on the forms and stylistic language of modern

⁴⁴ Jellett also wrote article in the journal *Commentary*, in November 1942 and in a lecture entitled 'Rouault and Tradition' given to the White Stag group in December, 1942, and published in *St. Bartholomew's magazine* in the same month. Arnold, 1991, p.192.

⁴⁵ Fr. Edward Leen, 'À Propos of Rouault', in *Irish Art Handbook* (Dublin: Cahill, 1943), pp.21-28

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Arnold, 1991, p.192.

art.⁴⁸ Clearly, by the time of the Rouault controversy that objective had not yet been achieved.

Another complex episode of official censorship concerns George Bernard Shaw's *The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God*, 1931-2. It was reputedly banned on the basis of its illustrations by John Farleigh (1900-1965), which depict the eponymous heroine naked in all of the illustrations, and in two of which she is pictured alongside the figure of Christ. (fig.2.5)⁴⁹ However, to the Catholic hierarchy, the text would also have given cause for concern, dealing as it does with a young woman's individualistic search for truth and her refusal to accept religious orthodoxies. In this context, specific reference is made to 'the struggle to maintain Protestant Freethought ... against the churches and Empires'.⁵⁰ While Adams warns that it would be difficult to prove that the panel of censoring authorities 'blatantly used religious, political, or other such criteria' in their decision-making processes, this case strongly suggests that religious intolerance and sectarianism did inform their thinking.⁵¹ Meanwhile, Brian Fallon has acknowledged that the way Christ is treated in the text 'merely as one of several great teachers of mankind, along with Mahomet and others' might well have been as good a reason for banning it as were John Farleigh's illustrations.⁵² It is difficult in this case to state with certainty whether it was the text or the images, or indeed the author himself that most excited concern, because as well as the specific attack on religious orthodoxy in *The Adventures of a Black Girl in her Search for God*, Shaw had been one of the most outspoken critics of the censorship legislation. Indeed he had long been an advocate for openness regarding nudity and sexuality, and pursued these goals at times to the point of obsession. As early as 1895 Shaw had become embroiled in a debate with William Alexander Coote, of the National Vigilance Association, concerning the suitability for public viewing of the 'Living Pictures' at the Palace Theatre, London.⁵³ These were a series of sixteen

⁴⁸ Robert O'Byrne, *Hugh Lane 1875-1915* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2000).

⁴⁹ Carlson, 1990, p.12.

⁵⁰ George Bernard Shaw, *The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God* (London: Constable, 1932), p.63.

⁵¹ Adams, 1968, p.54.

⁵² Fallon, 1999, p.92. Shaw's *Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search of God* was also banned by Cambridge Public Library in 1933. See also Tribe, 1973, p.37.

⁵³ G.B. Shaw, 'The Living Pictures', *The Saturday Review* (6 April, 1895), 443-445.

tableaux, depicting various 'naiads, mountain sprites, peris and Lady Godiva', and performed by apparently nude models, deemed 'indecent' and 'shameful' by Coote.⁵⁴ In his critique, Coote distinguished between the representation of the nude in paintings and the appearance in public of live models, maintaining that, 'The nude as represented by the true artist on canvas never has the slightest tendency to demoralize. The artist's soul so consciously pervades the work that the beauty of form and pose hides that which would mar or vulgarize the picture. The subject is spiritualized, and becomes an inspiration for good and lovely thoughts'.⁵⁵

In defending the 'art' of arrangement and lighting that characterized the tableaux, and likening their sensual appeal to Veronese and Rubens, there is a degree of disingenuousness in Shaw's argument, but he was clearly prepared to stand up for the principle of free expression regardless of artistic merit, or distinctions between high and low art which he considered spurious. His liberal views extended beyond the question of representation alone, to encapsulate social attitudes to nudity and sexuality. 'We have among us', he wrote, 'a certain number of people who are morbidly sensitive to sexual impressions and quite insensible to artistic ones', a trait he viewed as 'misanthropic'. Coote was not wrong, he said, in wanting to suppress things for the common good, but rather 'in his attempt to make nudity or semi-nudity the criterion for indecency'.⁵⁶ This episode clearly illustrates the difficulty in defining a term such as 'indecency' to the agreement of all.

In her examination of Shaw's relationship with the censor, Celia Marshik convincingly argues that he came to regard his battles to have *Mrs Warren's Profession* and *The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet* licensed, as the very measure of his modernity, defined in contraposition to the majority view of what was appropriate in theatre.⁵⁷ Seen in this context Shaw can clearly be identified as a protagonist in a war of words and ideas that

⁵⁴ In fact the models in these tableaux wore spun silk body stockings. See Alison Smith, *The Victorian Nude* (Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1996) and Martin Postle and William Vaughan, *The Artist's Model from Etty to Spencer* (New York; London: Merrell Holberton, 1999).

⁵⁵ Shaw, 1895, pp.443-445.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ The former, written in 1898 was not licensed in Britain until 1924, and the latter, failing to acquire a license in Britain was performed on the Abbey Stage in 1909. Celia Marshik, *British Modernism and Censorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

long preceded the censorship debate in Ireland. It was a position in which he took obvious delight, and he was not therefore the hapless victim of censorship to quite the same extent as Clarke had been. Harry Clarke, on the other hand, was an artist who was regularly commissioned to make work for the Catholic hierarchy. He was a nationally and internationally renowned artist, and practically beyond reproach. As Andrew Heggarty has pointed out, 'a fight might have been put up over Clarke's right as an artist to represent nudity, and maybe even sex - we shall never know. But clearly the government would and could not defend his right to represent the works of James Joyce or Liam O'Flaherty'.⁵⁸

Even before the passing of censorship legislation in Ireland there were several recorded instances of works of art and other images being removed from view because they were deemed to be indecent or obscene. George Russell wrote that police denounced an engraving of a painting by Sir Frederick Watts.⁵⁹ While he gives no details about the work or where it was located, at that time the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, then located in Clonmel House, Harcourt Street, had in rooms five and six several 'nude studies' by Leighton. In the same article he remembered attempts in Dublin and Cork to paint britches on a nude baby in a soap advertisement. Albert Power's (1881-1945) cherubs on the Iveagh Trust Centre in Bull Alley near St. Patrick's cathedral offended worshippers in St. Patrick's and were removed because 'such a display of nudity was not only unseemly in itself, but was particularly so opposite a house of God'.⁶⁰ These episodes took place under British Legislation in effect in Ireland at the time, specifically the *Obscene Publications Act*, 1857, and the *Indecent Advertisements Act*, 1889.

The Art of the Political Caricature

On 7th March 2009 an anonymous prankster put a painting, *Biffo on the Bog* (fig.2.6) depicting the then Taoiseach, Brian Cowen, sitting on the toilet holding a toilet roll in his hand, on display in the National Gallery of Ireland. The caption read:

⁵⁸ Heggarty, 1999, p.112.

⁵⁹ 'The Censorship Debate', *Irish Statesman*, 10.25 (August, 1928), 486-7.

⁶⁰ Adams, 1968, p.23.

'Brian Cowen politician 1960-2008. This portrait, acquired un-commissioned by the National Gallery, celebrates one of the finest politicians produced by Ireland since the foundation of the state. Following a spell at the helm of the Department of Finance during a period of unprecedented prosperity, Brian Cowen inherited the office [of] Taoiseach in 2008. Balancing a public image that ranges from fantastically intelligent analytical thinker to big ignorant fucker from Offaly, the Taoiseach proves to be a challenging subject to 'represent'. It hung for over an hour before being spotted and removed by security guards.⁶¹ A similar incident occurred at the RHA the following day, when another painting, this time of the Taoiseach in his underpants, appeared on the wall. The artist was subsequently revealed to be Conor Casby, a schoolteacher from Claremorris, Co. Mayo living in south Co Dublin and working for the Department of Education, as administrator of the school completion programme in Dublin's inner city. An article appeared in the *Sunday Tribune* newspaper on 22 March. The following day, when RTE ran the item on each of its evening television news programmes, the Fianna Fáil press secretary Eoghan Ó'Neactain, complained, though he insisted that he did not do so on the instructions of Brian Cowen. RTE contradicted this, saying that they received complaints direct from the Taoiseach's office.⁶²

Several Fianna Fáil TDs and Senators, including Maria Corrigan, Mary O'Rourke, M.J. Nolan and Michael Kennedy, considered the RTE coverage to be 'in bad taste' and Kennedy called on the station's director to resign.⁶³ Fine Gael's Enda Kenny and Charlie Flanagan called these objections a restriction of freedom of expression, and Liz McManus of the Labour Party criticized RTE for bowing to political pressure. RTE apologised for the coverage on 24th March, and the You-tube video of the news broadcast was subsequently blocked. That same day the story was covered by the Ray D'Arcy show on the radio station Today FM. Their reporter, Will Hanafin, told how he had received

⁶¹ Ken Foxe, 'Cowen Hung Out to Dry in National Gallery Hijack', *Sunday Tribune*, 22 March 2009 <www.tribune.ie/article/2009/mar/22/cowen_hung_out_to_dry_in_nationalgallery_hijack> [accessed 21 August 2009].

⁶² The R.T.E. news report was by Tadhg Enright. 'Artist Behind Nude Paintings of Irish Prime Minister Faces Criminal Charges', *Daily Mail*, 26 March 2009 <www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1164979/Artist-nude-paintings-Irish-Prime-Minister-faces-criminal-charges> (accessed 21 August 2009).

⁶³ Michael Kennedy, T.D., speaking on Matt Cooper's radio programme *Drive Time*, March 25, 2009.

another image, this time depicting the Taoiseach urinating, in the previous January. Gardaí visited the station and requested to see the emails with the attached image. When staff refused to co-operate, they were told a search warrant would be sought. The Garda investigation of the event which became known as 'Cowengate' lasted six hours. Casby was interviewed and he gave up five more paintings, including one of Michael McDowell, but no charges were brought. The offending picture was subsequently displayed in Pat Shortt's bar in Castlemartyr, and in a pub called Sean McD's in Dublin owned by Mark Leavy, during the subsequent general election campaign. It was also exhibited in *Nude: Blatant Exhibitionism* at the Kenny Gallery in Galway as part of the Arts Festival in July, 2012. Incidents such as this, while treated as humorous by most people, do make a serious point about the admissible levels of free speech. In democracies, government interference in the dissemination of images or in news coverage of such issues is generally looked on with disapproval. The political context for Casby's images, the sudden dramatic economic decline in 2009 and the public disavowal of the Fianna Fáil party held to be responsible for it, meant that he gained a lot of public support, especially on internet sites. This type of 'guerilla art' is increasingly popular because it is seen as democratic, not only because it voices popular concerns but because it is often disseminated on the electronic media and is therefore immediately accessible to everyone. While there may be a degree of shock at the attempt by government to interfere in the press coverage of this incident, the ensuing Garda investigation seems to have been reasonably measured in that it did not result in criminal charges being brought. Similar episodes have occurred recently in South Africa and Canada and the very different responses are quite telling in terms of the relative stability of democracy in those countries.

Established South African artist Brett Murray exhibited a portrait of the South African president, Jacob Zuma, in the Goodman Gallery in Cape Town, in May 2012. Entitled *The Spear*, (fig.2.7) it represents the South African President Jacob Zuma, in the iconic pose of Lenin, with his genitals exposed. The title refers to the armed wing of the ANC *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, meaning Spear of the Nation. It also references his sexual proclivities. Zuma has married 6 times, he currently has four wives and more than

twenty children, and in 2006 he was acquitted of a rape charge. The artist maintained that the painting was an 'attempt at humorous satire of political power and patriarchy within the context of the artworks in the exhibition and within the broader context of South African discourse'.⁶⁴

The ANC called the painting 'rude, disrespectful and racist', and demanded its removal from the gallery and a reproduction of it from the local Johannesburg newspaper, *The City Press*. The paper's editor, Ferial Hafferjee, refused. At first the gallery also refused to remove the painting, saying that the 'ANC's right to condemn the work is acknowledged as much as the artist's right to display it' seeing this as 'democracy at work'. Security was tightened and the publicity doubled normal attendance in the gallery.⁶⁵ The painting was then defaced by two men acting independently of each other. The first, a white middle-aged university professor, painted a red cross over it and the second, a young black taxi driver, smeared it with black paint. The ANC initiated court proceedings, considering it a matter of 'national importance'. Enoch Mthembu of the Nazareth Baptist church called for retribution against the artist saying; 'This man has insulted the entire nation and he deserves to be stoned to death'.⁶⁶

Eventually Zuma withdrew his case, and the gallery removed the painting from both the wall and the gallery's website and issued an apology.⁶⁷

The painting is reported to have been bought by a German collector for R.136,000 or £10,345.⁶⁸

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper received similar treatment at the hands of artist Margaret (Maggie) Sutherland in 2011, when she exhibited her painting *Emperor Haute Couture*, (fig.2.8) at the Kingston Frotenac public library in Ontario. By posing Harper

⁶⁴ David Smith (b), 'Jacob Zuma Painting Vandalized in South African Gallery', *The Guardian*, 22 May 2012 <www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/22/jacob-zuma-painting-vandalised-gallery> [accessed 2 June 2012].

⁶⁵ David Smith, (a) 'Jacob Zuma Goes to Court over Painting Displaying his Genitals', *The Guardian*, 21 May 2012 <www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/may/21/jacob-zuma-court-painting-genitals> [accessed 2 June 2012].

⁶⁶ David Smith (b), 22 May 2012.

⁶⁷ Associated Press Report, 'Jacob Zuma Drops Lawsuit over Genitals Painting', *The Guardian*, 30 May 2012 <www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/may/30/jacob-zuma-lawsuit-painting-genitals> [accessed 2 June 2012].

⁶⁸ David Smith (b), 22 May 2012.

as Manet's *Olympia*, Sutherland marks him out as 'a modern man', while the title refers to Hans Christian Anderson's fairytale *The Emperor's New Clothes*, which is less complimentary. She describes the painting as 'satire' and 'political and social comment' and claims she got good feedback from the public though the library also reported receiving numerous complaints.⁶⁹ The painting was intended to be humorous and was taken as such by Harper, who was said to be 'amused' by the picture. His spokesman Andrew McDougall only objected on the basis that Harper was 'a cat person', and that it was therefore inappropriate that he should be depicted with a dog.⁷⁰

A comparison of these various cases says something about the nature of society and the strength of democracy in each. In Canada, a country known for its progressiveness and tolerance, the incident was laughed off by the political establishment. Irish politicians, at least those being lampooned, may have taken the matter more seriously, but the forces of law and order nevertheless treated the case only with the degree of severity it deserved. In South Africa, the youngest of these three democracies, it was potentially more serious and socially divisive. It was eventually resolved by negotiation, though arguably at the expense of a degree of freedom of expression.

Individual Acts of Iconoclasm

Official censorship control was lessening in Ireland by the 1950s, though accounts of individual complaints and prosecutions continued, mostly aimed at images in mass culture. In 1949 there were 'complaints about comics and 'still pictures' such as those being shown through a machine at the *Funland* premises at Burgh Quay, in Dublin city, which depicted a woman in a state of semi-nudity'.⁷¹ These images were found not to contravene the law but the owners were persuaded to remove them nevertheless. In 1953 postcards in Tyrell's shop in Charlemont street were deemed 'vulgar and suggestive' but

⁶⁹ Linda Nguyen, 'Human Rights Tribunal Dismisses Nude Stephen Harper Painting Complaint', *The Star*, 6 October 2012

www.thestar.com/news/canada/2012/10/06/human_rights_tribunal_dismisses_nude_stephen_harper_painting_complaint [accessed 14 October 2012].

⁷⁰ Susan Delacourt, 'Nude Portrait of Stephen Harper, Sex-themed Exhibit Turning Heads in Ottawa', *The Star*, 18 May 2012 <www.thestar.com/news/canada/politics/article/1181043-nude-portrait-of-stephen-harper> [accessed 14 October 2012].

⁷¹ Ferriter, 2009, p.316.

not unlawful. Meanwhile, a successful prosecution was brought against the Pillar Café on O'Connell Street in respect of obscene pictures being shown in slot machines. The Catholic Church was as vigilant as ever. When McQuaid became Archbishop of Dublin in 1940, a post he retained until 1972, he presided over a culture of moral and sexual repression, and the majority church was in a position of power and influence over successive elected governments. As Archbishop of Dublin, McQuaid regularly corresponded with Thomas Coyne, secretary of the department of Justice about the need for greater censorship, in one case advising that an advertisement for women's bras in the *Observer* newspaper on 3rd April 1960 promoted the idea of sex appeal, and in another instance maintaining that 'the drawings of women modelling underwear used in Irish Press advertisements actually revealed a *mons veneris* if one employed a magnifying glass'.⁷²

These were all cases of individuals discovering the existence of material that they thought was inappropriate and reporting it to the relevant authorities, who decided if the case warranted prosecution under the law. However there are also several cases where such individuals did not choose to report their concerns to the authorities but decided instead to deal with the matter themselves.

Iconoclasm is properly defined as the destruction of religious images, and in Europe its history is one of extreme conflict of ideas in the wake of events such as the Protestant Reformation. Here the term is used in a broader sense, to apply to attacks on images of the nude, and its use is justified by the extremity of political or religious belief often held by the perpetrators of such actions, and because their objections to the depiction of nudity is very often couched in sectarian religious terms.

Probably the most famous example of iconoclasm perpetrated against a painting of a nude is the case of Velazquez's *Rokeby Venus*, c.1647-51 (fig.2.9) in the National Gallery, London, in March 1914. Mary Richardson, a prominent member of the Women's suffrage campaign, went to the gallery on a 'free day' with a small axe concealed up her sleeve, and struck the painting several times.⁷³ Because it was

⁷² Cooney, 1999, p.282.

⁷³ A free day was one on which there was no entrance fee and so the gallery was unusually busy.

mounted behind glass the first blow merely shattered the glass while the following four inflicted severe damage to the painting itself. In an amusing account of these events in her autobiography, published in 1953, she wrote that she was stopped by two German tourists who overpowered her, using their Baedeker guide books as weapons, before being apprehended by Gallery staff and police, though there is no mention of this in the contemporaneous report in *The Times* newspaper.⁷⁴

Upon her arrest Mary Richardson issued a statement to the Women's Social and Political Union, which read;

'I have tried to destroy the picture of the most beautiful woman in mythological history as a protest against the Government for destroying Mrs. Pankhurst, who is the most beautiful character in modern history. Justice is an element of beauty as much as colour and outline on canvas. Mrs. Pankhurst seeks to procure justice for womanhood, and for this she is being slowly murdered by a Government of Iscariot politicians. If there is an outcry against my deed, let every one remember that such an outcry is an hypocrisy so long as they allow the destruction of Mrs. Pankhurst and other beautiful living women, and that until the public cease to countenance human destruction the stones cast against me for the destruction of this picture are each an evidence against them of artistic as well as moral and political humbug and hypocrisy.'⁷⁵

At that time Mrs Pankhurst's health had become seriously undermined due to repeated hunger strikes while in prison for her suffragette activities, and Richardson's plan to attack the *Rokeby Venus* was apparently approved by Pankhurst's daughter Christabel.⁷⁶ In her autobiography, *Laugh a Defiance*, she claimed that it was the picture's monetary value that prompted her to choose it for her protest, and that its symbolic value was secondary to this, admitting at the same time that her dislike for the painting made it

⁷⁴ Mary Richardson, *Laugh a Defiance* (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1953), p.169.

⁷⁵ 'National Gallery Outrage, The Rokeby Venus, Suffragist Prisoner in Court, Extent of the Damage', *The Times*, Wednesday 11th March, 1914, reprinted on <www.heretical.com/suffrage/1914tms2.html> [accessed 11 March 2010].

⁷⁶ Richardson, 1953, p.165. The suffragettes were at this time focussed on bringing their cause to public attention through the destruction of public and private property. Mary Richardson was later convicted of arson, after setting fire to an uninhabited mansion outside London.

'much easier' for her to attempt to destroy it, because she didn't like the way men 'gaped at it'.⁷⁷

The *Rokeby Venus*, had been acquired by the National Art Collections Fund, by subscription, in 1906, for a sum of £45,000 and presented to the National Gallery. At the time it was also shown in Manchester, Liverpool and Edinburgh and had attracted much public interest. Richardson was sentenced to six months imprisonment in Holloway women's prison, where she had already served several sentences for her direct action protests.

Not long after Richardson's attack on the *Rokeby Venus*, Patrick Tuohy's painting *Seated Nude Reading*, 1915-16, now lost, was exhibited in South Kensington and awarded a silver medal. 'It then travelled to Belfast on exhibition in 1916 and was slashed to pieces by a group of irate viewers who considered it too frank and too revealing'.⁷⁸ This account, from Patrick Murphy's 2004 biography of the artist is based on verbal evidence from Tuohy's sister Bride, recorded in 1967, in which neither the venue of the exhibition or the motive of the protestors is given, and remains therefore merely anecdotal.

However, the date of the exhibition might in itself prove noteworthy. 1916 was a year of great political and military upheavals that impacted on the Irish, the key events being the Easter Rising in Dublin, and the Battle of the Somme, in which thousands of Irishmen serving in the British army lost their lives.⁷⁹ It is just possible that there might have been some political aspect to the objection to Tuohy's painting, given the levels at which emotions were running in that eventful year, and his known Republican sympathies.

Another incident of recorded iconoclasm in more recent Irish history concerns Louis le Brocquy's *Bathers*, 1951 (fig.2.10), part of the *Family* series of paintings. After being exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1956 it was lent by Victor Waddington to the department of Foreign affairs to hang in their Offices in Iveagh House, Dublin. It subsequently disappeared and was presumed lost for thirty-seven years. In fact the painting had been attacked by an irate female employee, who slashed the standing nude male figure twelve times. It was removed from view and put into storage in the

⁷⁷ Ibid. p.165.

⁷⁸ Patrick J. Murphy, *Patrick Tuohy* (Dublin: Town House, 2004), p.50.

⁷⁹ It is estimated that over 200,000 Irishmen fought in W.W.1 and that approximately 35,000 died. See <www.irishcentral.com/news/Veterans-Day-Lest-we-forget> [accessed 20 Sept 2011].

basement. When it was discovered there years later by Niall Burgess, private secretary to the then Tánaiste, Dick Spring, it was sent for restoration to Mary McGrath in 1994. The painting was included in the retrospective mounted in celebration of the artist's 80th birthday at IMMA in 1996.⁸⁰ This physical attack on le Brocquy's *Bathers* echoes the press attack that had attended the exhibition of *A Family* in 1951 and this latter case may well be connected to the previous one. The public vilification of *A Family* received a lot of press attention and may have attached a certain infamy to the person of the painter and the ideas he was perceived to represent.⁸¹

During Kilkenny Arts Week in 1975, the Protestant Dean, Rev. Brian Harvey personally removed Robert Ballagh's *Flasher Kite* (fig.2.11) from the exhibition on foot of a complaint from an organization called *Parents Concern*. Ballagh's kite was a self-portrait as a flasher in a raincoat, and was intended to be humorous. The kites were exhibited suspended from the ceiling and according to Ballagh the Dean 'got a big stepladder and he went up and it was nearly life size and he took it and put it under his cassock and marched out.'⁸² Nobody attempted to stop him, but as Ballagh says 'that was 1975, and times change'.⁸³ The exhibition's organizer, Barrie Cooke, denounced this act of unofficial censorship, and was supported by other artists including Theo McNabb, Camille Souter and Michael Farrell.

The Ev+a exhibition of 1984 was held in the Municipal Gallery in Pery Street, Limerick.⁸⁴ David Lilburn (b.1950) exhibited a monoprint entitled *Towards from the Forceps to the Chains of Office*, 1984, (fig.2.12) which won the £500 prize for graphic art. The image depicts the artist, lying on his back, naked, with an erection and represents his desire to be free of personal constraints that arise from being part of society. Richard Coughlan, proprietor of the Treaty café on Nicholas Street, Limerick, notified the *Limerick Leader* that he would deface the drawing on Thursday 2nd

⁸⁰ John Harbison, State Pathologist's Report, Dublin, 20th May, 1994, cited in *Louis le Brocquy, Paintings, 1939-1996* (Dublin: IMMA, 1997), p.81.

⁸¹ The public reaction to le Brocquy's *A Family* is discussed further in chapter three of this study.

⁸² Robert Ballagh in conversation with the author, 15/05/2010.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Ev+a, now called eva, was established in Limerick in 1977. In 1984 its curator was Peter Fuller.

November 1984, stating his reasons to the press. 'That is absolute filth. I have a daughter of 15 and she is a member of this library and I will not allow her to see that...it's disgusting...a man with an erect penis...do you call that art?'⁸⁵

The newspaper duly alerted the gallery but did not identify the attacker to them, in the interests, they said, of confidentiality. They were therefore on hand to photograph the events when Mr. Coughlan attacked the painting, taking notes and photographs for the newspaper report. Coughlan was apprehended by the chair of Ev+a, Hugh Murray, and in the ensuing scuffle the two fell to the floor. In the process the print was slightly torn. The committee of Ev+a was critical of both Coughlan and the *Limerick Leader* reporter Conor Keane and photographer Eoin South. The attack appeared to have been deliberately planned in order to maximise publicity and the organisers felt that the paper was complicit in seeking a sensational story. Interestingly, it was reported that there were several members of the public in the gallery at the time, including a nun and a priest. Perhaps these two somewhat incongruous figures are intended to provide the same amusement for the reader as did the two resourceful German tourists in the *Rokeby Venus* affair. Stories such as these, when reported in the popular press undoubtedly function as light-hearted antidotes to the more serious new reports of the day.

Coughlan demanded to be arrested for causing wilful damage, claiming, 'I want to be charged with destroying it and I want the corporation charged for allowing it to be displayed – it's nothing but filth', but Murray would not humour him by pressing charges.⁸⁶ The following Wednesday, 10th November, Coughlan held a picket outside the gallery, accompanied by like-minded objectors. Ironically, while they attempted to persuade people not to attend the exhibition, they had copies of the catalogue to show the offending print to those over eighteen who wished to see it.

David Lilburn's reaction was 'one of amazement, not that someone did not like the drawing but that they went to lengths to destroy it...The work is not pornographic, it is part of the nature of art that it is up to an individual to react to what he sees.'⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Newspaper report reprinted in Sean Lynch, *Yesterday's Papers: Art and Artists in Irish Newspapers*, (Dublin: 2008).

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

These examples of individual outrage once again raise the question of the innate prudishness of the Irish people. Bearing in mind the theories on this subject discussed in the introductory chapter to this study, especially those of Inglis, it seems that there is a convincing argument to support this view. Inglis, as we have seen, attributes Irish prudery to the country's colonial status combined with the pervasive influence of the Catholic Church. According to Kenneth Clarke Victorian prudery in Britain had more to do with rapid economic growth than religious principles. Inglis also identifies specific economic conditions that precipitated prudery in Ireland, in the emergence of a class of tenant farmers who had to curtail marriage in the interests of the sustainability of the land, resulting in the repression of sexuality.⁸⁸ However, unlike in Britain and America, where there was always a strong voice of opposition, 'the crucial role of the Catholic church in the modernization of Irish society meant that Victorian morality remained dominant in Ireland until late in the twentieth century'.⁸⁹ Inglis refers to this phenomenon as 'the long nineteenth century of Irish Catholicism'.⁹⁰ Ultimately it was, he says, the alliance of church and state, of priests and mothers, which 'drove sexuality into the dark recesses of Irish society'.⁹¹ The repression of sexuality described by Inglis can be seen to have affected all areas of Irish life and no doubt directly influenced ideas about the representation of the body in art.

However much we may be tempted to think that moral outrage to explicit art works is to be expected in Ireland, many similar episodes have occurred internationally, even up till very recently. In April, 2011, Susan Burns, a 53 year old woman from Virginia, attacked Gauguin's *Two Tahitian Women*, 1899 (fig.2.13) while it was on loan from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York to the National Gallery of Art in Washington.⁹² She approached the painting and began pounding it with her fists before trying to remove it from the gallery wall. She was easily overcome by staff and later charged with attempted theft and destruction of property. She told police she thought the

⁸⁸ Tom Inglis, 'Origins and Legacies of Irish Prudery: Sexuality and Social Control in Modern Ireland', *Éire/Ireland*, 40.3/4 (Fall/Winter, 2005), p.16.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p.33.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p.13.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* p.5.

⁹² 'Gauguin Painting in Washington D.C. Attacked by Woman', 6 April 2011 www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-12966698 [accessed 5 July 2011].

painting should be burned, and that Gauguin was 'evil' because of the nudity in the painting, which is 'bad for the children'. She further maintained that the picture was 'very homosexual' because there are two semi-nude women depicted in it.⁹³

Her final words to the court indicate her troubled state of mind, and explain why such incidents are often reported light-heartedly in the press. She said 'I was trying to remove it, I think it should be burned...I am from the American CIA, I have a radio in my head, I am going to kill you'.⁹⁴

The incident represented the first act of vandalism at the gallery since the 1970s, and the painting was placed back on display the day after the attack. Clearly the gallery staff sensibly saw this as the act of a troubled individual. However, the coverage of the incident on the local television news channels is somewhat more bizarre. The WTTS channel reported the story and showed the painting in question but blurred out the nipples on screen. Other channels used different strategies to disguise the nudity of the two figures in the painting. WJLA pushed up the banner headline from the bottom of the screen so that it would cover the breasts, while WRC cropped the image to show the heads only. The editors of these news channels apparently wanted to avoid any further public outrage yet their approach seems to allow space for the moral justification of the initial outrage. This seems to suggest that either they are not sympathetic to the idea of the acceptability of nudity in high art images or, more probably, that they cannot presume their viewing public to be so.

In a recent case that spanned Europe and America the reason for public controversy was the apparent blasphemy of the work rather than the nudity. This was the case of Andreas Serrano's controversial work, *Immersion (Piss Christ)*, 1987 (fig.2.14) which was damaged on April 17, 2011, while on exhibition in France. It had previously been vandalized in Australia in 1997 and in Sweden in 2007.⁹⁵ The director of the National Gallery of Victoria cancelled the Australian exhibition, allegedly out of concern for a Rembrandt exhibition that was also on display at the time. The photograph had also been

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ During a retrospective of Serrano's work at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1997, the then Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, George Pell, unsuccessfully sought an injunction from the Supreme Court to restrain the Gallery from publicly displaying *Immersion (Piss Christ)*. Afterwards, one viewer attempted to remove the work from the gallery wall, and two teenagers later attacked it with a hammer.

shown in France several times without incident, and for four months it had been on view as part of the exhibition *Je crois aux miracles (I Believe in Miracles)* in the Collection Lambert in Avignon, before *Civitas*, a lobby group that aims to re-Christianize France, launched an online petition and mobilized other fundamentalist groups. When the staunchly conservative archbishop of Vaucluse, Jean-Pierre Cattenoz, called the work 'odious' and said that he wanted this 'trash' removed, the gallery was inundated with demands to have the work banned.⁹⁶

On Saturday 16th April 2011, around a thousand Christian protesters marched through Avignon to the gallery. The following day four people in dark glasses entered the exhibition just after it opened at 11am, and attacked the work with a hammer and a screwdriver or ice-pick. Describing the attack as a kind of 'inquisition' against art, the gallery director, Eric Mézil, promised that the gallery would re-open with the destroyed works on show so that the public could 'see what barbarians can do'.⁹⁷ Mézil maintained that the movement against *Piss Christ* had started at the time of the ruling UMP party's controversial debate on religion and secularism in France, and specifically then president Sarkozy's speech in March 2011 celebrating 'the Christian heritage of France' at Puy-en-Velay, where the first Crusades were launched.⁹⁸ Sarkozy has been accused of using anti-Muslim and extreme-right rhetoric to appeal to voters and counter the rise of the right-wing *Front National*, in the prelude to the 2012 presidential election. However, the then French culture minister, Frédéric Mitterrand, condemned the vandalism as an attack on the fundamental freedoms of creation and expression. Mézil drew attention to the sectarian aspect of the episode, alleging that protesters insulted museum staff of North African origin, and threatened to 'pour donkey piss on the Qur'an', while an email to the museum talked about 'plunging the diary of Anne Frank in urine'.⁹⁹ Seen in its proper context, this incident reflects the tensions inherent in relationships between Christianity

⁹⁶ Angelique Chrisafis, 'Attack on "Blasphemous" Art Work Fires Debate on Role of Religion in France', *The Guardian*, 18 April 2011 <www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/04/18/andres-serrano-piss-christ-destroyed-christian-protestor> [accessed 2 May 2011].

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

and Islam in the West, that go well beyond the traditional concerns about explicit imagery and blasphemy in art.

Censorship is 'an issue of profound social and psychological importance', and David Tribe identifies a particular 'type' of personality that is attracted to authoritarianism.¹⁰⁰ In countries where there is a recognised state religion the offence of blasphemy is often enshrined in law. However, even in non-religious societies, authoritarian 'types' who have strong personal religious or political ideologies often choose to make their objections public. According to Argyle, writing in 1958, 'Authoritarianism is considerably higher for religious people, and in particular for Catholics, while these are the people who tend to play a prominent part in both official censorship and private censoriousness'.¹⁰¹ Contemporary Ireland can arguably be said to be in a transitional state as regards the influence of conservative religious opinions, but the Ireland of the 1920s and 30s was one whose religious and national homogeneity had an adverse effect on those who dared to represent an alternative view of what it meant to be Irish. There has also been a tendency to self-censorship on the part of art institutions in Ireland, a desire to pre-censor shows or individual works in order to avoid any adverse public reaction. Mick O'Dea had two nude studies removed from his 1989 show in County Hall, Portlaoise in an act of censorship that he felt was completely out of step with the times, and came down to the decision of one un-accountable person. The artist felt that the unreliability of such subjective decisions was underlined by the fact that one of the works was subsequently bought by a priest.¹⁰²

Robert Ballagh, probably one of the most censored living Irish artists had a chastening experience with the Office of Public Works, who wanted to buy a print from him in the 1980s. He recounts the purchasing of *The Ambidextrous Paradigm*, 1986, (fig.2.15) with some amusement.

'This is how mad it is; in the 1980s I did a series of prints. One of the prints had a Vesalius drawing of a man and a woman and of course they're nude, and the man is there, I can't say in all his glory because he is very modestly endowed, but they're in the

¹⁰⁰ Tribe, 1973, p.293.

¹⁰¹ Michael Argyle, *Religious Behaviour* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p.89, cited in Tribe, 1973, p.296.

¹⁰² Brian McAvera, 'State of Surveillance', *Irish Arts Review*, 27.1 (Spring, 2010), 62-69.

background of this print. The other print is about astronomy, space exploration, and in the corner it had a line drawing of a plaque that was put on one of the US space exploration vehicles – it was a disc that contained music, the spoken voice, and also this *drawing of a man and a woman*, very basic, and again you'd hardly notice that the man's credentials were on it, but this was a tiny part of this print. Then some people from the OPW came in to buy some and they would only take the one that had no nudity in it. I mean, I just scratch my head and think where are we at?'¹⁰³

A certain amount of caution on the part of public bodies for display in public buildings is understandable and appropriate but the approach of the OPW here seems ludicrous. As the artist says; 'But what do you end up with, buying pictures of flowers?'¹⁰⁴

When faced with such a litany of cases involving either personal or official objections to works of art on the basis of 'obscenity' it is clearly necessary to investigate further in order to ascertain the precise nature of the offence caused. The depiction of nudity in itself has always been problematic for some, but as the parameters of acceptability shift in society, the censorship issue is ever more narrowly construed to focus on particular types of images. Hence, in the culture wars in America, 'obscenity' came to signify both sexually explicit images and blasphemous images, as the campaign was driven by the political right, which has strong links to fundamental Christianity. More recently the debate has been complicated by the debates surrounding the conflict of ideologies between Christianity and Islam, as witnessed in the Serrano case in Avignon in 2011. Also, in the current climate, child protection issues have become central to our understanding of the appropriateness or otherwise of images of children and young people.

Youthful Nudes in Irish Art

There are few examples in Irish art of controversial images of children but two in particular bear some examination, if only for the fact that no controversy surrounded them at the time of their inception or exhibition.

¹⁰³ Robert Ballagh in conversation with the author, 15/05/2010.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Patrick Tuohy's *The Model (Study of a Young Girl)* (fig.2.16) was painted in 1914 and is widely considered to be 'one of the finest artistic achievements of his career'.¹⁰⁵ It is thought perhaps to have been inspired by Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, as Tuohy is known to have shared Orpen's interest in art historical borrowings and references to the works of old masters. Murphy acknowledges it as 'a daring subject for its day', and sees 'sadness' in the young model's face.¹⁰⁶ Bruce Arnold goes a little further, describing it as 'a disturbing image' for Ireland at that time, and a 'mark of Tuohy's courage as an artist that he carried off the complex challenges presented by the subject'.¹⁰⁷ Rosemarie Mulcahy owns that, to our contemporary eyes there is something disturbing about the picture, the model seems 'extremely vulnerable...fragile...haunting'.¹⁰⁸ This feeling of uncertainty in the viewer is caused by the young model's apparent unease. Most commentators seem to accept the probability that she is May Power, the daughter of sculptor Albert Power, who had sat to Tuohy on many previous occasions, and was known to him through her family, who arranged the sittings.¹⁰⁹ According to hearsay, Tuohy first sold the painting for the sum of £1.00, and it 'changed hands a number of times after 1919'.¹¹⁰ In that year it was exhibited in the Royal Hibernian Academy, priced at £150, a huge sum of money at that time. It was subsequently exhibited at the Patrick Tuohy Memorial Exhibition at Mills Hall, in July 1931, where it was listed as being owned by a W.G. Lyons Esq.

It may seem extraordinary that so frank an image of young sexuality eluded comment in the press at the time and to this day is somewhat glossed over in accounts of Tuohy's life. Alison Smith's account of *The Victorian Nude*, gives some explanation for the lack of comment at the time. She explains that images of children were intended as depictions of innocence and were accepted as such by the viewing public.¹¹¹ It is possible that although Tuohy's painting was made well outside of the Victorian period, it may have

¹⁰⁵ Patrick J. Murphy, *Patrick Tuohy* (Dublin: Town House, 2004), p.84.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p.47.

¹⁰⁷ Bruce Arnold, 'Jack Yeats and the Making of Irish Art in the Twentieth Century' in *When Time Began to Rant and Rage*, ed. by James Christen Stewart (London: Merrell Holberton, 1998), p.55.

¹⁰⁸ Rosemarie Mulcahy, 'Patrick J. Tuohy 1894-1930', *Irish Arts Review Yearbook* (1989/90), 107-118.

¹⁰⁹ Murphy, 2004, maintains that May Power was the daughter of the sculptor Albert Power but Mulcahy, 1989/90, suggests she was his sister.

¹¹⁰ Murphy, 2004, p.47.

¹¹¹ Alison Smith, *The Victorian Nude: Sexuality Morality and Art* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1996).

been an anomalous case that was accepted on those terms. At that time, in Ireland and elsewhere people were not as sensitive to issues surrounding child safety as they are today. It is also clear that the concept of child protection was very different then than now. In 1911 Egon Schiele spent 24 days in prison for exposing his young models to explicit pictures in the studio. It was thought more damaging for children to be exposed to explicit pictures of adults than to be child models themselves.¹¹²

However, Tuohy's painting hints at darker psychological resonances in the artist's own personality. A similar look of apprehension that is on the girl's face in this picture can be seen in his *Self-Portrait*, c.1927, (fig.2.17) in the National Self-Portrait Collection in which he depicts himself alongside his sister Bride. Finlay speculates that the portrait may be unfinished, and may have been intended to show him in the act of painting his sister's portrait, but there is no visible evidence in the picture to support this view, in the form of an easel or any hint of a canvas.¹¹³ Furthermore, the facial similarities between the two figures seem to suggest an unusually strong identification between the artist and his sister, and the figures appear almost to merge. The siblings had a very close relationship but the artist's relationship with his father was reportedly 'very stained'.¹¹⁴ Such a curious self-portrait demands some investigation of the artist's character and personality. Mulcahy describes Tuohy as having a 'romantic nature' but she also notes that he was 'renowned for his short temper and sharp tongue' ...and 'subject to fits of depression.'¹¹⁵ While living in Ireland he had been engaged to the artist Phyllis Moss, who wrote that he was 'tortured by misgivings and doubts, insecurity and fancies not usually dominant in normal persons – he did not allow himself happiness. The stress was almost constant. He had so many friends but they seldom could give him any repose, he would not let them'.¹¹⁶ Tuohy and Moss spent the summer of 1923 in Italy together, and were engaged to be married. Nevertheless Tuohy went to America, apparently because he was worried about finance, and according to Thomas McGreevy he felt that his

¹¹² Schröder, *Egon Schiele: Eros and Passion*, Prestel, Munich, London and New York, 2006, p.107, quoted in Joanne Bernstein, 'Artist and Muse', in *Seduced: Art and Sex from Antiquity to Now*, ed. by Marina Wallace, Martin Kemp and Joanne Bernstein (London: Merrell, 2007), pp.157-8.

¹¹³ Sarah Finlay, *The National Self-Portrait Collection of Ireland, vol.1, 1979-1989* (Limerick: University of Limerick Press, 1989), p.242.

¹¹⁴ Murphy, 2004, p.63.

¹¹⁵ Mulcahy, 1989, pp.107-118.

¹¹⁶ Private letter from Moss to Mulcahy, 1979, cited in Mulcahy, 1989-90, p.111.

teaching and portrait-painting in Dublin would not provide a sufficient income for a married couple.¹¹⁷ Then, when his career 'seemed to be going well' he took his own life, a fact which was to some extent covered up in the initial police reports.¹¹⁸ Following Tuohy's death his sister Bride received a letter from a priest in America who wrote; 'the Mr. Tuohy I met was a real nice fellow, and had a very delicate conscience and seemed to be of a high strung disposition, but was a man behind it all'.¹¹⁹ It would be fruitless to speculate on the nature of Tuohy's unhappiness but it may be that his own sense of sexual unease made it possible for him to communicate a similar feeling in the portrait of a young girl with whom he felt a degree of empathy.

Tuohy's painting is very different in tone to Roderic O'Connor's *The Young Girl*, c.1917-19, (fig.2.18) though relatively close in date. As Roger Benington has observed, O'Connor introduced 'a note of modernity by means of the shockingly frontal, yet very relaxed pose of the nude model'.¹²⁰ However, there are significant differences between the two pictures in tone and in the circumstances surrounding their production. O'Connor had been living and working in France since 1886 and before that he had studied at the *Académie Royale des Beaux Arts* in Antwerp. His move to Paris from Pont Aven in 1904 involved a shift away from landscape to nudes, flowers and interior subjects as a direct result of working indoors in the studio. He exhibited his first nude in 1905. *The Young Girl* is thought to be a portrait of René Honta, who became O'Connor's model during the First World War. They had become lovers by 1919 though they did not marry until 1933.¹²¹ At the time the picture was painted she would have been about twenty two years old though she looks younger as the title suggests. After their marriage and their subsequent move to Nueil-sur-Layon, O'Connor had no further access to models and so he painted no more nudes.

¹¹⁷ Thomas MacGreevy, 'Patrick Tuohy R.H.A. 1894-1930', *Father Matthew Record*, 7 (July, 1943), p.5.

¹¹⁸ Mulcahy, 1989-90.

¹¹⁹ Letter to Mrs. Killeen from Rev. M.C. Murphy, St. Francis Church, 3815 Wheat St. Columbia S.C. dated October 3, 1930, original underlining. Archive material, National Gallery of Ireland: ESB Centre for the Study of Irish Art, Box CSIA/TUO.

¹²⁰ Jonathan Benington, *Roderic O'Connor* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1992), p.124.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.122-134, p.150 and note 14, p.183.

Robert Ballagh painted a semi-nude painting of his daughter Rachel, aged about six, which he considered 'innocent' at the time. He explains his approach to painting *Rachel, Marilyn*, 1973-5 (fig.2.19) as follows:

'I did a painting which I liked very much, my daughter is 41 now and she was only six or seven then, and we dolled her up and I photographed her with the wig on and make up and false eyelashes and everything. First of all I thought the painting that I did was rather a nice painting, but also, it was about innocence and sexuality and all sorts of things, and at the time I liked it, I thought it was an interesting picture.'¹²²

However, he recognises the changes that have been wrought by recent exposures of the extent of child abuse, and he admits that he would not do such a painting today. Asked why, he admits that it is fear of the association of paedophilia.

'It wasn't a big issue then, obviously it existed but it wasn't a big issue, and so, as a consequence I don't think any of us was conscious of it as an issue, so this seemed a perfectly reasonable thing to do, and speaking for myself it would still be a perfectly reasonable thing to do.'¹²³ *Rachel Marilyn* was bought by Fr. John McGrath, who was the Parish priest in Tipperary, then Doon, Co.Limerick. During his lifetime he amassed a collection of forty-five modern Irish paintings and prints which were bequeathed to the Crawford Gallery when he died in 1998.

But are we 'being forced to look through the eyes of a paedophile'?¹²⁴

Ballagh agrees, 'Yes, we're all being made into criminals, and I think that's a shame'.¹²⁵

Internationally, there have been several cases in recent decades where images of nude children have caused extreme controversy.¹²⁶ However, it seems clear that to some extent the medium employed by the artist affects public reaction and in many of the international cases it can be seen that the photographic image is more likely to cause

¹²² Robert Ballagh in conversation with the author, 15/05/2010.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ David Marr, *The Henson Case* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2008).

¹²⁵ Robert Ballagh in conversation with the author, 15/05/2010.

¹²⁶ Controversy surrounded Robert Mapplethorpe and Sally Mann in the USA and Bill Henson and Concetta Petrillo in Australia. While a deeper examination of these cases does not lie within the scope of this work, it is important to acknowledge that they influenced the international climate on censorship. For more information see especially Marr, 2008 and Janet Kardon, *The Perfect Moment* (Penn: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1989).

outrage than the painted image. Allison Archer makes this point in relation to Australian audiences but it is clearly a universal phenomenon. David Tribe has observed that ‘nudes are acceptable from the hands of old masters’ because he maintains that status is important when considering what is acceptable in art. Nevertheless he goes on to list thirteen old masters whose work has suffered at the hands of the censor, among them Michelangelo, Rubens and Boucher.¹²⁷

Before the invention of photography the differences between art and pornography were harder to define. Some works that are now revered as old masters definitely had an explicitly erotic function. According to Anne Hollander Titian’s patrons saw his nudes ‘with *Playboy* eyes’.¹²⁸ In Philip IV’s collection paintings depicting nude Goddesses and mythological figures such as Venus and Danaë were kept in private rooms for select viewing, while the religious works were on public show. They were classified and separated by function, and in the process, subjected to a type of censorship.¹²⁹ In this way they were appropriately contextualized according to the prevailing social norms, though it is of course important to remember that, as privately owned works, they were only seen by a privileged few. However, notwithstanding this seventeenth century understanding of the disparate functions and appeal of certain categories of images, a painting can be seen to operate in ‘multiple visual and psychological fields in a way that works against the one-dimensional thrust of pornography’, and the explicitness and unparalleled realism of the photographic image brought about ‘a renewed questioning of the codes of nudity within the realm of art’.¹³⁰

Photography’s early exploitation by the pornographer was due to its mimetic quality, and the sense of reality heightened the sense of eroticism in the pornographic image. It is interesting that these early pornographic photographs often took Old masters as points of reference, and Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* was frequently quoted from.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Tribe, 1973, pp.39-40.

¹²⁸ Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (London: Penguin, 1988), p.88.

¹²⁹ Wallace, Kemp and Bernstein, 2007, p.14.

¹³⁰ Ibid. p.15 and p.55.

¹³¹ Marina Wallace, ‘Exposures’ in *Seduced*, ed. by Wallace, Kemp and Bernstein (London, New York: Merrell, 2007), pp.87-98.

Marina Wallace also draws our attention to the terms used by photography, and the fact that a photographic image is said to be 'taken' rather than made.¹³²

Kemp maintains that 'photography has made the separation between art and pornography more complex', but historically, as we have seen, there has always been room for some degree of overlap between these definitions.¹³³

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the targets of censorship have changed over the years. While the representation of women has run the gamut from idealization to abjection, and everything in between, the subjects that remain contentious today are male sexuality, specifically homoerotic imagery and, nude representations of children, which have become new taboos. Images of naked children once seen as 'innocent' now provoke anxieties that arise from the perception if not the actuality of increased incidents of paedophilia in society. As a result, the perfectly reasonable impulse to protect children has resulted in severely limiting artists' freedom of expression in the USA and Australia. There are reports daily in the international press about new objections being raised against art for very spurious reasons connected with the exploitation of children or homosexuality. The recent case of public reaction to Louise Bourgeois's *Father and Son*, 2004-6 (fig.2.20) is one of the most extreme simply because the work itself seems utterly innocuous. In 2002 a wealthy executive, Stu Smaile, left one million dollars in his will to provide a classical style nude male sculpture and fountain for the city of Seattle. The Seattle Art Museum duly commissioned Louise Bourgeois to make a sculpture for the Olympic Sculpture Park in Seattle, which opened in January 2007. There was a considerable public outcry and objection to the work, largely conducted over the airwaves via the local radio talk shows. The reason for this reaction was that the donor, Smailes, was gay.¹³⁴ Bourgeois's piece, which features a father and son, as a visual antidote to the ubiquitous mother and child theme in art, was deemed to have an

¹³² Ibid. p.88.

¹³³ Wallace, Kemp, and Bernstein, 2007, p.15.

¹³⁴ Sam Howe Verhovek, 'Plan for Statues of Nudes Exposes Seattle's Modesty', *The Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 2005

automatic association with paedophilia.¹³⁵ The fact that the implicit prejudice against male parents in such a view did not cause concern illustrates how discourses around the representation of children can be affected by anxiety concerning child protection. Similar cases have not arisen in Ireland, but this is not because Irish society is more liberal or tolerant, but because the limits of tolerance have not been tested to the same degree by challenging and difficult images. This may be due to the fact that Ireland remains a relatively homogenous country, with a shared sense of national identity. The recent experience of immigration and cultural and racial mixing has not yet resulted in a heterogeneous society in which all points of view must be openly debated. In particular, the field of Irish sexuality remains largely un-researched, and images that explore the margins in relation to sex and gender are still rare.

The history of censorship in Ireland is by no means unique but it has at times been quite extreme. For the most part it was aimed at the written word and films, and at images in the mass media such as advertising in magazines and newspapers. In the 1930s, immediately after the censorship legislation was enacted, it seems that images were often censored, not because of their content or subject matter, but were used as an excuse to censor, when political or religious reasons could not be openly stated. Harry Clarke and G.B. Shaw both fell foul of this duplicity in the government's approach to the problem. This amounted to, in effect, 'a censorship exercised on behalf of one creed'.¹³⁶ The privileging of one creed was mirrored by the privileging of one political ideology, and this resulted in the twin orthodoxies of Catholicism and Nationalism. Both affected the authorities' treatment of Harry Clarke's *Geneva Window* and G.B. Shaw's *Adventures of a Black Girl in Her Search for God*.¹³⁷ Bearing in mind Müller's censorship map, we can with hindsight distinguish between some of the censorship scandals in Ireland in the twentieth century. In the case of Harry Clarke, it was the context that provoked governmental ire, while G.B. Shaw was objected to on the basis of messenger, message,

<<http://articles.latimes.com/2005/oct/02/nation/na-statue2>> [accessed 1 October 2011].

¹³⁵ Sue Peters, 'Sculpting Controversy', *Seattle News Weekly*, 18 January 2006

www.seattleweekly.com/2006-01-18/arts/sculpting/controversy/ > [accessed 1 October 2011].

¹³⁶ 'Frank O'Connor on Censorship' in Julia Carlson, *Banned in Ireland: Censorship and the Irish Writer*, (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.151- 157.

¹³⁷ W.P Ryan, *The Pope's Green Island* (London: James Nisbet, 1912), p.100.

and context. For le Brocquy's *A Family* the code employed, as well as the context proved provocative, while for Farrell it was the code employed, and the message.

In Ireland, censorship never became a repressive tool of the state to the same extent that it did in Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union, or indeed as it has in contemporary China. But its power to oppress was magnified by the political and religious homogeneity of the Irish people, so that often objections were raised by individuals representing an entrenched majority. The radical alternative voice was always marginalised, and as a result of this stultifying atmosphere many artists and writers emigrated. Emigration can be seen, in this context, as an extreme strategy of avoidance. Certainly painters of the nude have often found it less troublesome to emigrate than to face possible objections and restrictions in Ireland. For others, choosing to remain in Ireland, the wisest course of action has been to avoid the subject of the nude altogether, and this is not difficult in a country which has no tradition of the subject and very little overt demand for it.

But if there was a reticence about the representation of the body, an 'etiquette' as Brian O'Doherty would have it, it is probably fair to say that the same etiquette extended to unofficial censorship of the visual arts as well.¹³⁸ Hiding away a damaged picture in the basement to avoid embarrassment, the discreet signage at the Royal Hibernian Academy, the reception of Childhood images as innocent, the secreting away of paintings of nudes in private collections are all possibly strategies of polite avoidance, but there has been comparatively little in the way of official confrontation. The extremely opinioned and motivated individuals who decide to physically attack a painting exist everywhere and are explained by personal psychology as much as public opinion.

Tom Inglis, in his discussion of Irish sexuality, makes a point about social behaviour in Ireland that may help to explain the approach to nudity and sexuality in the arts in this country. Drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, he describes the notion of 'Habitus' as 'knowing, for example, how to walk and talk; how to dress; how to present oneself; how to exchange looks; what can be said between men and women; the jokes that are permissible between men; the things about sex that men can say to women; the teasing,

¹³⁸ O'Doherty, 1971.

bantering and cajoling'.¹³⁹ It is the ingrained understanding of what is and is not acceptable in social behaviour, and, for the purposes of this discussion, in artistic production and reception. Habitus, he explains 'tends to guarantee the "correctness" of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms.'¹⁴⁰ It may be the case, as O'Doherty has said, that, in relation to the representation of the body in art, the Irish way has been to, wherever possible, practice avoidance.¹⁴¹ Finally, it is also clear that legislation framed specifically to deal with the print media is outdated in the age of electronic communications. Speaking on a BBC radio 4 news programme in January 2012, Myles Jackman, a solicitor specialising in obscenity law, said that there was an inherent weakness in the law regarding the definition of obscenity.¹⁴² Because the definition of obscenity in the UK's 1959 *Obscene Publications Act* is so vague, it is left for juries in individual cases to decide what is or isn't obscene and this, Jackman feels, is too subjective a position to be enshrined in law. The situation is strikingly similar in Irish law. Furthermore, he insists that legislation that was framed in the middle of the twentieth century is unfit for purpose in an age of electronic communications. In January 2012 Jackman represented Michael Peacock who appeared in Southwark Crown Court on six counts of distributing pornographic DVDs, and was acquitted. The jury in the case agreed with Jackman's assertion that 'the *Obscene Publications Act* has been rendered irrelevant in the digital age', as they felt that equally explicit imagery was freely available on-line and that it was an individual choice whether or not to view such material.¹⁴³ At that time the Crown Prosecution Service was unwilling to commit to reviewing the legislation to make its definition of obscenity more specific.

¹³⁹ Tom Inglis, 'Foucault, Bourdieu and the Field of Irish Sexuality', *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 7 (1997), pp.5-28, (p.20).

¹⁴⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p.54.

¹⁴¹ O'Doherty, 1971.

¹⁴² Myles Jackman is a solicitor with the London law firm Hodge, Jones and Allen.

¹⁴³ Michael Peacock was acquitted on six counts of distributing pornographic material on 6th January 2012 in the Southwark Crown Court, London, <www.solicitorsjournal.com> [accessed 3 Feb 2012].

Chapter 3

The Practice of Copying in the Work of Louis le Brocquy and other Irish Artists

Introduction

This chapter deals with the work of Louis le Brocquy who was one of the most important painters of the nude in twentieth century Irish art. In particular it examines his relationship with those European artists from whom he derived his sources, especially the French artist Edouard Manet. It will also consider other less iconic artists who, at specific times in his early career, exerted a strong influence on le Brocquy's work. Manet was crucial to le Brocquy's development as an artist, not just because le Brocquy admired his technique and subject-matter, but because of Manet's importance as one of the nineteenth-century progenitors of modernism, for which reason he occupies a privileged place in the canon of modern art. The arguments here will show that le Brocquy's homage to Manet was not based solely on formal or aesthetic considerations, but was also related to the myth of the artist as a harbinger of social change. The circumstances that link le Brocquy to Manet in this sense are the rejections that both suffered at the hands of conservative official art establishments during their careers.

The examination of the origins and provenance of le Brocquy's paintings will demonstrate their indebtedness to the ideas of Manet and others. Further, by way of an exhaustive investigation of Manet's own art-historical sources it is hoped to convey the rootedness of Irish art in a tradition that originates outside of its own cultural and geographical boundaries. The influence of the rich European tradition of classical painting is especially important in discussions on the nude because it is in the depiction of the figure that the conventions and norms honed in the academies of Europe were particularly dominant. Academic training in Ireland was based on the French model but was introduced via the Kensington system of education during the period that Ireland was under British rule. Following independence, the same educational approach was maintained but it soon began to go into decline. le Brocquy, as a self taught artist, did not

avail of the fairly limited opportunities to learn figural painting in his native Ireland, but chose instead to go directly to the source, and to learn by observation.

By way of comparison, the discussion will then turn to the works of three other Irish artists who made seminal paintings in response to well-known European masters, Michael Farrell, Robert Ballagh and Gerard Dillon respectively. It will consider the similarities and differences between their approaches to copying from original works, and examine the ways in which each sought to find a source which would facilitate the expression of their artistic, social, political and sexual identities. Such comparisons will serve to illuminate the distinctions between the representation of the nude in modernism and post-modernism, as evinced in the at times subtle differences between homage and appropriation.

The chapter begins with an introduction to the theory and practice of copying which, though a long-standing practice for artists, has altered greatly over time in terms of its avowed use and value.

The Theoretical Approach to the Copy

Copying a work of art by a previous artist has long been a practice among artists, for several reasons. Firstly, it is an obvious way of learning technique and composition, and as such, it became a standard part of studio practice in the Renaissance. Thereafter it became embedded in art teaching practice until the twentieth century. Students would copy from drawings before moving onto casts of antique statuary, and finally progressing to the live model. This ensured that the idealised figure was ingrained in the memory and imagination even when there was a live model present, which suited the idealist ethos of academic art taught in academies throughout Europe. However, aside from its long-standing tradition as a didactic tool, copying from another artist's work has long had a particular attraction for artists, and it is one that has survived into contemporary art. Many have personal motives for referencing or copying the work of another artist, particularly one who has a privileged place in the canon, or who has particular personal resonances for the copyist.

There are various forms of copying, the most straightforward being a faithful copy in the same medium. One degree removed from this is a faithful copy in another medium, and

thereafter the process becomes more fluid. A single element, such as a figure, may be lifted from an original and placed in a different context in a new work, as is the case in Gerard Dillon's *Bed-sitting Room*, 1955, discussed below. More subtle is the overall direct influence, so that the later work resembles the original in technique, composition and subject matter, but is essentially a new work. Most nebulous of all is the indirect influence, so that the new work may remind the viewer of a previous one in feeling or tone, but is nevertheless a completely independent work.

Norman Bryson, in *Tradition and Desire*, explains the problem for the 'latecoming' artist, namely to exist within a tradition and continue its aims and objectives, and at the same time to advance the medium in which those traditional ideas are expressed.¹ These ideas are indebted to literary criticism and particularly to Harold Bloom's definition of 'the anxiety of influence', as the inevitable condition of the late-coming artist.² In the practice of copying differences also pertain to the artist's intentionality, depending on whether the influence is known only to him and kept as an interior impulse, or whether it is intended to be recognised by the viewer, and to trigger a particular set of responses in them. This form of allusion and the extent to which it can be utilized in visual art is the subject of much debate.³ Its effectiveness also depends on the viewer, who, in the first place has to recognise the reference or quotation, and then has to interpret it and disentangle its associated meanings. If the viewer does not read the image in the way the artist intended, can we then say the intention of the artist has failed? Or perhaps the intentionality of the artist is immaterial to the viewer, who can form his/her own set of associations in relationship to the work. The discussion of Robert Ballagh's re-working of Delacroix's *Liberty on the Barricades*, 1830, below, illustrates the dynamics of this process which resulted in frustration for the artist and the subsequent re-iteration of the allusion. The process of allusion and comprehension highlights the complex nature of the relationship between the artist, the work and the viewer. Of these three the relationship

¹ Norman Bryson, *Tradition and Desire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

² Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

³ Literary theory in general claims that allusion is not possible in visual art yet, as art historians refer to it freely, the argument seems to be a semantical one that hinges on a difference of emphasis only. See Carmela Perri, 'On Alluding', *Poetics*, 7 (1978), 289-307, William Irwin, 'What is an Allusion?', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 59.3 (2001), 287-297, Stephanie Ross, 'Art and Allusion', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 40.1 (1981), 59-70, and Michael Leddy, 'Limits of Allusion', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 32.2 (1992). In this discussion I am treating allusion in visual art as an acceptable idea.

between the artist and the viewer is the most remote (except in the obvious case of performance art) and therefore less easily understood.

Often works copied from another artist are works of homage, generally a tribute to the older artist by a younger one, as an acknowledgement of perceived greatness. In its simplest form it can stem from the belief that a particular artist had made a definitive work, that no other can be expected to surpass, and that a simple restatement is sufficient. It often signifies a desire to live up to the achievements of the precursor, or even to surpass them. This latter sense has been described as having an oedipal impulse.⁴ However, Michael Baxendall contests this view when he maintains that the later work creates the situation of influence by invoking the older one. In other words there is an element of choice for the artist in whose work he/she will quote from.⁵ That being the case there is still the power of the established canon, which is likely to exert an influence on this choice.

More common is the complete re-working of an image, taking the composition or subject matter and making it anew so that it is indistinguishable from the original except to the initiated, educated viewer. This was a popular device in the Renaissance, a play on the transposition of motifs which depended on the requisite erudition of the viewer. Modern and contemporary art has seen the proliferation of appropriation, the deliberate transposition of an image or part of an image from one context to another, often contradictory one, in order to subvert the old meanings and produce new ones. This is a very common form of reference in contemporary art, which often seeks to displace old certainties about the social order, and to replace them with new political awareness.

le Brocquy's sources for *A Family*

Louis le Brocquy's *A Family* (fig.3.1) was painted in 1951 as part of a series of paintings that together make up his grey period. In subject matter these paintings increasingly move away from the family group, to highlight the isolation of the individual. His debt to

⁴ Braudy, Leo, 'Afterword: Rethinking Remakes', in *Play it Again, Sam*, ed. by Andrew Horton and Stuart Y. McDougal (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1998), 324-327.

⁵ Michael Baxendall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985).

Manet's *Olympia*, 1863 (fig.3.2) is clearly evident in *A Family* despite the fact that the two paintings differ significantly in both form and feeling. In each case the recumbent female figure, one nude, the other partially draped, dominates the space, and the distinctive pose, propped up on the right elbow, is strikingly similar in both. The forward tilting of the figure in *Olympia* is exacerbated in *A Family*, so that the viewer can see the entire surface of the slab-like bed on which the female figure reclines, and the male figure sits. The chief disparity between the two lies in le Brocquy's suppression of Manet's overt and provocative sensuality. As Anne Madden puts it, 'The sensuous eroticism of these historic paintings gave way in *A Family*, to a bleak linearity', which is, in its way, equally affecting.⁶

Olympia's body is firmly outlined, with pert breasts and crossed legs, the left foot provocatively flexed and delicately shod. She reclines on soft plumped pillows, her right hand resting on a luxuriously embroidered shawl. Enough of the darkly draped background is visible to enable the viewer to place the scene in the familiar (to some) world of the bordello.⁷ Her jewellery and accessories are also part of her masquerade and add to the air of eroticism. In contrast, the body of the woman in *A Family* is less defined, her form merging with the background at her left shoulder and with the body of the cat in front. Her breasts lack softness or roundness and read more easily as pectoral muscles, giving the figure an almost androgynous look. Her legs extrude rigidly from under the sheet and one large ungainly foot blocks the figure of the child from advancing further into the scene. If the viewer is to interpret either the child or the flowers as a symbol of hope, as has been suggested, then it is the only ray of hope in an otherwise bleak scene.⁸ The female figure's only covering is a thin, functional white sheet, clasped

⁶ Anne Madden le Brocquy, *Louis le Brocquy: A Painter Seeing His Way* (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1994), p.81.

⁷ Nancy Locke, *Manet and the Family Romance* (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press, 2001). Locke identifies the setting for *Olympia* as a *maison de rendez-vous*, a type of discreet establishment that gradually replaced the *maison de passé* and the *maison à partie* in the process of gentrification of the sex trade that had begun in Paris in Manet's time. See also Timothy J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris and the Art of Manet and his Followers* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), for a breakdown of the complex classifications of prostitution in nineteenth century Paris.

⁸ Madb Ruane, 'The Family', *Irish Arts Review*, 19.1 (Summer, 2002), 22-23, and Riann Coulter, 'Louis le Brocquy's 'Presence' Series, 1956-1966: Irish, British or International?' *The Irish Review*, 39 (Winter, 2008), 139-56, both interpret the child as a symbol of hope. Síghle Bhreathnach-Lynch, 'Louis le

desperately in her right hand. It is incapable of giving adequate cover or comfort, and despite its presence she seems utterly naked and exposed.

In Manet's *Olympia* the presence of an unseen male figure is implied through the presentation, by a maidservant, of a bouquet of flowers, implying a monetary transaction. Although the narrative in *A Family* represents an entirely different social context, another kind of sexual tension pervades the scene and the utter dejection of the male figure, who appears in the place of the maid, can be seen to derive from the tense emotional transactions between the two adults. Focus is brought to bear on this sense of sexual tension by the position of the woman's left hand, placed between them on the bed, her middle fingers flexed in a manner similar to *Olympia*'s, but here suggesting estrangement rather than intimacy. *Olympia*'s direct gaze has been interpreted in many ways, from mindless ennui to evidence of her personhood.⁹ Her face appears flattened, an effect of the even dispersal of light, which gives her a blank expression, suggesting her indifference to her life as a model and a courtesan. The woman in *A Family*, on the other hand, bitterly resists her fate, her anguished face marked by the darkest shadows. *le Brocquy* has also kept some of Manet's most provocative motifs, transforming them to reflect the altered circumstances of his composition. Manet's playful black cat has become a ferocious white cat, the woman's familiar, on guard, a streak of red paint below its paw serving as an implicit threat of violence. It has been interpreted as 'a masterly expression of covert sexual longing, to match Manet's lascivious feline.'¹⁰ The flowers, smaller and simpler in arrangement than in Manet's original, and proffered here by a child, offer the only note of colour in an otherwise grey and catastrophic scene. Of course, there are debts to other sources than Manet in *A Family*. Several elements of the composition, including the three triangular light shades, one of which is only half visible, and the angular sub-division of the dark indeterminate space of the background, which is fractured and unstable, recall Picasso's *Guernica*, 1937 (fig.3.3). The overhead light in

Brocquy's A Family: 'An Unwholesome and Satanic Distortion of Natural Beauty', *Circa* (January, 2003), sees that symbolism in the bouquet of flowers.

⁹ See especially T.J. Clark, 'Preliminaries to a Possible Treatment of *Olympia* in 1865', *Screen*, 21.1 (1980), 18-41, Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) and Locke, 2001.

¹⁰ Bhreathnach-Lynch, 2003, sees a 'menacing' cat while Ruane, 2002, describes the cat as 'tigerish'. The quoted phrase is from Barbara Dawson, *Louis le Brocquy: Early Heroes, Later Homage* (Dublin: Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane, 2007), 13-20 (p.16).

particular has been identified as indebted to Picasso.¹¹ However, it is important to note that despite the apparent similarities, le Brocquy always denied that the light bulbs were derived from Picasso. At the time that le Brocquy painted *A Family*, *Guernica* was in the Museum of Modern Art in New York but it was widely available in reproduction and le Brocquy was familiar with other works by Picasso in European galleries. Picasso had reverted to utilizing aspects of Synthetic Cubism in 1937 for the painting *Guernica*. By revisiting this experimental stage of his youth and restricting himself chromatically, he succeeded in giving full force to the stark dramatic forms and successfully conveyed the sense of claustrophobic terror endured by the people in the small town of *Guernica* under fire. This sensibility translates, in le Brocquy's Cubist-inspired painting, into an awareness of the 'claustrophobic nature of domesticity', particularly when coupled with exile and oppression.¹² It is clear that le Brocquy adopted Cubism in order to convey similar emotional and political tensions to those expressed in *Guernica*, without ever fully embracing it as a style.¹³ *A Family*, then, is a composite work, indebted to Manet but 'distilled within Picasso's work of the 1930s'.¹⁴

le Brocquy's knowledge of Picasso was mediated through his closer knowledge of, and friendship with, the Polish artist Jankel Adler.¹⁵ An Hassidic Jew from Poland, Adler had fled Germany at the rise of National Socialism, moving to Paris, where he met Picasso in 1933, and then to Scotland, settling eventually in London, where le Brocquy met him in 1947. Both artists exhibited their work at Gimpel fils London gallery. Referring specifically to le Brocquy's 1949 work entitled *Child with Doll* (fig.3.4) which is inscribed on the reverse *Hommage à Adler*, Riann Coulter notes that while le Brocquy previously knew Picasso's work at first hand, nevertheless his 'influence is filtered

¹¹ Bhreathnach-Lynch, 2003.

¹² Roisín Kennedy, 'Made in England: The Critical Reception of Louis le Brocquy's *A Family*', *Third Text.*, 19.5 (September, 2005), 475-486 (p.476).

¹³ S.B. Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University, 1991), p.34.

¹⁴ Mick Wilson, 'le Brocquy: To look, and then to look again, once more', in *Louis le Brocquy: Early Heroes, Later Homage* (Dublin: Dublin City Gallery, the Hugh Lane, 2007), p.26.

¹⁵ S.B. Kennedy also notes the influence of Cézanne in *A Family*, though this can be understood through the influence of Picasso and Adler.

through the eyes of Adler'.¹⁶ Both artists, she writes, shared an interest in their respective cultural roots and in the international avant-garde. Avram Kampf also stresses this point, referring to the 'tensions between tradition and innovation in Adler's work'.¹⁷ Also, both were widely acknowledged to belong to a group of London based artists whose sights were fixed on developments in Europe, both artistic and social. Maurice Collins referred to le Brocquy as 'a leading exponent of the school to which Adler and Robert Colquhoun belong', a group of artists 'who seek to express the portentous fatality of the times'.¹⁸ John Berger understood the connection between le Brocquy and Adler in even stronger terms, referring to Adler as le Brocquy's 'teacher'.¹⁹ Indeed, it may be that Adler was le Brocquy's teacher in both artistic and political matters. Aside from being the older and more successful of the two, with an established reputation in Europe before he came to Britain, Adler provided first-hand experience of the horrors of the Holocaust, having lost all of his nine siblings in Hitler's concentration camps.²⁰ Adler was known among those London-based artists 'not only as a formidable artist, but also as a profound thinker, deeply concerned with the philosophical and spiritual content of art', even to the extent of being seen as something of a 'mystic'.²¹ Roger Bristow writes about Adler's influence on his 'disciples', Robert Colquhoun and Robert MacBryde, and how they referred to him alternatively as 'the master' and 'the wise old man'.²² Adler was a follower and friend of the Jewish mystic Martin Buber, and was 'profoundly aware of his cultural identity and history'. He encouraged Colquhoun and MacBryde to turn to their Scottish Celtic backgrounds for inspiration, specifically recommending them to look at the *Book of Kells*.²³ Similar advice may well have been doled out to le Brocquy regarding his Celtic roots, but it is Adler's character and his innate feeling for design and structure that

¹⁶ Riann Coulter, 'Child with Doll, Hommage à Adler, 1949', *Whyte's Important Irish Art*, sale catalogue, 28th April, 2008, lot no.53.

¹⁷ Avram Kampf, *Chagall to Kitaj: Jewish Experience in Twentieth Century Art* (London: Lund Humphries, 1990).

¹⁸ Maurice Collins, 'Natural Drawing versus Pattern' in *Time and Tide*, (London: Leicester Galleries, 1948).

¹⁹ Berger referred to Adler as 'a teacher whom le Brocquy has justified'. John Berger 'Distinguished Humility', *Art News and Review*, III.10 (June 16, 1951), p.4.

²⁰ Coulter, 2008.

²¹ Robert Frame, 'W.S. Graham at Sandyford Place', *Edinburgh Review*, 75 (1987), cited in Roger Bristow, *The Last Bohemians: The Two Roberts, Colquhoun and MacBryde* (Bristol: Samson and Company, 2010), p.155-7.

²² Bristow, 2010, p.159.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp.159-60.

le Brocquy singled out for the highest praise. 'He was a wise, simple, spiritual man. His work will live not only in its own right but in its enormous influence on young painters in this country. He was the man who put bones into the modern school of British painting'.²⁴ Bristow also notes this quality in Adler's work. Adler insisted that a painter should never be seduced by the superficial qualities of a painting but should aim, instead, for the deeper, spiritual 'truth' that any art, striving for a degree of profundity, should attempt. Adler also stressed that it was essential to get the structure of a work right before attempting anything else saying 'once the design is right you can do anything you want with it'.²⁵ In *A Family* it is specifically this rigidity in the underlying structure that conveys the desperate human emotion contained within it. In addition, the round, wide-eyed head of the child, with its elongated neck and innocent expression recalls Adler's figure style in works such as *Two Orphans*, 1942 (fig.3.5). Adler gave this painting to his friend and fellow artist Josef Herman, the two orphans of the title being himself and Herman, both of whom lost their entire families in the Holocaust. The culmination of Adler's elegiac head can be seen in *Hommage à Naum Gabo*, 1946 (fig.3.6).

Contextualising le Brocquy within European Modernism.

Writing in 1966, Anne Crookshank identified le Brocquy as a 'lone painter...never a member of groups or movements'...because his artistic vision remained 'exceptionally personal'.²⁶ While that description aptly fits the artist who emerged into maturity with his painted 'presences', it is, nevertheless, possible to underestimate the level of influence at work in le Brocquy's earlier paintings and in particular the seminal influence of Jankel Adler. Brian McAvera posed the question of whether le Brocquy should be understood in connection with European artists such as Soulages, Manessier, Mathieu, Hartung and Henri Michaux. He writes, 'surely we should be treating the artist with respect – by placing him within the wider European heritage – and not delimiting him within a cosy,

²⁴ le Brocquy, *Irish Times* (April 29, 1949), cited in Madden, 1994, p.85.

²⁵ Bristow, 2010, p.158. Barbara Dawson attributes le Brocquy's 'structured figurative composition' in the early works to the influence of Manet and Degas. Dawson, 2007, p.13.

²⁶ Anne Crookshank, 'The Paintings of 1964-1966', in *Louis le Brocquy: A Retrospective of Oil Paintings, 1939-1966* (Dublin: Municipal Gallery of Art), 1966, 11-23 (p.8).

uncritical Irish context?²⁷ Similarly, Brian O'Doherty has remarked that 'the attenuated body, axial, central, spectral annotated with clots and streaks of colour, was a standard Expressionist subject in the 1950s', specifically citing the work of Nathan Oliveira as an example.²⁸ The female figure in *A Family* is also related to contemporaneous European images of women who were 'dangerously seductive or determinedly noncompliant' and posed 'a direct challenge to traditional representations of women as virginal and submissive'.²⁹ Other commentators have linked le Brocquy thematically and spiritually to Giacometti and Francis Bacon.³⁰

In art, a copy does not seek to replace an original but to 'repeat an intention'.³¹ In painting *Olympia*, Manet's intention was to produce a reclining nude in the grand manner, and at the same time to reinvent the iconography of the genre for his age, in order to address the realities of modern urban life in painting as his friend Baudelaire had done in poetry and prose. le Brocquy was also trying to test himself in the production of a 'major painting', trying to produce a work that, as John Russell maintained, 'summed up what a painter stood for and showed what he could do when at full stretch'.³² At the same time he was trying to find a universal image of suffering mankind, one which would not be bound within the narrow confines of nationalism implicit in a national school of painting. It seems clear, then, that over the course of his long career, le Brocquy's was very influenced by his close contemporaries, those known to him both personally and professionally, in his early work, and that he also sought inspiration from the revered old masters of European art. As a self-taught artist he needed to find his place among those artists who inspired him in order to forge his own identity. In 1938, aged 22, le Brocquy visited the cities of London, Paris, Venice and Geneva as part of his, by now legendary,

²⁷ Brian McAvera, review, *The Visual Artists' News Sheet Review Supplement*, 1 (December, 2006), p.7, cited in Wilson, 2007, p.25.

²⁸ Brian O'Doherty, *Louis le Brocquy: Human Images, Early and Recent Works on Paper* (Dublin: Taylor Galleries, 1988-1989).

²⁹ Yvonne Scott, *Louis le Brocquy: Allegory and Legend* (Limerick: Hunt Museum, 2006), p.19. Scott also wonders whether Willem de Kooning may have seen le Brocquy's *Tinker Woman with a Newspaper*, in the exhibition *Twelve Contemporary British Painters* in the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, in 1948-9. This possibility highlights the fact that influence is not always uni-directional.

³⁰ See especially Coulter, 2008. Coulter situates le Brocquy among his artistic contemporaries and within the philosophical boundaries of European Existentialism.

³¹ Brian McAvera, 'le Brocquy: Masters and Muses', *Irish Arts Review*, 23.2 (Summer, 2006), 70-77.

³² John Russell, *Louis le Brocquy: Images, Single and Multiple, 1957-1990* (Kamakura: Museum of Modern Art, 1991), p.97.

auto-didactical Grand Tour of Europe. He discovered Titian, Velazquez and Goya, finding common cause with Manet who had so admired the painterliness of both Venetian and Spanish painting. Among nineteenth century artists, aside from Manet he admired Whistler and Degas, while the breadth of his admiration also encompassed twentieth century masters such as Picasso and Munch. His interest was wide-ranging and eclectic. In particular, though, Manet ‘moved him profoundly’, and bore a direct influence on many of his earliest paintings.³³ *Girl in Grey*, 1939, evokes two of Manet’s paintings, using indirect quotes from *Olympia* in the model’s slippers while the decorative use of the railings is taken from Manet’s *The Balcony*, c.1868-9. At the same time le Brocquy was thinking ‘in particular [of] Goya’s luminous greys’.³⁴ Reference to *The Balcony* occurs again in *Southern Window*, 1939, though Barbara Dawson also notes the subtler influence of William Orpen’s *The Wash House*, 1905, in the treatment of the figure and the subdued colour palette.³⁵ In making free use of Manet’s *The Balcony*, le Brocquy was quoting from a source that itself referenced Goya’s *Mayas on a Balcony*, 1808-10, in both subject matter and composition.³⁶ Another early painting, *A Picnic*, 1940, is related to Degas’s *On the Beach*, c.1876-7 and both it and *Belfast Refugees*, 1941, also display an indebtedness to the cut-off composition of Japanese woodcuts.³⁷ *Girl in White*, 1941, owes something to Whistler’s *Young Girl in White*, 1864, but the artist insists that the influence of Japanese hashira-e or ‘pillar prints’ of Kitagawa Utamaro, c.1753-106 is the dominant one here.³⁸ The presence of Cézanne is also pervasive in le Brocquy’s work. He acknowledged a direct debt in *Book and Penny*, 1941, which is based on Cézanne’s *Black Clock*, 1869-71.³⁹ Later, he would return to Cézanne as a source for the *Procession* paintings. Crookshank evaluates this group of

³³ Madden le Brocquy, 1994, p.36.

³⁴ Ibid, p.40. le Brocquy quoted in *Louis Le Brocquy: Early Heroes, Later Homage* (2007), p.21.

³⁵ Barbara Dawson, ‘Unfailing Eye’ in *Louis le Brocquy: Early Heroes, Later Homage* (Dublin: Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, 2007), pp.13-20.

³⁶ A version of Goya’s painting was in a Paris collection at the time Manet painted *The Balcony*. See G.H. Hamilton, ‘Is Manet Still Modern?’, *Art News Annual*, 31 (1966), pp.122-160.

³⁷ Dawson, 2007, p.18.

³⁸ le Brocquy, quoted in *Louis Le Brocquy: Early Heroes, Later Homage*, (2007), p.22. See also Barbara Dawson’s essay in the same volume, p.18.

³⁹ Le Brocquy, quoted in *Louis Le Brocquy, Early Heroes, Later Homage*, (2007), p.21.

early paintings, maintaining that they are ‘not copies but similar compositions, made, seemingly, in an effort to reach an absolute understanding of the original’s vitality’.⁴⁰ Overall, Cézanne and Manet emerge as the seminal influences on le Brocquy over the course of his life’s work. He regarded Cézanne as ‘the Cimabue of our modern post-Renaissance age, which eventually developed into the formalized Cubism of Picasso, obliquely translated in *Condemned Man*, 1945, and *A Family*, 1951 and in many of the head studies long afterwards’. However, it is Manet who strongly influences his ‘first authentic painting’, *Negro*, 1939, and he admitted that ‘perhaps I have most consistently influenced over the years by Manet.’⁴¹

One explanation for le Brocquy’s strong attraction to *Olympia* was the subject matter. He wrote that he had always been ‘fascinated by the horizontal monumentality of traditional Odalisque painting’, citing the examples of Titian’s *Venus of Urbino*, c.1534, (fig.3.7) Velazquez’s *Rokeby Venus*, c.1647-51, (fig.2.9) Goya’s *La Maya Desnuda*, 1797-1800, Ingres’s *Grande Odalisque*, c.1814 and Manet’s *Olympia*, 1863 in particular.⁴² Another was certainly the painterly treatment of the subject. He eloquently explained his response to the quality of facture in painting, when he wrote of Rembrandt, ‘it was not that the hand which held the brushes the painting became, so to speak, my hand. It was that I identified with the paint on the canvas so that my hand *understood* that painted hand, *felt* those painted brushes’.⁴³ Finally, Manet’s mythologized presence in art history as ‘the father of modernism’ no doubt spurred le Brocquy on to achieve something equally groundbreaking in his own art. Both artists occupied pivotal positions in their respective countries in historical periods when art came to reflect alternative political and social possibilities. le Brocquy’s position in relation to exhibiting at the RHA and the foundation of the IELA in Ireland, echo Manet’s experience with the Salon and the Salon des Refusés in Paris, and would probably have strengthened his already strong identification with Manet. In using recognizable sources, artists seek to ape the ‘originality’ of a particular artist or work of art, in order to attract unto themselves

⁴⁰ Anne Crookshank, ‘The Paintings of 1964-1966’, in *Louis le Brocquy: A Retrospective Selection of Oil Paintings 1939-1966* (Dublin: Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, 1966), pp.11-13 (p.8).

⁴¹ Louis Le Brocquy, quoted in *Louis Le Brocquy: Early Heroes, Later Homage* (2007), p.21.

⁴² Louis le Brocquy, quoted on www.anne-madden.com/LeBpages/chronology9.html [accessed 3 November 2008].

⁴³ Madden le Brocquy, 1994, p.198.

something of its aura and power.⁴⁴ Both impulses ring true for le Brocquy's obsession with Manet as both the man and the work were iconic for the younger artist. Manet had risen to the challenge of representing modernity while, at the same time, perpetuating the tradition of the reclining nude, and le Brocquy, in his turn, took up that challenge.

In looking at *Olympia* le Brocquy was joining a distinguished list of devotees of Manet's provocative painting. *Olympia* was, it has been said, 'far too challenging in conception, too brilliant in execution, not to have elicited responses...from many artists over the last hundred years'.⁴⁵ Contemporaneous responses to the painting include those by Courbet, Lefebvre, Cézanne, Rouault and Dubuffet. These range in type from fairly straightforward copies to re-interpretations and parodies, and in at least two cases, were studies for later independent paintings, Gauguin's c.1890 copy becoming the source for both *Manao Tupapao*, 1892 (fig.3.27) and *Woman with Mangoes*, 1896. Picasso's 1901 sketch after *Olympia* directly influenced his *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* of 1907.⁴⁶ Later responses tended towards parody, particularly those in the Pop Art style of the 1970s, which include Larry Rivers, *I Like Olympia in Black Face*, 1970, Mel Ramos's *Manet's Olympia*, 1974, Arthur Ballard, *Punch and his Judy, No.3*, 1973, and even the dance performance piece by Robert Morris, *Site*, 1965.⁴⁷ The 1980s saw another crop of pastiches including Caroline Coon's *Mr. Olympia*, 1983, John O'Reilly's *Preparing to photograph Olympia*, 1984 and Annette Bezor's *Odelympia*, 1988.⁴⁸ It is perhaps this later frivolous approach to Manet that has prompted one historian to remark that *Olympia* 'has directly inspired only ironic playfulness'.⁴⁹ However, it was with a deep seriousness

⁴⁴ Göran Hermerén, *Influence in Art and Literature* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp.128-9.

⁴⁵ Theodore Reff, *Manet's Olympia* (London: Penguin Books, 1976), pp.29-30.

⁴⁶ Reff, 1976, argues that Courbet's *Woman with a Parrot*, 1866, was a response to Manet's provocation. Cézanne made several versions, including *A Modern Olympia*, c.1870 and 1873 (the latter including a male figure), and *Olympia*, 1875-7. Fantin-Latour's c.1883 copy was idealized or corrected. Gauguin made a caricature in 1889 and a copy in c.1890, which became one source for his *Woman with the Mangoes*, 1896, along with Lucas Cranach's *Venus*, 1532. For the relationship of *Manao Tupapao* to *Olympia* see Stephen F. Eisenman, *Gauguin's Skirt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997). Picasso's parodic sketch *Olympia*, 1901, includes a self-portrait in allusion to Titian's *Venus and Organ Player*, 1550 and 1555, and a second male figure. There are also versions by Dubuffet and Rouault. See Theodore Reff, 'The Meaning of Manet's Olympia', *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, LXIII (1964), 111-122 (p.114).

⁴⁷ Reff, 1976.

⁴⁸ Alan Krell, *Manet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), ills.47-49, p.52.

⁴⁹ Françoise Cachin, *Manet 1832-1883* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983), p.181.

and reverence that le Brocquy originally approached the work in 1951, and since then he has re-worked the theme in a more sensual way in *Odalisques I-IV: Looking at Manet*, 2005 (figs.3.8-3.11).

Manet's Sources for *Olympia*

Manet has been referred to as 'the Old Masterly Modernist' because of his reliance on identifiable sources from previous well-known works. Of the seven hundred extant sheets of drawings made by Manet, one fifth of them are after old masters, and most of these are Italian.⁵⁰ Of these, the most commonly attributed source for *Olympia* is Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, but it is by no means the only one, nor was it mentioned at the time or cited as a reason for the particularly adverse reaction to the painting in the Salon of 1865.⁵¹ Manet visited Italy in 1853 and made an oil sketch of the *Venus of Urbino* in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence.⁵² Other direct sources that have been proffered in the obsessive search for Manet's influences include Goya's *La Maya Desnuda*, c.1797-1800, which, according to Paul Jamot, was in fact the primary influence on the conception of *Olympia*.⁵³ Thomas Bodkin refuted Jamot's assertion, maintaining that Goya could not have been an influence as Manet 'had not yet seen the *Maya Desnuda* because his first and last journey to the Prado was not made until the August of 1865, after the closing of the Salon in which *Olympia* was exhibited'.⁵⁴ However, he then went on to produce documentary proof that Manet might have seen a print of the *Maya* by Goya. He cited a letter from Baudelaire to the photographer Nadar, 'urging him to buy two small replicas of the *Maya Desnuda* and the *Maya Vestida* which were then to be found in the establishment of a picture dealer called Moreau in the Rue Lafitte.'⁵⁵ Finally, though,

⁵⁰ Alain de Leiris, *The Drawings of Edouard Manet* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1969) identified about half and Peter Meller, 'Manet in Italy: some newly identified sources for his early sketchbooks', *Burlington Magazine*, 144.1187 (February, 2002), 68-110, completed the research in 2002. The quoted phrase is from the editorial, *Burlington Magazine*, 144.1187 (February, 2002), p.67.

⁵¹ For a full account of the criticism of Manet's paintings exhibited at the annual Salon see G.H. Hamilton, *Manet and his Critics* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1954).

⁵² James H. Rubin, *Manet's Silence and the Poetics of Bouquets* (London, Reaktion, 1994), p.53. See also G.H. Hamilton, 1954, p.67, note 28.

⁵³ Paul Jamot, 'Manet and the Olympia', *Burlington Magazine*, 50.286 (January, 1927), 27-35.

⁵⁴ Thomas Bodkin, 'Manet, Dumas, Goya and Titian', *Burlington Magazine*, L (1927), 166-167 (p.166).

⁵⁵ Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres Posthumes et Inédites* (1887), p.204, cited in Bodkin (1927), p.167.

Bodkin concludes that 'the conception of *Olympia* is due more to Titian than to Goya'.⁵⁶ Other commonly attributed sources are Ingres's *Grande Odalisque*, c.1814 and *Odalisque with Slave*, 1839-40. These are not surprising in that Ingres represents the grand manner of the female nude in the French classical tradition. The distinctive embroidered cashmere shawl in Manet's *Olympia* is perhaps, an *homage* to Ingres.⁵⁷ Thomas Couture is another plausible influence, as Manet trained in his studio for six years from 1850 to 1856, and Reff cites the central reclining female figure in *The Romans of the Decadence*, 1847, as a specific source for *Olympia*.⁵⁸ Other possible sources that have been proposed include Jalabert's *Odalisque*, 1842, Fragonard's *Le Billet Doux* c.1776, and David's *Á Marat*, 1793.⁵⁹

Manet first encountered the Venetian masters in Couture's studio, where he was encouraged to make copies from the collection in the Louvre. At the same time he made visits to Fontainebleau to watch the Barbizon painters work *en plein air*. He was advised to copy the Venetians by Devéria, and Delacroix suggested he should also copy Rubens.⁶⁰ Velázquez's impact was profound, while Goya's painting is seen as 'akin spiritually to Manet, arguably a source'.⁶¹ In a more general sense Michael Fried suggests the pervasive influence of both Watteau and the Le Nains on the art of Manet during the years 1859-63, demonstrated in the 'contrast between the realistic, democratic, sensuous, naïve, and moral painting of the Le Nains and the fantastic, frivolous, contrived, and dissolute art of Watteau'.⁶² Manet's sources are often understood as having influenced particular aspects of the painting rather than the composition as a whole, for example the gaze of the model in *Olympia*.⁶³ Furthermore they should be understood as a complex layering of sources that results in a complicated web of

⁵⁶ Bodkin, 1927, p.167.

⁵⁷ Reff, 1976, Hamilton, 1954 and Cachin, 1983.

⁵⁸ Reff, 1976.

⁵⁹ The Jalabert was suggested by Mathey, 1948, cited in Cachin, 1983 and Hamilton, 1954. Fried, 1996, suggests the links with Fragonard and David, pp.148-9.

⁶⁰ Juliet Wilson-Bareau, *The Hidden Face of Manet* (London: Courtauld Institute Galleries, 1986), pp.203-4.

⁶¹ Reff, 1976, p.65. Reff is referring specifically to Manet's *Young Woman Reclining in a Spanish Costume*, c.1862, which he maintains resembles *Maya Vestida*, while the *Maya Desnuda* reclines on a similar couch to *Olympia*'s which may be intended as a deliberate pun. Wilson-Bareau, 1986, sees Manet's early themes of Gypsies, drinkers and indigent musicians as being inspired by Murillo and Goya.

⁶² Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.71.

⁶³ Anne Coffin Hanson, *Manet and the Modern Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), pp.98-99, accepts the idea of Goya as a source for the gaze.

allusions, mediated one through another so that *Olympia* can be seen to be the influence of Titian 'mediated by his appreciation of Ingres'.⁶⁴

Among the various print sources cited for *Olympia* are Constantin Guys's drawings of prostitutes, the lithograph of Delacroix's *Odalisque* exhibited in the 1847 Salon, and the popular and widely available Epinal prints.⁶⁵ Michael Fried even suggests that a lithograph by Achille Devéria – *sujet gracieux* for a *macédonie*, 1820s is an even more important source than Titian.⁶⁶ Manet's painting also partly derived its distinctive flatness and angularity from his use of photographic sources. These probably ranged from contemporary stereoscopic photographs, which borrowed trappings from high art to much cruder images popularly used by prostitutes as calling cards.⁶⁷ Pornographic images were widespread in Paris in 1860s and their visible influence on Salon art might explain the furore that surrounded Manet's painting. Gerald Needham accepts that photographic images and Japanese prints will give a similarly flat result but argues that because of the subject matter of Manet's nudes, the influence of photography is the greater.⁶⁸

Olympia also has literary roots. In 1927 one critic remarked that 'So far as I am aware, no one has yet thought of connecting *Olympia* with "La Dame aux Camélias", identifying Manet's model as of a type with the Dumas fils character of *Olympe* in the novel.'⁶⁹ In fact, there existed a long literary association of the name *Olympia* and a particular social

⁶⁴ The search for sources may have made Manet's pictures inexplicable, and over-complicated to all but the most obsessive iconographer. John House, 'Manet's Naïveté', in *The Hidden Face of Manet*, ed. by Juliet Wilson-Bareau (London: Courtauld Institute Galleries, 1986), p.1. The quote is from Fried 1996, p.90.

⁶⁵ Reff, 1976, pp.68-9; Reff, 1964, Hamilton, 1954, pp. 97-99.

⁶⁶ Fried, 1996, p.61.

⁶⁷ Stereoscopic photographs were viewed through a special device called a stereopticon, invented in the late 1840s, through which flat surfaces appear to acquire depth. They were very often used to view pornographic images. Liam Hudson, *Bodies of Knowledge: The Psychological Significance of the Nude in Art* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982). For the reference to prostitutes calling cards see Cachin, 1983, p.179. However, it should be noted that photography did have a degree of acceptability even at the official Salon, where photographic works were exhibited, separately, in 1859.

⁶⁸ Gerald Needham, 'Manet's Olympia and Pornographic Photography' in *Woman as Sex Object*, ed. by Linda Nochlin and Thomas Hess (New York: Newsweek, 1972). Manet was not alone in his dependence on photography. Ingres's use of photographs is documented in Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography* (London: Penguin, 1974). Delacroix is also known to have used photographs but unlike Manet, he softened the angularity of the image to keep it within the norms of the traditional visual language of the nude. See Beaumont Newhall, 'Delacroix and Photography', *Magazine of Art*, XLV (November, 1952), pp.300-303.

⁶⁹ Bodkin, 1927. *La Dame aux Camélias* was published in 1848, 15 years before Manet's painting, and a staged version was produced in 1852.

'type', which was well established in contemporary French theatre.⁷⁰ Again, the recognisability of this 'type' of woman goes some way to explaining the extent of public outrage at the Salon. However, the writer who most influenced Manet was Baudelaire, in his infamous work *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and especially the poem *Les Bijoux* which contains several motifs which also appear in Manet's *Olympia*.⁷¹ In a more general sense French literature of the period is rich on the subject of the fallen women in works by authors such as Edmond de Goncourt, Guy de Maupassant, Joris Huysman and Emile Zola. Manet's 'complex involvement with the art of the past', may also have been substantially aided by an art historical book, Blanc's *Histoire de peintres de toutes les écoles, École Vénitienne*, published in Paris in 1868.⁷²

Indeed, Manet was very well-versed in finding sources in old masters long before he painted *Olympia*. *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, painted in 1863 and exhibited in the Salon des Refusés in the same year, having been rejected by the official Salon, has been described by Carol Armstrong as 'the most concentrated experience in eclectic quotation since *The Old Musician...of 1860*'.⁷³ In his paintings dating from 1859-1862 Manet had already copied from Titian, Velázquez, Tintoretto and Rubens. He is known to have had a copy of Giorgione's *Concert Champêtre*, c.1510-11 by his friend Henri Fantin-Latour hanging in his studio, and it is generally accepted to be the primary source for *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, though many other sources have been suggested.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ These include Augier's *Le Mariage d'Olympe*, Varin and de Biéville's *Ce que deviennent les roses*, Augu's *Les Femmes sans nom*, E.T.A. Hofman's *The Sand Man* – all of which featured a similar type of courtesan.

⁷¹ *Les Fleurs du Mal* was itself the subject of an indecency trial in 1857. *Les Bijoux* makes reference to black women, bouquets, cats and jewellery. Reff, 1976, pp.88-118. For an account of the thematic links between Manet and Baudelaire see Lois Boe Hyslop and Francis E. Hyslop, *Baudelaire as a Love Poet and other Essays* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1969).

⁷² Blanc's 14 volume work was also published in installments from 1849-1876, and was 'the first comprehensive, illustrated history of European painting from the Renaissance down to the present'. Half of the installments were published by 1860 the period of Manet's intense involvement with old masters, including those chapters on Rubens, Velazquez, Murillo, Zurbaran, Titian, Van Dyck, Raphael and Veronese. Theodore Reff, 'Manet and Blanc's *Histoire des Peintres*', *Burlington Magazine*, 122.808 (July, 1970), p.457-8, and note 34.

⁷³ Carol Armstrong, 'To Paint, to Point, to Pose: Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*' in *Manet's Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, ed. by Paul Hayes Tucker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.94, and note 5, p.113.

⁷⁴ For a summary of sources in this painting see Hayes Tucker, 1998, pp.20-22. Michael Fried, 1996, attributes to Watteau an overall influence and the bathing figure in the background as especially indebted to Watteau's *La Villageoise*, pp.23-135. See also Armstrong, 1998, p.91. Others, including Anne Hanson and Beatrice Farwell, 'Courbet's *Baigneuses* and the Rhetoric of the Female Image', in *Woman as Sex Object*,

When considering the question of influence it would be unusual to arrive at one source which could be considered to be the definitive original. Rather, the process involves a series of excavations through several strata of repetition and reprise. So then, tracing le Brocquy's line of descent, leads us to Manet and (ignoring the minor tributaries) thence to Titian, and especially to the *Venus of Urbino*.

Why then did Manet turn to Titian for inspiration when he came to paint *Olympia*? There was a well established myth, accepted as fact in the 19th century, that when Titian was summoned by Emperor Charles V he brought with him a *Christ Crowned with Thorns* and a *Venus*, in order to demonstrate his ability to paint pictures both of devotion and sensuality, and perhaps reflecting his own assumptions about the taste of the Monarch.⁷⁵ Manet clearly identified with Titian pictorially, as many other artists had before him and perhaps he also sought to emulate his fame and success. And like Manet, le Brocquy was drawn to Titian for his temperament and for the quality of his paint, finding, in him, both 'a distant precursor of Manet' and a direct source for his own painting.⁷⁶

Research carried out on Manet's *Olympia* shows that it was originally closer in conception to Titian's original. Examined under x-ray, there is evidence of a drapery curtain behind the maidservant, as well as a suggestion of a view of the rear of the room. More significantly, there is no evidence of the famous black cat, Olympia's slippers and black choker or the embroidered shawl on the bed. Also, the bouquet being presented to her was originally much smaller in size. These are alterations of a kind that is not unusual in any painter's practice, but in this case it was precisely the elements that are considered provocatively modern which Manet added during the later stages of painting.⁷⁷ The delay in exhibiting it from 1863 when it was completed until the Salon of 1865 may be due in part to Manet's re-workings of the composition.

ed. by Linda Nochlin and Thomas Hess (New York: Newsweek, 1972), pp.64-79, see this as the influence of 18th century French painting in general. Cachin, 1983, p.169, sees a common source in Giorgione for both Manet and Watteau. Other specific sources include Courbet's *Young Ladies on the Banks of the Seine*, 1856-7, and Titian's *Virgin with a White Rabbit*. See Cachin, 1983.

⁷⁵ This story was recounted in Blanc's *Histoire de peintres de toutes les écoles, École Vénitienne*, Paris, 1868, cited in Reff, 1976, p.46.

⁷⁶ Madden le Brocquy, 1994, p.41.

⁷⁷ Wilson-Bareau, 1986, pp.44-45.

The black cat in *Olympia* is widely seen as a recognizably Baudelairean symbol, becoming a 'sexual surrogate of the female'.⁷⁸ It replaces Titian's lap dog, symbol of fidelity, to become an alternative symbol of promiscuity, and as such was particularly singled out for lampooning by the cartoonists after the 1865 Salon exhibition.⁷⁹ In certain quarters it was seen as the balance to Courbet's parrot in *Young Woman with a Parrot*, 1866⁸⁰ There are antecedents of the infamous black cat in Manet's own work and in that of other artists. One appears in Manet's frontispiece etching for Guérin's *Premier Essai* (actually *Deuxieme Essai*) *de frontispiece*, 1862 and is an 'allusion to the artist himself...an embodiment of his presence' and a direct antecedent of *Olympia*'s black cat.⁸¹ A work in India ink and wash entitled *The Woman with the Cat*, 1862-3 (fig.3.12) is probably a humorous preliminary sketch of the theme of *Olympia*.⁸² Fried points out the similarity of Manet's cat to one in Chardin's *La Raie Dépoullée*, 1727, and Manet's well-known admiration for Japanese prints makes the hissing Black cat on the lovers' bed in *The Cookoo's Verse* by Shunshō a possible influence.⁸³ The black cat continued to appear in caricatures of Manet, becoming synonymous with his name in the press and he seems to have adopted it as a personal symbol, and made of it his own familiar.⁸⁴ Cats appear in other paintings by Manet including *Young Woman Reclining in a Spanish Costume*, 1862, and *Luncheon in the Studio*, 1868.⁸⁵ In Manet's lithograph and poster *The Cat's Rendezvous*, 1868, (fig.3.13) commissioned to illustrate the critic Champfleury's book *Les Chats*, we see 'a black cat, clearly descended from *Olympia*'s, stalking a white one on a rooftop'.⁸⁶ In the lithograph the black and white cats are a complementary pair. le

⁷⁸ Reff, 1976, p.98.

⁷⁹ The French word *chatte* was a slang term for the female genitals, for promiscuity in general and for a *cocotte*, a registered prostitute. Krell, 1996.

⁸⁰ Mina Curtiss, 'Manet Caricatures Olympia', *Massachusetts Review*, 7 (1966), 725-752. There is a lot of ancient symbolism both positive and negative attached to cats. In Egypt they were revered as gods, in the middle ages feared as personifications of Satan, familiars of witches and therefore symbolic of unfettered female sexuality. Cats were even associated with the pope. Many people still regard them with superstition today.

⁸¹ Fried 1996, p.51, fig.29.

⁸² Cachin, 1983. This is noteworthy in view of the fact that under x-ray there is no sign of the cat in *Olympia*, and it appears that Manet deliberated on whether to include it or not. See also Wilson-Bareau, 1986.

⁸³ Fried 1996, fig.190, p.478. Hanson, 1977, ill.72.

⁸⁴ Reff, 1976, pp.15-16.

⁸⁵ Hanson 1977, p.71, also suggests that by the time of *Luncheon in the Studio* the cat has become a personal symbol for Manet.

⁸⁶ Reff, 1964, p.115. Champfleury's, *Les Chats* published in 1870 was a book on cats in literature and art.

Brocquy had already included a black cat resembling Manet's in *A Condemned Man*, 1945, and he makes the white cat the woman's 'menacing' familiar in *A Family*.⁸⁷ As he puts it himself, '*The Olympian black cat in turn becomes white, ominously emerging from the sheets*'.⁸⁸ le Brocquy was probably unaware of the complementarity of the black and white cats in Manet's work, and his reasons for including a white cat in *A Family* was more probably due to formal considerations and the development of a paler colour palette in his own work. Later, in *Odalisque I*, he removes the cat from the composition altogether, only for it to reappear insistently in *Odalisques II- IV*.

The Significance of Manet's Modernism in Nineteenth Century Paris

The hostile reception of Manet's paintings has become part of his heroic myth as the father of modernism, the lone crusader in conflict with artistic orthodoxy.⁸⁹ However, in reality the situation was far less clear cut than the familiar account would suggest.⁹⁰ The 1863 Salon, was called the 'Salon des Vénuses', because of the large number of mythological nudes exhibited, including, famously, Alexandre Cabanel's *Birth of Venus*, 1863 and Paul Baudry's *The Pearl and the Wave*, 1863, and many others.⁹¹ While Manet was pilloried in the press for his *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* in the *Salon des Refusés*, Cabanel and Baudry, exhibiting in the official Salon, also came in for their fair share of press criticism. McCauley situates this criticism within the political context of the second empire. She points out that as Napoleon III purchased Baudry's *The Pearl and the Wave*, and the Empress bought the Cabanel, it could be seen as a politically expedient act by journalists to praise those paintings which had achieved court approval. Criticism of excessive nudity on the other hand, came from the Republicans, Orleanists and liberals

⁸⁷ Bhreathnach-Lynch, 2003.

⁸⁸ Louis le Brocquy, quoted on <<http://www.anne-madden.com/LeBPages/chronology9.html>> [accessed 3 November 2008].

⁸⁹ For a full account of the criticism of the Salons of 1863 and 1865 see Hamilton, 1954.

⁹⁰ Anne McCauley, 'Sex and the Salon' in *Manet's Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, ed. by Paul Hayes Tucker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.38.

⁹¹ The title *Salon des Vénuses* was coined by Théophile Gautier, 'Salon de 1863', *Moniteur Universel*, 164, (June 13, 1863), p.1, cited in Jennifer L. Shaw, 'The Figure of Venus: Rhetoric of the Ideal and the Salon of 1863', *Art History*, 14.4 (December, 1991), 540-570 (note 1, p.562). For Amaury-Duval, Meynier, Briguiboul, Appert, Bouguereau, Lansac, Monvoisin, Schutzenberger, Mazerolles, Ehrmann, Blin and others who produced canvases with a bathing, mythological or Venus theme, see McCauley, 1998, p.46.

who formed the Bonapartist opposition, as well as the Catholic right. Sexual promiscuity, allegedly condoned by paintings of the sexualized female nude, was seen by the political opposition as a symptom of social decay that was perceived to permeate from the Emperor down.⁹² Satires on the annual Salon originate in this period, becoming established in the paper *Charivari*, edited by Charles Philipon. It is important to remember though that most of the Journalists were not specialists in art criticism; indeed they were only interested in the Salon as 'part of the social life of Paris', because the censorship law enacted in 1835 meant that newspapers were precluded from printing political satire.⁹³

Manet has been described as an 'enigmatic' artist who, on the one hand, craved success at the official Salon and on the other hand pushed out the bounds of acceptability in a deliberate attempt at notoriety.⁹⁴ Some authors see this dichotomous position as problematic, and try to reconcile Manet's intentions in terms of whether he was trying to 'state modern life in terms of the great Italian tradition or in fact, 'restating the tradition in terms of modern life'.⁹⁵ For others this seeming duality poses less of a problem. 'Manet was playing a double game; he was both pastiching the past and enjoying it'.⁹⁶ Yet another strand of thought focuses on the serious desire at the heart of Realism to forge entirely new modes of representation, and view Manet's practice as 'a deliberate attempt...to repossess the past in order to establish the universality of his own painting, and in so doing liquidating that past and entering a new world'.⁹⁷ Michael Fried, sees a desire for the 'transcendence of nationality' as a motivating force in Manet's eclectic use of sources.⁹⁸ He means this in terms of a national school existing within a wider sphere of

⁹² McCauley, 1998, p.46-50 and note 36, p.67.

⁹³ Curtiss, 1966, points out that under Napoleon III the ban on political satire was particularly vigilantly enforced.

⁹⁴ For these opposite views of Manet's intentions see Hamilton, 1954 and Linda Nochlin, 'The Invention of the Avant-Garde in France', *Art News Annual*, 34 (1968), pp.11-18.

⁹⁵ Hamilton, 1966, p.123-6. Fried also vacillates between Manet's desire 'to reclaim the past, to repossess it' or to 'liquidate' it and move on to a new era. Fried 1996, p.127.

⁹⁶ Wilson-Bareau, 2003. Cachin agrees with this proposition maintaining that 'It is entirely possible that Manet, as in *Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe*, meant at one and the same time to align himself with the Old Masters and to deliver a parody', Cachin, 1983, p.177-8.

⁹⁷ Elizabeth Cropper, *The Domenichino Affair: Novelty, Imitation and Theft in Seventeenth Century Rome* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), p.196.

⁹⁸ Fried 1996, p.126.

influence, and identifies the pervasive influence of Watteau and the Le Nains, coupled with an abiding interest both in Venetian and Spanish art, as a way of locating Manet's art in both national and international terms.

In most of the adverse criticism of *Olympia* following the 1865 Salon, the flattened abstracted quality of the figure was cited as the reason that the painting lacked the 'potential for symbol or narrative', while those critics who were more amenable to Manet's experiment generally ignored its potential for meaning and concentrated instead on its purely formal qualities.⁹⁹ Chief among these were the poet Charles Baudelaire who wrote that Manet 'has never been guilty of the stupidity committed by many others of wishing to put ideas into his paintings' and the novelist Emile Zola, whose famous defense of Manet was published in 1867.¹⁰⁰ Zola was at pains to stress the importance of style over meaning, and a denial of the importance of subject matter, and in so doing he set the trend for a formalist view of *Olympia* in the 1920s and 30s.¹⁰¹ This formalist view of Manet's work was perpetuated by Clement Greenberg who traced the progression from early European modernism to post-war American abstraction, establishing a firm line of modernist descent.¹⁰² It is not clear however, if Manet acceded to this view of his own work.¹⁰³ In his 1868 *Portrait of Zola*, Manet included a miniature version of *Olympia*, in which her gaze is averted from the viewer, and directed instead at the seated figure of Zola. This can be interpreted as a tribute to his friend or indeed as an ironic comment on his inability to see anything noteworthy in his painting beyond the obvious formal

⁹⁹ Hanson, 1977 p.52. One critic, Gonzague Privat, criticized the public for not understanding the 'abstract' qualities of *Olympia*, in 1865. See Hamilton, 1954, p.77.

¹⁰⁰ Charles Baudelaire, cited in Hamilton, 1954 p.94. Emile Zola, 'Une nouvelle manière en peinture: Edouard Manet', *Revue du dix-neuvième siècle* (Jan 1, 1867), republished as *Edouard Manet, Étude biographique et critique* (Paris, 1867), cited in Carol Armstrong, *Manet Manette* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), pp.31-47.

¹⁰¹ Theodore Reff, 1976, p.26. Paul Jamot, 'Manet and the Olympia', *Burlington Magazine*, 50.286 (January, 1927), p.28, found it 'innocent of hidden meaning'. Zola's account was formalist to a point. He did recognise a certain social truth in *Olympia* describing her as 'a girl of our time', Krell, 1996, p.81. George Moore, in *Modern Painting* (London: Walter Scott, 1893), p.41, thought *Olympia* was symbolic, unlike most of Manet's work. Hanson, 1977, p.100-101.

¹⁰² *Clement Greenberg, The Collected Essays and Criticisms*, ed. by John O'Brien, 4 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986-93), cited in Armstrong, 2002, pp.xi-xviii.

¹⁰³ Theodore Reff, 1976, pp.21-2.

experimentation.¹⁰⁴ Even among more recent commentators, opinion remains divided on the question of Manet's symbolism, though recent scholarship has tended towards more socially complex readings.¹⁰⁵ Foucault appears to agree with Baudelaire and the generations of analysts who have insisted on the absence of meaning in Manet's works when he writes that 'the reinvention of painting started with its materiality'. However, he goes on to describe Manet as 'a founder of discursivity', implying that while modernism swept away those embedded meanings in art that relied on established readings of allegory and myth, it nevertheless allowed for the reinstatement of an entirely new discourse.¹⁰⁶ Nancy Locke extends the usual interpretation of the modernist account of representation to allow for social meanings to be extrapolated from the paintings. In focusing on the materiality of painting, modernism, she writes, exposes painting's 'illusions', thus deconstructing the viewer's assumptions about representation and reality. She argues that these formal 'illusions' can be read as 'illusions of social relations' raising questions that reach beyond the represented image to challenge societal relationships.¹⁰⁷

From 1852 onwards Paris experienced enormous social change, due to increasing industrialisation and the massive reconstruction projects being undertaken in the city by Baron Hausmann. The *Flaneur*, who epitomized the modern male individualist, and the advent of modernist painting were both by-products of this modernizing process,¹⁰⁸ and its upheavals had strong implications for the concept of the individual self, and the self in society. Indeed the artist-*flaneur* can be seen as a product of his own invention, as much a product of his creativity as the canvases he produced. This point is convincingly argued by Locke, who maintains that Charles Baudelaire, in his essay *The Painter of Modern Life*, while advocating the necessity of modern subject matter for the artist, was also

¹⁰⁴ Reff, 1976, maintains that this is a tribute from Manet to his defender, while the alternative proposal is supported by Krell, 1996, p.81.

¹⁰⁵ Hamilton, 1966 and Cachin, 1983 take a mainly formalist approach, while Clark, 1984, Fried, 1996, Reff, 1976, Locke, 2001 and Armstrong all take different philosophical approaches, allowing for a wider range of readings. It is to this latter group of writers that I am indebted for my ideas on Manet.

¹⁰⁶ Michel Foucault, *Manet and the Object of Painting* (London: Tate Gallery, 2009). See also the Introduction to this volume by Nicolas Bourriaud, pp.12-14.

¹⁰⁷ Locke, 2001, p.1.

¹⁰⁸ Stephen F. Eisenman, *Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), p.283.

calling for the formation of a modern self.¹⁰⁹ As she puts it “something in the encounter with modernity leads artists, notably in the 1860s, to a new consciousness of self, a novel kind of exploration of self and identity”.¹¹⁰

The idea of having an individual ‘self’ implies also having a ‘field of experience’ and ‘being able to construct and narrate one’s own story’.¹¹¹ For the mid-nineteenth century male artist, and particularly the painter of the nude, his selfhood was derived from his role as a progenitor of original works, and even of creativity itself. The very physicality of the medium of paint can be understood to ‘mirror the touch of the artist, on the depiction and on the actual body of the woman’, suggesting his right to authorship of both.¹¹² The self is often defined in opposition to the ‘other’ and in the case of a male painter of the nude the female model is an apt example of otherness, he being the progenitor and she the created entity. Evidence of essential difference between the sexes emerged from biology in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but it was in the arts and especially in representation that cultured concepts of woman’s complete alterity and inferiority were formed.¹¹³ Thus the female nude could at once become differentiated from her male creator and, at the same time, come to stand, as synecdoche, for the artist’s creative self. The subject of Venus had traditionally been and, in some quarters, continued to be a vehicle for idealisation but for those engaged with modernism it also offered opportunities for revolt. Feminist critics have linked this desire for rupture to the fact that masculine creativity and control were threatened by the new social realities of modernity.¹¹⁴ Manet found his modern Venus in Victorine Meurent, his favourite model of the 1860s. The abstracted gaze of Victorine Meurent has been identified as evidence of her own personality and selfhood, part of her self-presentation and evidence of a degree of autonomy in a situation in which she would, in reality, have had very little real power.¹¹⁵ Manet depicted her over and over again and always with the same look of

¹⁰⁹ Locke, 2001.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.176.

¹¹¹ Cierán Benson, ‘Modernism and Ireland’s Selves’, *Circa*, 61 (January/February, 1992), pp.18-23.

¹¹² Carol Armstrong, ‘Edgar Degas and the Representation of the Female Body’, in *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed.by Susan R. Suleiman (Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp.223-242 (p.223).

¹¹³ Shaw, 1991, p.544.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.541.

¹¹⁵ T.J. Clark, 1980, p.34. See also Fried, 1996 and Locke, 2001.

distracted ennui.¹¹⁶ Because that look is not erotically compliant she has been credited with a real awareness of her own human agency that is unusual in sexualized images of the female nude. But in reality it is impossible to know the cause of her look. Some art historians will consider the ‘apparent abstraction or self-absorption’ of the gaze in strictly formal terms.¹¹⁷ Others credit Victorine with a healthy level of self-awareness that translates into a particular look or attitude. However, these are not necessarily contradictory states, as Foucault’s description of the dual nature of the subject, firstly as being under the control of (*subject to*) another’s power, and secondly as being the subject of an individual identity possessed of self knowledge, demonstrates.¹¹⁸

In fact Manet never depicts an actual woman. Victorine’s real self is ambiguous and resists interpretation. What he offers is a series of masquerades in which there is an ‘equation of her selfhood with colour, paint, quotation and costume’.¹¹⁹ As well as a panoply of pseudo-theatrical roles, we are offered a variety of body types that change from slender to fleshy, so that Victorine’s face and figure ‘chart the mutability of a single person’s identity and likeness’ in paint.¹²⁰ So for Manet, the female subject becomes an ambiguous conflation of subject and object, which reflects both his and her uncertainty and social unease.¹²¹ In this sense Victorine Meurent, or at least Manet’s various and changing depictions of her, become a signifier for the artist himself. Borrowing conceptually from Freud’s notion of the ‘family romance’, Locke describes how a ‘set of family relationships structures Manet’s art.’¹²² She argues that the painting of modern life entails painting family members, a process which ‘gives form to desires, conflicts and repression of and in the family’.¹²³ It is possible to re-shape this idea in an Irish context

¹¹⁶ Victorine Meurent modelled for at least nine paintings by Manet between 1862 and 1875.

¹¹⁷ Fried, 1996, pp.63-4, believes the nature of the gaze derives from the influence of the Le Nains. He is referring specifically to the *Portrait of the Artist’s Parents* 1860, but the abstracted gaze is such a ubiquitous feature of Manet’s work that the point is applicable here.

¹¹⁸ Michel Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, in *Art After Modernism*, ed. by Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), pp.417-434. Elsewhere, he suggests that it could be that the attention is fixed on something unseen to the viewer, outside of the canvas. Foucault, 2009, p.15. In truth, Victorine could be merely bored, or thinking some private thoughts of her own.

¹¹⁹ Armstrong, 2002, p.149. the quote refers to *Mlle. Victorine in the Costume of an Espada*, 1862, but more generally to a series of depictions of Victorine in a variety of costumes and attitudes.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.306.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.307.

¹²² Locke, 2001, p.1.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

to mean, not the series of extended family portraits that Manet made,¹²⁴ but the interrelated series of works made by Irish artists in the middle of the twentieth century which refer to old masters. By reaching outside of their own tradition to appropriate their modernity, these artists are engaged in a two-way dialogue, with their illustrious forebears and with ideas of Irishness current among their contemporaries.

The Significance of le Brocquy's Modernism in Twentieth Century Ireland

By the time he painted *A Family*, le Brocquy had already come into direct conflict with the forces of conservatism in the art world in Ireland. He had been involved in the controversy surrounding the refusal of Rouault's *Christ and the Soldier*, 1930 (fig.2.4) by the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art in 1942.¹²⁵ The previous year, his own painting *A Picnic*, 1941, had been rejected by the RHA for its annual exhibition, despite the fact that he had exhibited there yearly since 1937. The rejection of *The Spanish Shawl*, 1941 and *Image of Chaos*, 1941, the following year, and *Classical Theme*, in 1943 resulted in a frustration that was shared by other artists interested in modernism, and led eventually to the establishment of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art (IELA) in 1943.¹²⁶

A Family was exhibited at Gimpel fils in London in 1951, where it was well received critically, John Berger referring to the right-hand portion of the painting as the 'finest bit of contemporary painting'.¹²⁷ However, its subsequent exhibition in Dublin caused a public uproar. Having been offered as a gift to the Municipal Gallery in Dublin by a private donor and the art dealer Victor Waddington, it was refused by the Dublin City Council.¹²⁸ It was then offered to the Arts Advisory Committee, the body in charge of

¹²⁴ Locke posits the opinion that most of Manet's paintings feature family members as models, not just those that are obvious portraits, due to Manet's 'highly subjective framework' for his painting, Locke, 5001, p.87.

¹²⁵ Now the *Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane*. The circumstances surrounding the initial refusal of the painting are outlined in chapter 2.

¹²⁶ Arnold, 1991. IELA was founded by Louis le Brocquy and his mother Sybil, and included artists such as Mainie Jellett, Evie Hone, Fr. Jack Hanlon, Margaret Clarke, Ralph Cusack, Nora McGuinness, Elizabeth Curran, and Laurence Campbell. Dermod O'Brien was its first patron.

¹²⁷ Berger, 1951, p.4.

¹²⁸ Bhreathnach-Lynch, 2003. Victor Waddington offered to supplement the £100 given by Mr. and Mrs. Malcolm Brush, to purchase *A Family* at the price of 400 guineas and present it to the Municipal Gallery.

acquisitions to the gallery, but it was refused a second time.¹²⁹ Members of the IELA sent a letter of protest to the *Irish Times*.¹³⁰ The controversy in the press also treated the painting in terms of the desirability (or otherwise) of modern art in general in Ireland. *A Family* was subsequently exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1956, where it was awarded the Nestlé- endowed Premio Aquisitato prize. Eventually it was privately bought and donated to the National Gallery, making le Brocquy the first living artist to be represented in the collection.¹³¹

If le Brocquy was out of step with the prevailing notion of what was acceptable in Irish art, he was also an outsider in Britain, when he emigrated there in 1946, this time because of his adherence to figurative painting. He describes how in London in the 1950s abstract painting was '*de rigueur*' and that 'painters like Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud and myself had no approved place in the scheme of things, being regarded as merely literary'.¹³²

Clark has argued that in painting *Olympia* Manet 'altered and played with identities the culture wished to keep still.'¹³³ He goes on to assert that the means of alteration were crucial to the failure of the viewing public to find Manet's image acceptable. In other words, a challenging idea, presented in a more recognisable artistic form might have assuaged the critics. This suggests that modernist strategies of representation, rather than radical ideas, were at issue with the critics. It seems, however, that in *A Family* both style and subject matter were deemed 'unsuitable'.¹³⁴

In the context of the conflict between modernism and Ireland, Fintan Cullen discusses the ability of form to 'convey purpose', and asks which is the 'appropriate' style for a newly emerging nation striving to define new modes of representation for itself.¹³⁵ Ultimately

¹²⁹ Ibid. The offer was made at a meeting of the AAC on 25th February, 1952. On 29th February a letter from Waddington to J.F. Kelly curator of the gallery, regretted that the picture had not been accepted.

¹³⁰ The letter was signed by signed by Norah McGuinness, Thurloe Connolly, Elizabeth Curran, Ralph Cusack, Gerard Dillon, R.R. Figgis, Evie Hone, Robert Knox, Michael Scott, Patrick Scott and Anne Yeats.

¹³¹ Christin Leach, 'Face Up to Reality', *Sunday Times* (October 19, 2003). Lochlann Quinn paid £1.7 million for *A Family* and presented it to the NGI in 2002.

¹³² Louis Le Brocquy cited in McAvera, 2006, p.74.

¹³³ T.J. Clark, 1999, p.100. Clark is referring here specifically to the artistic genre of the nude and the social classification of the prostitute in mid 19th century Paris.

¹³⁴ Ruane, 2002, pp.22-3.

¹³⁵ To this end he contrasts the realism of Sean Keating or the abstraction of Mainie Jellett in terms of the public 'accessibility' of Keating and the 'highly private art' of Jellett. Fintan Cullen, *Visual Politics: The Representation of Ireland 1750-1930* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), p.4.

he defends the cause of realism in defining a new national aesthetic because it 'addresses the reality of 1920s Ireland', citing a painting such as Keating's *Night's Candles are Burnt Out*, 1928-9 as an 'examination of the modern', while Mainie Jellett saw modernism 'as a purifying force that rid art of a 'national' purpose' altogether.¹³⁶ Cullen maintains that 'by representing Ireland in an uncontroversial language, the form overrides the subject to negate any hint of subversion'.¹³⁷ This view implies that it was modernism's formal concerns that caused controversy in Ireland in the 1950s, but its radical social ethos was equally a cause for concern among conservatives. The central tenets of modernism are experimentation, a spirit of critical enquiry, and a willingness to question the norms. It needs to embrace change, because it is a style in which meanings are made, challenged and remade constantly, and therefore modernism in Ireland would potentially involve 'subversion of much more than academic art'.¹³⁸

Bruce Arnold identified Mainie Jellett as 'the undisputed leader of the modernist movement in Ireland', and maintains that she was opposed to the idea of identifiable Irishness in art because she believed in the power of modern abstract art to enable a young nation to define itself anew.¹³⁹ Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that Mainie Jellett found a logic for her pursuit of abstraction not only in the highly codified and dogmatic modernism of L'Hote and Gleizes but in pre-Christian Celtic patterning, which is arguably more 'traditional' to Ireland than the *École des Beaux Art* classical tradition taught in Dublin art Schools at the time, and of which Keating was an ardent supporter, though both systems have 'foreign' influences at their core.¹⁴⁰ More importantly 'appropriateness' is not properly a question of stylistic language but rather of critical approach. After all, the modernist images of Manet and le Brocquy under discussion here are representational images with only a slight though varying tendency towards

¹³⁶ Ibid. pp.162-72. Quote, p.163.

¹³⁷ Ibid, p.6.

¹³⁸ Benson, 1992, p.23.

¹³⁹ Bruce Arnold, 'Jack Yeats and the Making of Irish Art in the Twentieth Century', in *When Time Began to Rant and Rage*, ed. by James Christen Stewart (Berkeley: Merrell Holberton, 1998), pp. 60-61.

¹⁴⁰ Jellett was criticised by AE for being inspired by 'reason rather than imagination'. This is hardly fair; Jellett's art was highly experimental, and she did not achieve full maturity in it though she did approach a synthesis with a nationally inspired idiom towards the end. Her unfinished experiment is insufficient reason to reject the appropriateness of modernism in principle. Also, the Picasso/Braque school of Cubism resulted in a return to figuration, thus highlighting its important role in defining new forms rather than embracing abstraction.

abstraction, resulting in no loss of clarity or legibility in the image. What distinguishes them from other representative images is that they have all been interpreted, at the time of their inception and since, as works which are highly critical of the cultural context in which they were made. It was in positioning itself in the Avant Garde that modernism retained its power, even when it remained rooted in representation, and this remains the case today. It is this spirit of critical enquiry which characterizes modernism at least as importantly as does the concept of pure form, and which now dominates post-modern discourses.

This debate had more to do with acceptable representations of 'Irishness' than the formal attributes of modernism *per se*. The important aspect was 'difference' and to define the nation in opposition to a notion of 'otherness'.¹⁴¹ Cullen acknowledges the real fears of the new Irish state when he addresses the question of modernism in Ireland being 'monopolised by the Anglo-Irish'.¹⁴² His view of the 'Protestant middle class' as 'exterior forces' who were 'looking in, rather than participating' and 'not fully involved in Ireland', accurately reflects the fears of the new state in 1922, but has been re-evaluated since then.¹⁴³ From the perspective of the 21st century we can see that for an individual the idea of a self 'is better understood as a more or less well integrated *community* of selves'.¹⁴⁴ This has implications too for the national self which in turn should be seen as an integration of constituent selves' where 'internal differences are part of the nature of national identity'.¹⁴⁵ Surely, as Benson suggests, by her understanding of modernism as 'a serious attempt by a new century to create an identity for itself', Mainie Jellett sought an Irish identity that would embrace her several identities as Anglo-Irish, as Protestant, and as a woman.¹⁴⁶ Similar issues about nationality affected le Brocqy. He has commented humorously that 'when I was a young man (with the derisory term West British in mind) I occasionally referred to myself ironically as a 'West Belgian'.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, far from *reflecting* social realities, images play a role in *constructing* those

¹⁴¹ Bhreathnach-Lynch, 2003.

¹⁴² Cullen, 1997, p.165.

¹⁴³ Ibid, p.172.

¹⁴⁴ Benson, 1992, p.21.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ le Brocqy, 1981, p.25.

realities and the state under construction in the 1920s was being built by traditionalists who insisted that Irish identity was 'to be forged from the stuff of tradition'.¹⁴⁸

From a feminist perspective, in Manet's time 'the crisis of the nude resulted less from internal stresses and contradictions in codes of representation than it did from conflicting discourses about the status of women as a social and sexual agent and from the nature and terms of man's relation to and control of the feminine'.¹⁴⁹ A similar circumstance can be seen to have existed in Ireland in the 1950s. Roisin Kennedy argues that the representation of family and especially the woman in *A Family* were at odds with how that group was idealized and represented in Ireland at the time. The controversy surrounding the painting took place in the same year as Noel Browne's Mother and Child scheme brought down the coalition government.¹⁵⁰

According to Ciarán Benson Ireland's independence sprang from rebellion rather than revolution, and it was conservative, Catholic and nationalist in tone. Thus its cultural viewpoint was directed towards 'some previous, real or imagined, state of affairs', rather than 'a new social order'. The position of pictorial art in relation to society in early twentieth-century Ireland was 'quietist and generally acquiescent'.¹⁵¹ In representational terms, Modernist pictures have an edginess to them that is lacking in early 20th century Irish realism.¹⁵² Keating's paintings in particular are stylistically, and arguably, intentionally more akin to the Socialist Realism of the 1930s in Russia than to the critical Realism of the 1850s and 60s, as seen in the works of Courbet, Daumier and Manet. In 1865, *Olympia* was recognised as a prostitute but attempts to pigeonhole her into one of the types or categories of prostitution failed, illustrating the ambiguity of the image even for a contemporaneous viewer.¹⁵³ Recognition, then, can be seen as key to the acceptability of images. In Ireland this recognition amounted to a 'partisan view of Irish

¹⁴⁸ Cullen, 1997, p.170.

¹⁴⁹ Shaw, 1991, p.542.

¹⁵⁰ Kennedy, 2005, p.480. See also Ruane, 2002, pp.22-23.

¹⁵¹ Benson, 1992, p.19.

¹⁵² Ibid. p.20.

¹⁵³ Clark, 1999, pp.109-10.

identity, which ultimately positions it as Catholic and Nationalist'.¹⁵⁴ Other, less recognisable identities were seen as threatening and rejected out of hand.

le Brocqy has written about his sense of Irishness as an artist. It was in seeking among the great artists of the past, in the cities of Europe that he says he 'became vividly aware for the first time of my Irish identity to which I have remained attached all my life'.¹⁵⁵

Those great painters were 'each simultaneously himself, his race, and universal'. Universality, he felt, would protect him from 'self-conscious nationalism'.¹⁵⁶

The Challenge of Modern Art to Irish Identity in the Early Twentieth Century

It was Sean Keating who wrote of William Orpen, that he 'distrusted his native language. And so he does not know whether he will speak English or Spanish, Dutch or French. And that is the disadvantage that handicaps artists of our race. We have no background and no tradition'.¹⁵⁷ Others were not so liberal with the choice of nationalities they bestowed on Orpen. John Rothenstein saw him as 'sentimentally an Irishman and practically an Englishman'.¹⁵⁸ Art historians have long been at a loss as to how to approach Orpen's three Irish allegorical paintings. Roy Foster's evaluation, that they were 'intended to complete a consciously national enterprise', even though he doubts that 'his heart was in it', is not quite convincing.¹⁵⁹ Orpen was often criticised for relying too heavily on his sources, but his skill as a painter was never at issue. If he was metaphorically bowing down before the new order, and its leader, Keating, it is unlikely that he would produce such an unresolved image. What seems more likely is that *The Holy Well*, 1916, (fig.3.14) was evidence of an identity marginalized by the new epoch, or indeed that he was openly mocking the new rural Irish aesthetic.¹⁶⁰ Arnold suggests that Orpen 'believed in the act of painting, not its cultural impact', and that he believed

¹⁵⁴ R. Kennedy, 2005, p.486 and note 52.

¹⁵⁵ le Brocqy, 1981, pp24-25.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Keating, 'William Orpen, A Tribute', *Ireland Today*, 2 (1937), pp.21-26.

¹⁵⁸ John Rothenstein, *Modern English Painters: Sickert to Smith* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1952), p.221.

¹⁵⁹ Roy Foster, 'Orpen and the New Ireland' in *William Orpen, Politics, Sex and Death*, ed. by Robert Upstone (London: Imperial War Museum, 2005), p.64.

¹⁶⁰ James Christen Stewart, 'The Irishness of Irish Painting', in *When Time Began to Rant and Rage* (London: Merrell Holberton, 1998), holds the former view, while Arnold, 1998, suggests the latter.

that for painting to qualify as Irish was a simple matter of geographical location.¹⁶¹ In particular *The Holy Well* can be seen to symbolise, at one level, the forced separation of British and Irish identity that he had experienced as a painter schooled in the academic training of the Kensington system. This is not to suggest that the artist meant it to be read as such, but the benefit of hindsight and the changes that have occurred since it was painted in relation to the complexity of Irish identities, surely allow such a reading now. In certain aspects of *The Holy Well*, Orpen adopted the new Irish aesthetic in the depiction of the western landscape and the details of vernacular architecture and costume. However, the nude figures are incongruous, not for their nudity *per se* but for the treatment of the figures, so indebted are they to sources from the Renaissance and Baroque. The subjugation of these classical figures to a new rural aesthetic simply doesn't work, and that might have been Orpen's point. He was a pragmatist, who preferred technique and excellence of execution over ideological intent, and he had 'limited belief in the collective, national purpose to be served by developing art in Ireland as an extension of life in Ireland'.¹⁶² The great irony is that he left Ireland in the grip of his followers who used his methodology to impose an aesthetic on a national identity for which he had so little empathy. If Orpen was Irish in his life but not consciously so in his art, is this because Irish art was deemed to possess certain specific characteristics? This question is relevant for many of the artists under discussion here.

le Brocquy has written of his own early lack of a sense of Irishness, 'although I was born in Dublin in the year of the Rebellion and brought up entirely in Ireland, I do not remember being conscious of being particularly Irish. I remember being acutely aware of being human, for as a child it seemed to me that I might just as well have been born a goat or a hedgehog – an animal for which I had an early sympathy'.¹⁶³ Furthermore, the question of Irishness was not apparently important in his early career in London, where many of the leading critics routinely described him as a 'British' artist.¹⁶⁴ It could even

¹⁶¹ Arnold, 1998, p.52.

¹⁶² Ibid. p.61.

¹⁶³ Le Brocquy, 1981, p.24.

¹⁶⁴ See Berger, 1951 and Herbert Read, *Letter to a Young Painter* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962), pp.11-51.

be said of him in his early career that 'Ireland did not fit him, nor he it'.¹⁶⁵ More recently, Coulter maintains that le Brocquy's 'ability to be classified as alternatively Irish, British and universal raises questions over the nature of (his) cultural identity and the extent to which his art can be claimed as Irish'. She goes on to remark on the lack of any evocation of a sense of place is evoked in his work and she interprets his internationalist, modernist intentions as being at odds with his Irishness.¹⁶⁶ However, while it is perfectly reasonable to situate le Brocquy's work solely in an international context, it is also necessary to allow for complexity and overlap between identities. As we have seen, the desire to define identities in opposition to each other resulted in the challenge to Orpen, to choose between his Irishness and his Britishness.

Is it reasonable to ask what constitutes Irish art and how is it to be recognised? For many, Irish art derives its mood from the landscape and climate, giving it an 'atmospheric painterliness' which denotes soulful poeticism.¹⁶⁷ This suggests that Irish art is characterized by a mystical quality. Roisin Kennedy intimates that this view was promoted as a compromise by official Ireland, concerned with portraying an image of Irish culture abroad, and eager to designate 'Irish culture as aware of modernism and post-modernism but, ultimately, poetic, passive and introspective'.¹⁶⁸ She cites a letter written by James White to a Miss Tunney in the Department of Foreign Affairs, in which he insists on le Brocquy being an Irish artist, because he realized that Francis Bacon and F.E. McWilliam had already been claimed by the British.¹⁶⁹ In the catalogue essay for the Biennale exhibition, White presented le Brocquy's work in an Irish context, ignoring his international sources. This process of nationalization, led, she argues, to a view of le Brocquy being a 'spiritual' artist, unconcerned with social and political events. This form of 'spirituality' appealed to the Irish art establishment as an 'appropriate' form of modernism, one with its origins in Celtic art. White was an admirer of Mainie Jellett and this was her way of promoting abstraction, by subsuming it into a Celtic aesthetic.¹⁷⁰ The result is a privileging of style and technique over substance, so that the Irishness of the

¹⁶⁵ Ruane, 2002, pp.22-23.

¹⁶⁶ Coulter, 2008.

¹⁶⁷ Brian O'Doherty, *The Irish Imagination 1959-1971*, Rosc'71 (Dublin: The Municipal Art Gallery, 1971), p.11.

¹⁶⁸ R. Kennedy, 2005, p.486.

¹⁶⁹ National Archives MS 415/95, CRC 29th February 1956, cited in Kennedy, 2005.

¹⁷⁰ R. Kennedy, 2005.

work can be judged by its formal qualities.

Opinions differ widely on the advisability of an identifiable national school of art. It has been said of le Brocquy that he knows that the 'concept of a national art, like the concept of a national science, has about it something needlessly inhibiting.'¹⁷¹ However, according to the spiritual mentor of le Brocquy's friend, the artist, Jankel Adler, a national style is beneficial but 'it needs a soil from which to spring and a sky towards which to rise...a national style needs a heterogeneous society from which it grows and for whom it exists.'¹⁷² However, there was no such 'heterogeneous society' in Ireland, but rather an homogenous one. Buber argued that exile and return would produce in the artist the 'aesthetic detachment is essential for the creation of an authentic social and national art.'¹⁷³ Ireland's modernists took this advice wholeheartedly. They did not, however, adhere strictly to the classic modernist belief that art has its own condition and cannot be bound by national boundaries. From quite early on, the critic Herbert Read identified 'qualities of Celtic origin', in le Brocquy's work, but he stressed that these were 'emancipated from provincial myth' to become 'independent and universal'.¹⁷⁴ Jellett, too, adapted her modernist idiom to suit a newly rediscovered interest in Celtic abstract pattern. Whether the developments towards the Celtic idiom in these artists' works amount to a fusion of influence, a compromise with the intractable nature of Keating and his camp, or a rediscovery of some innate and unalterable characteristic of Irishness, is open to question. If it is the latter, a re-discovery of the innately Irish soul of the modernist, then Orpen, and others like him, must remain outsiders in Irish art.

Ireland was not the only country to be concerned with the necessity of a national school of art. It has been shown that this was a live debate in mid 19th century France and the desire to be perceived as distinctively French influenced Manet in his choice of emulation. In other countries, particularly those emerging into new nationhood or experiencing extreme constitutional change, the idea of art reflecting national values had real currency. The Russian artist, El Lissitzky, believed that art should be forged in an

¹⁷¹ Russell, 1991.

¹⁷² Hans Kohn, *Martin Buber: Sein Werk und Sein Zeit* (Herrerau, 1930), p.301, cited in Kampf, 1990, p.15.

¹⁷³ Kampf, 1990, p.22.

¹⁷⁴ Herbert Read, *Louis le Brocquy* (London: Gimpel fils, 1961).

unconscious manner. He wrote; 'that which we call art is always created in an absent-minded fashion. When one does not know that that one creates art – that is the sign of culture.'¹⁷⁵ For others, the national character of art was due to the 'collective unconscious', an idea borrowed from Jung, coupled with the *zeitgeist*, or Spirit of the Age.¹⁷⁶ Polish author Poznanski wrote that national art is only possible in a country like Mexico where art is recent and 'where the link which binds the artists with the soil from which popular and traditional art emerges has remained strong'.¹⁷⁷ These two contradictory views do little to shed light on the Irish situation. In Ireland, in the early decades of the twentieth century, there was no extant tradition of folk art, as there was in Mexico. The established teaching method in the Irish academies was learnt from the French Academy by way of the Kensington system in London. Ironically, it was the modernists, those who emigrated and returned more attuned to their national art, like Jellett and le Brocquy, who mined the deep seam of pre-Christian Irish motifs in their work.¹⁷⁸ Those who were trying to define a new national (ist) aesthetic, as opposed to a modernist one, were relying on Orpen's, by now outdated, realism. The views of both sides seem disingenuous, intended to mask the reality that the argument was never just about national versus international trends in art, but about conservatism versus the avant-garde and all that that stood for in societal as well as artistic terms. Poznanski's view that, 'in an enslaved country, whose whole energy was concentrated on maintenance of national individuality, the force of public opinion demanded of the artists that their works should be in the service of the nation', might have been written about Ireland.¹⁷⁹ As in Ireland, Poland's struggle for a national art at the end of the nineteenth century relied on realism, and as in Ireland, and there were two very different views on whether art should be placed at the service of the nation or retain its autonomy.¹⁸⁰ There, as in Ireland, modernism was judged as anathema to the national spirit. The work of Jankel Adler, discussed above, tended towards Cubist abstraction and therefore was thought not to

¹⁷⁵ El Lissitzky, 'The Synagogue of Mohilev, Reminiscences', *Rimon*, 3 (Berlin 1923), cited in Kampf, 1990, p.40.

¹⁷⁶ C. Poznanski, *Polish Artists in Great Britain* (London: [s.n.], 1944), p.5.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Micheal Farrell had used Celtic motifs in his work in the 1960s but ultimately found abstraction too restricting.

¹⁷⁹ Poznanski, 1944, p.7.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p.30.

‘correspond to the Polish temperament in painting’, and remained ‘on the fringe of Polish contemporary art’, although he was highly regarded internationally.¹⁸¹ More recent scholarship has concentrated on Adler’s identity as a Jew rather than as a Pole. In this respect, Kampf uses the term Jewishness to describe an artist’s *experience* and his discussion of Jewish art is broad ranging, taking into consideration content, subject matter, iconography, the function of the object, and the nationality of artist. The designation is a personal and an artistic consideration, not a national one. All art is to some degree autonomous and if Irish art is to be defined solely by qualities such as its mysticism or its evocation of place, it cannot be seen to represent the experience of Irishness in its entirety and its diversity. Many of the artists discussed here looked to sources outside of their own tradition in order to formulate ways of expressing their own identities. Very often those identities, whether of nationality, gender or sexuality, were marginalised and unrecognized in their native country.

Micheal Farrell and Madonna Irlanda

Farrell’s borrowing from Boucher in *Madonna Irlanda*, 1977, (fig.1.6) differs from le Brocquy’s homage to Manet in several key ways, and involves a complex appropriation of image, text and myth. In appropriating Boucher’s *Blonde Odalisque*, 1752 (fig.3.15) he draws attention to the sensual imperative in the history of the reclining nude, and perhaps also to its inherent contradictions.¹⁸² He seems to be acknowledging that the eighteenth century function of the nude is outdated and uses this point to critique Irish political life and what he identifies as its lack of independence.

The use of Boucher’s painting as a source seems unusual in that they were very different kinds of artists with very different aims and ambitions. Farrell was not aiming to take some of the aura of Boucher onto himself as le Brocquy had been with Manet. Indeed, as Cheryl Herr has noted ‘Boucher sums up perfectly the century in which he reigned as

¹⁸¹ Ibid. p.23.

¹⁸² Boucher painted two versions of *Blonde Odalisque*, dated 1751, (Cologne) and 1752, (Munich).

court painter for Louis XV, its comfortable decadence, its intrigues and careful avoidance of distressing immediacies'.¹⁸³

It seems then that it was the biographical subject of Boucher's painting that interested Farrell most of all and the thing that apparently caught his imagination was the story of an Irish 'emigrant' which enabled him to create an image that was rooted in art historical associations but have political resonance for the time in which it was painted.¹⁸⁴ The particular version of the Louise O'Murphy story that Farrell understood was that she had been born in Dublin and was brought to France by her father who was a boot-maker for the army. 'His task was to make boots for the many Irish soldiers fighting as mercenaries in France', Farrell's biographer informs us.¹⁸⁵

Herr suggests that the initial appeal for Farrell may have lain in the possibility of combining a pun on Boucher's name with a drawing in which he depicts the woman's body quartered as on a butcher's chart. *Miss O'Murphy d'apres Boucher*, 1976, (fig.3.16) was also said to have been influenced by a visit to a brothel in Florence, where Farrell encountered a very beautiful woman with a badly scarred body, which gave him the idea for the drawing. In it he marks out several 'cuts' such as 'gigot' and 'forequarters' and includes 'the knee cap' as a specific reference to paramilitary violence in Northern Ireland. 'Butchered by the history of Irish politics she rests there, sanctified in the public eye by her own willingness not to know her violation'.¹⁸⁶

Yet another level of appropriation occurs when Farrell 'seizes the connotations of sexual consumption and exchange in Boucher's original to address the historical conflict in Northern Ireland...known as the 'Troubles'. Mahon identifies this complex layering of allusion as part of 'the political appropriation of the classical erotic tradition by contemporary artists'.¹⁸⁷

In chapter 1, above, we have already looked at this painting alongside Patrick Graham's *My Darkish Rosaleen*, (fig.1.7) and considered how politically motivated Irish artists of the 1970s and 80s directly challenged the myth of Irish purity through representations of

¹⁸³ Cheryl Herr, 'The Erotics of Irishness', *Critical Inquiry*, 17.1 (Autumn 1990), pp.1-34 (p.10).

¹⁸⁴ Liam Kelly, 'Irish Art: An Art of Journeying and Dislocation', in *Arguing at the Crossroads: Essays on a Changing Ireland*, ed. by Paul Brennan and Catherine de Saint Phalle (Dublin: New Island Books, 1997) p.120.

¹⁸⁵ David Farrell, *Michael Farrell: The Life and Work of an Irish Artist* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2006), p.80.

¹⁸⁶ Herr, 1990, p.10.

¹⁸⁷ Mahon, 2007, pp.34-5.

Mother Ireland. As Inglis has shown there were clear sociological reasons for the development of the myth of sexual purity among the Irish, related mainly to the influence of the Catholic Church, fears over the sustainability of the land, and the rural custom of late marriage. These outward restrictions led, he argues, to the internalization of processes of self-control, especially in Irish women.¹⁸⁸ The resultant stereotypical image of the good Irish woman resembled the Virgin Mary, in her passivity and submissiveness.¹⁸⁹ It is this mythical stereotype that Farrell addressed in *Madonna Irlanda*, her halo denoting her symbolic identity as virgin mother. However, Farrell's image was concerned with un-masking this spurious identity and showing Ireland for what she really was, in his view a whore. To this end he appropriated another convenient myth contained in the story about the origins of Miss O'Murphy. According to popular legend the subject of Boucher's painting, the young Irish woman Louisa O'Murphy, became mistress to Louis XV aged 13. Farrell responded enthusiastically to her story; 'I thought, here we go; this is the right way to do it. You'd have Ireland as a whore, ridden by everybody, mixed up with religion and the whole business, and as Ireland was a woman...that seemed to be a better political way of doing the thing than the other paintings I'd done before...Ireland is a feminine country and constantly referred to as she. Ireland is getting fucked by the opposition, getting screwed up by Britain, by the Protestants...a real Irish stew. Ireland has opened her legs to allow this kind of thing to happen...I don't like Ireland being a whore, but that doesn't mean that I don't like whores.'¹⁹⁰

However, Alistair Laing, speaking at a symposium in the National Gallery of Ireland in 2010 repudiated the veracity of the Louise O'Murphy myth. While he accepts that the person referred to as Mlle.O'Morphie and 'La Petite Morphie' by Camille Pascal and Casanova respectively, was one of the king's mistresses, he denied that it was the same woman who appears in Boucher's painting. Laing maintains that the girl in Boucher's *Blonde Odalisque*, was his studio model from 1751-2, before Marie Louise O'Murphy

¹⁸⁸ Inglis, 2005.

¹⁸⁹ Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press,1996).

¹⁹⁰ Farrell, 2006, p.81.

was procured for Louis in 1753.¹⁹¹ Of course in one way this is unimportant and does not diminish the force of the message in Farrell's picture, which is produced through the conflation of a young whore with the personification of Ireland, Cathleen ni Houlihan. Symbolising the young state, and positioned as she is between the lascivious gaze of the self-portrait on the right and the distorted version of Leonardo's Vitruvian man (c.1487) on the left (signifying dis-harmony) the woman is presented as young, inexperienced, immature and threatened by violence and inertia. However, Farrell's agenda in this painting is the de-bunking of myths that perpetuate stereotypical attitudes and behaviours and therefore his misappropriation of the Louise O'Murphy myth should not pass unnoticed. The version of the story that he accepted contained various elements that conformed to his particular political and sexual prejudices, including the sexual abjection of the woman, and her father's role as a contributor to a colonizing army.

Herr's analysis of Farrell's image suggests that, far from challenging the norms of the representation of sexuality, he actually perpetuates an extreme repression of the body that has always been a primary characteristic of Irish art. Using Paul Frankl's analysis of Boucher's Rococo invention of a type of 'swimming movement' in his *Odalisques* that contributed to their eroticism, she notes that Farrell fixes his female figure in place between the disembodied gaze of his self-portrait head on one side and the codifying presence of Vitruvian man on the other.¹⁹² In this way Louise O'Murphy is 'cut free from the Rococo world of pleasant motion and hooked into a profound stasis produced from ambivalence about the female body, about the body in general, an eternal threat to the other half of the Cartesian side'.¹⁹³ Herr equates this stasis in Farrell's painting to a stern morality attached to the body in post-colonial Ireland. She maintains that central to Irish art is 'a reflexive and wide-spread resistance to seeing movement, to recognizing its necessity, and ultimately to sanctioning radical changes of posture'.¹⁹⁴ In this way she re-

¹⁹¹ Alastair Laing, curator of pictures and sculptures, the National Trust. W.D. Finlay lecture on Boucher's *A Female Nude Reclining on a Chaise-Longue*, c.1752, National Gallery of Ireland (October 7, 2010).

¹⁹² Frankl, 'Boucher's Girl on the Couch' in Meiss (ed.) *Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, 2 vols (New York: 1961), cited in Herr, 1990, p.13.

¹⁹³ Herr, 1990, p.13.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

iterates Inglis's point that controlling influences in Ireland have resulted in the internalization of restrictions on the body and on its representation in art.

Ultimately, *Madonna Irlanda* says as much about Farrell's personal anger and frustration as it does about the contemporaneous political situation in Ireland. His artistic frustration with the regionality of Irish art had led him to Internationalism and abstraction as a young artist in London and New York, and he continued to champion that style at home in Ireland. However, even while pursuing abstraction he remained interested in the figure. Frustrated with the life drawing facilities on offer in NCAD he and fellow artist Brian Bourke set up a drawing school in Lincoln Place under the auspices of the Trinity College Art Society. Called The Farrell School of Light and Vision, it charged a small fee for the payment of models but was otherwise open to all without restriction. The enterprise was short-lived. Eventually, frustration with internationalism led him back to figurative painting. This was at least partly occasioned by the eruption of violence in the Northern Ireland conflict in the late 1960s. As a politically active artist he felt the need to make visual statements about the political situation and the pictorial means of abstraction were wholly inadequate to his purpose. In 1977, the same year in which he painted *Madonna Irlanda*, he said 'I became interested more in the literary aspects and less in the formal. It put me in a terrible jam, and rethinking the whole basis of my work took a long time...I've withdrawn from the international scene of art to a more human and personal style than before.'¹⁹⁵ At that point he changed from making art about art, to making art about politics.

Farrell's political position in respect to the conflict in Northern Ireland, a circumstance with which he was very engaged, is also anomalous. His antipathy to Catholicism is clearly legible in his work, especially in the association of virgin and whore in *Madonna Irlanda*. At the same time Farrell supported Irish nationalism and while nationalism and Catholicism are entirely separate, they have consistently been treated as conceptually interdependent in the separatist politics of Irish nationalism. At the same time he identified the Protestants in Northern Ireland as a class of oppressors. It seems that his political position was one of frustration with all sides and that he didn't fully identify

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Maev Kennedy, *Irish Times*, 1977, cited in Farrell, 2006, p.73.

with any of the parties involved. This sense of alienation may have contributed to his life-long self-imposed exile.

Clearly art can be autonomous and politically engaged at the same time, and in Farrell's painting it is difficult to distinguish between his personal and political imperatives.

Madonna Irlanda was painted in the Villa Romana, an artist's residence in Rome, where Farrell had gone to escape personal and family problems. And his relationship with Ireland was problematic too, both in his familial relationships and his anguished response to the troubles in Northern Ireland. Noel Sheridan put it succinctly when he said. *I sometimes imagine that Micheal might echo Flaubert in saying of the Madonna Irlanda series 'Miss O'Murphy, c'est moi.'*¹⁹⁶

These aspects of Farrell's personality make *Madonna Irlanda*, despite all that has been written about its political context, a peculiarly personal statement. In this way it differs substantially from le Brocquy's *A Family*, where the sources have been mediated through layers of influence, resulting in an image that is less literal and far more universal.

Robert Ballagh and the Politics of Appropriation

Although he famously remarked that 'artists are of their time and the art they make is conditioned by the time they live in',¹⁹⁷ pastiche has become something of a signature methodology for the artist Robert Ballagh, who has copied from over thirty painters over the course of his career.¹⁹⁸ Only a handful of these feature the depiction of the nude, and these are largely inspired by a particular group of eighteenth and nineteenth century French artists, David, Delacroix, Gericault and Ingres, who straddle the divide between Neo-classicism and Romanticism, epitomized on the one hand by the rational and moral and on the other by the sensuous and emotional.¹⁹⁹ Ballagh initially trained an architect, and afterwards became a graphic artist. He is self taught as an artist and his imagery

¹⁹⁶ Noel Sheridan, *On Reflection* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), p.45.

¹⁹⁷ Cieran Carty, *Robert Ballagh* (Dublin: Magill, 1986), p.11.

¹⁹⁸ These include Dürer, Magritte, Picasso, Duchamp, Friedrich, Vermeer, Goya, Delacroix, David, Gainsborough, Matisse, Lichtenstein, Ingres, Pollock, Barnett Newman, Capogrossi, Soulages, Gotlieb, Frank Stella, Jasper Johns, Morris Louis, Franz Klein, Clifford Still, Motherwell, Kenneth Noland, Bradley W. Tomlin, Ellsworth Kelly, Leger, Dan Flavin, Cecil King, Michael Farrell and Patrick Scott.

¹⁹⁹ Friedlander, *David to Delacroix* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1964).

derives mostly from photographic sources, cinema and comic books, leading to a natural inclination towards photorealism and pop art in his later career.²⁰⁰ He remains a self-confessed technician in his approach to his work, eschewing the poetic element that is often characterized as central to Irish art. It is not difficult to see, then, why he was so drawn to David and Ingres's neo-classicism for its linearity and cleanliness of finish, he admired the fact that they were 'both technically brilliant.'²⁰¹ Although this same linearity is not found in the work of Gericault or Delacroix, there was often political content in both and this was perhaps the most important stimulus for Ballagh's interest in painting. That interest included the subject matter of the work and the personality of the artist. For example, he admired David's role in democratizing art in France by opening the Louvre to the public, when he was Minister for Culture under the Directorate. As he put it, 'I would have identified with David on two levels... I do believe in the artist as a social animal, as well as an aesthetic creature, and he seemed to sum up those things for me.'²⁰² Ballagh's *Rape of the Sabines after David*, 1969-70, (fig.3.17) reworks Jacques-Louis David's *Intervention of the Sabine Women*, 1799.²⁰³ (fig.3.18) The subject matter of the original is derived from a classical source, the story of the Sabine women who intervened between their warring menfolk and the Roman army, and it served as an allegory for the internecine fighting in post-revolutionary France.²⁰⁴ Ballagh also painted *Liberty at the Barricades after Delacroix*, 1969-70, (fig.3.19) a version of Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the Barricades*, 1830. (fig.3.20) It's genesis was sparked by a particular event. In 1969 the IELA held its then annual exhibition in Cork. The show was due to transfer to Belfast, until Micheal Farrell, Ballagh and ten other artists withdrew their

²⁰⁰ Ballagh was taught art at secondary school level by John Coyle RHA.

²⁰¹ Ballagh in conversation with the author, 15/05/2010.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Another work of the same title, made in collaboration with Joe Kelly, *Rape of the Sabines after David*, 1973, comprises a set of twenty four colour silkscreen prints, 22"x 26", in an edition of 75.

²⁰⁴ The army of Romulus abducted the women of the Sabines, whose menfolk came to rescue them 3 years later. By this time they had become the wives of their abductors and mothers too and they didn't want to return to Rome, and so intervened on behalf of their new families. Because of the complexity of the subject matter, David distributed an explanatory pamphlet when it was exhibited as did Ballagh did for his *Liberty on the Barricades* in 1969, see below. Erica Rand, 'Depoliticizing Women: Female Agency, the French Revolution, and the Art of Boucher and David', in *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Postmodernism*, ed. by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2005), note 34, p.157. Ballagh also painted *Homage to David*, 1970, a version of David's *Death of Marat*, 1793, in *homage to David*.

participation in protest at the events taking place in Northern Ireland.²⁰⁵ In the end the show did not transfer to Belfast. When asked to take part in a subsequent exhibition, entitled *The Celtic Triangle* Ballagh was faced with a choice, either to boycott again or to make suitably critical work. Because he felt that his opportunities to exhibit were already limited enough, he chose the latter and submitted *Liberty at the Barricades after Delacroix*, which was exhibited in the window of the Arts Council Gallery in Bedford Street in Belfast to advertise the exhibition.

For Ballagh, as for many contemporary artists, 'the quest for originality is a stony road' and so for inspiration he turned to artists from the past who had he said, 'been faced with a similar sort of situation in their own context and I very quickly came to Goya and his paintings about the French in Spain and all of that, and then Delacroix and David and all of these people seemed to me to be artists of their time dealing with similar issues, so that was interesting, and then I said how am I going to deal with that, and being either modest or hopelessly inadequate I decided that the images they made were so good and so powerful that I didn't want to change the actual images, you know the firing squad in *The Third of May* or *Liberty on the Barricades* or whatever. I would try and redo them in a contemporary style, and that's what I did.'²⁰⁶

At the time he felt that an artist should either change his source material radically or leave it alone, and he criticizes Picasso's adaptations of Goya's *The Third of May 1808*, 1814 as an example of a source which has been changed without being taken 'away far enough to do something interesting with it'.²⁰⁷ In this statement he also acknowledges youthful inexperience that made him loath to compete on already well established ground with those he perceived as great artists.

In his personal and artistic life Ballagh has always been very politically motivated, and his assertion that 'it doesn't matter if people don't make all these connections', suggests that artist intentionality is the key issue when referencing works with specific meanings

²⁰⁵ James White, *Gerard Dillon: An Illustrated Biography* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1994), maintains that Gerard Dillon initiated the protest on the train to Cork, presenting 30 exhibitors with a written declaration of intent to boycott the Belfast IELA, which was signed by 25 artists, and that Michael Farrell declared his agreement at the Cork opening of the show. Ballagh, in conversation with the author, remembers Farrell as the instigator.

²⁰⁶ Carty, 1986, p.49. Ballagh in conversation with the author, 15/05/2010.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

and contexts.²⁰⁸ He elaborates on this view when he says, 'If you get the reference you're home but I think all great art is layered...I think that the viewer gets in direct proportion to the amount of information they bring with them to the art work. Their levels of appreciation are in direct proportion to the amount of knowledge they have.'²⁰⁹

Having meant his version of *Liberty Leading the Barricades* to arouse strong political feelings, Ballagh fully expected there may be a complaint, as indeed there was.

However, the complainant was concerned about the public display of a bare breast, rather than any intended political connotation. It appeared that this member of the viewing public, at least, failed to make the connection between Delacroix's iconic painting and recent events in Derry in 1969. In order to correct this, Ballagh wrote a pamphlet explaining the painting's political meaning but the Arts Council forbade him from distributing it at the exhibition.²¹⁰ They also insisted that certain words be omitted from the catalogue entry, entirely altering its meaning. The amended sentence now read, 'these paintings are inspired by (recent) events (in my country)'.²¹¹ Eventually, his frustration with the lack of public understanding and official censorship, prompted him to do another painting a few years later, 'to say this is what I meant'.²¹² That painting was *My Studio 1969*, 1976, (fig.3.21) which contained within it a version of his earlier *Liberty on the Barricades*, in order to reiterate the point. The same painting appears again in *Inside No.3*, 1979, (fig.3.22) and a 1979 Stamp commemorating Patrick Pearse shows it in the background with the GPO replacing the barricades and the Irish tricolour replacing the French.

This approach to appropriation, which extrapolates fixed meanings from one context and applies them directly to another, can be problematic. Meanings were often contested in their own time, and images can often acquire layers of meaning over time. As Marcia Pointon has written on Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the Barricades*; 'its meanings were surrounded with uncertainty at the time of its painting and have been widely disputed since'. Furthermore, it has 'attained an extraordinarily privileged status within cultural

²⁰⁸ Carty, 1986, p.127.

²⁰⁹ Ballagh in conversation with the author, 15/05/2010.

²¹⁰ Ibid. See also Carty, 1986, p.72, and Karim White, *Robert Ballagh: Works from the Studio 1959-2006* (Dublin: Gorry Gallery, 2006), pp.-70-72.

²¹¹ Carty, 1986, p.92.

²¹² Ballagh in conversation with the author, 15/05/2010.

history', that it did not possess at the time of its exhibition.²¹³ Ballagh himself acknowledges the difficulty in trying to fit known images to new and unrelated circumstances.

'Probably foolishly I was trying to be fairly explicit in my choices and it seemed to me in the context of the attacks on the civil rights marchers and things like that the *Third of May* was spot on and then *Liberty on the Barricades* seemed so right because they were throwing barricades up all over the north, and then the *Sabine Women* seemed to me absolutely right again with the women interposing themselves between the conflicting parties trying to achieve some sort of peace, that seemed to me right.'²¹⁴

The iconography of Delacroix's painting places it in a long standing tradition and makes of it 'an alliance of the erotic and the political'.²¹⁵ It may have been inspired by a true story of poor laundry-girl Anne Charlotte D who went in search of her brother on the barricades in her petticoat, found his body with ten bullet holes, and vowed to kill as many Swiss. She shot down nine before she herself was killed.²¹⁶

The exhibition of *Liberty Leading the Barricades* caused a furore, which presages that of Manet's *Olympia* in 1865, because the female figure defied the conventions of the Salon nude. It was severely criticised by contemporary critics, for its depiction of a 'dirty' woman, who was presumed to be a prostitute.²¹⁷ The term 'dirty' had physical and moral implications as it was common, in the thinking of the time, for working class women to be seen as more sexualised than bourgeois women.²¹⁸ Therefore, despite the woman's ostensibly heroic role, Pointon sees the image as one in which women are simultaneously heroicised and demonised.²¹⁹ Similarly, Erica Rand has critiqued David's *Intervention of the Sabine Women*, not so much for its inherent meaning but for the political intention which lay behind it. The generally accepted theme of David's painting, for over two

²¹³ Pointon, 1990, pp.61-3. She points out that the figure of Liberty has been very widely copied, including versions by John Heartfield, *Liberty Fights in their Ranks*, 1936, Paul George, *My Kant State*, 1871-2, Alexander Moffat, *Poets Pub*, 1980, and Red Grooms, *Liberty*, 1982. Courbet subsumed *Liberty* into the male top-hatted figure for the cover of Baudelaire's journal *Le Salut Public* in 1848.

²¹⁴ Ballagh in conversation with the author, 15/05/2010.

²¹⁵ Pointon, 1990, p.63.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.* p.64 and note 19, p.143. This story appeared in an anonymous 1831 pamphlet, and Pointon suggests it may have been distributed after the exhibition of the painting to promote sales of the engraving.

²¹⁷ Pointon, 1990, p.68 and note 28, p.143.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.* pp.74-5.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.* p.82.

centuries, was that of two groups of male antagonists who become reconciled by women, representing the mother country.²²⁰ However, Rand interprets the image differently, as one of enforced gender segregation, in which the Sabine women, as wives and mothers, serve as ideal models for women in post revolutionary France. The message is clear, women should abandon the barricades and return to their rightful place in society, the kitchen. Furthermore, Rand see this as evidence of David's representation of the political aims of the Directorate, of which he was a member, who 'only transgressed traditional gender boundaries out of an intense desire to maintain them'.²²¹ Their ultimate aim for women, she maintains, was to make them withdraw from the battlefield. Thereafter, women were excluded from the public sphere by being placed above it, idealized in their twin roles as wives and mothers. For Rand, 'the Sabines is the work of a man who had to paint women onto the political stage in order to keep them off'.²²² Delacroix's painting may seem to elevate the role of women in politics but the historical fact remains that 'women increasingly lost credibility in the public sphere under the evolving Empire'.²²³ Contemporary research such as this re-evaluates works of art in the established canon in order to forge new meanings in line with current discourses. In doing so it poses new challenges to artists who have made thematic connections between these works and their own contemporary situations. Greater interrogation of the original image may demand more complexity of the artist in the process of appropriation. For instance Ballagh's reference (above) to the peacemaking role of women in Northern Ireland is successful to a point but when the viewer is armed with deeper understanding it hardly seems adequate.

Taken as a group, the paintings after David, Delacroix and Gericault represent for Ballagh a strong identification with the political interpretation of the subject matter above all. Though they all include nude and semi draped figures, they cannot be said to be in the tradition of the nude as a genre. In complete contrast to the inherent political messages

²²⁰ Chaussard, cited in Rand, 2005, p.152, and note 33, p.157.

²²¹ Rand, 2005, p.153.

²²² Ibid. p.154.

²²³ Ockman, 2005, p.198.

contained in them, Ballagh painted *The Turkish Bath after Ingres*, 1970, (fig.3.23) for pure pleasure.²²⁴

‘The *Turkish Bath*... was a kind of added bonus, done as a little present to myself, because it wasn’t for any particular exhibition, and because of my historical investigation into David that inevitably led me to Ingres and inevitably led me to appreciate his work. I thought if I was going to do a work that was an *homage* to him the *Turkish Bath* was the one to do, it was the most iconic of all his works.’ For the artist, ‘it sits rightly aside from the more political ones’.²²⁵

Ballagh’s reworking of Ingres’ painting was exhibited at the Oireachtas exhibition in 1970, and received a negative review in *Irish Times*. Shortly afterwards he went to New York where he saw an exhibition of versions of the Ingres’ *Turkish Bath* in a 52nd Street gallery and of David’s *A Marat*, 1793, in the Lerner Heller Museum, on Madison Ave. It was then, he maintains, that he fully realized that copying was part of the postmodern zeitgeist. Works such as these were part of a fashion for pastiche in the 1970s, a decade which also saw so many variants on Manet’s *Olympia*, as discussed above.

Although a student of the radical David, Ingres was non-political. He struggled with history painting but was an enthusiastic and lifelong painter of the nude.²²⁶ Ingres’ *Turkish Bath*, 1863 (fig.3.24) represents the ‘culmination of a whole series of similar compositions that go back for decades through his career’.²²⁷ Ingres made many copies throughout his career, initially from eclectic sources, but these were gradually pared down to the influence of the Greeks and Raphael.²²⁸ These he used so liberally that his critics referred to him as ‘a robber of the graves of the past’ and a plagiariser of his own work.²²⁹ He was a superb technician and this extensive re-working of a few select themes was done in pursuit of perfection.²³⁰ For example, the figure in the *Valpinçon Bather*,

²²⁴ Ballagh also made a lithograph entitled *The Turkish Bath after Ingres*, 1973, in an edition of 35.

²²⁵ Ballagh in conversation with the author, 15/05/2010.

²²⁶ Ingres copied Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* in Florence, in 1822 as a model for his sculptor friend Bartolini’s *Recumbent Venus*.

²²⁷ Francis Haskell, ‘A Turk and his Pictures’, in *Past and Present in Art and Taste: Selected Essays* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), p.181.

²²⁸ *Ibid.* p.14.

²²⁹ *Ibid.* p.10.

²³⁰ *In Pursuit of Perfection* was the title of an exhibition held in The Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth and The J.B. Speed Art Museum, Louisville, in 1984.

1808, re-appears in an altered pose in *Small Bather* 1826, and again, with five accompanying figures in *Interior of a Harem*, 1828, and yet again, slightly altered, and with the addition of a mandolin, in *The Turkish Bath*.²³¹ As Ingres re-worked his painting, he also changed its format from the square to circular, added in many still life details, and extra figures; twenty five nude or semi nude figures in total, many of which are reprised from earlier compositions.²³² The overt eroticism of the work has been discussed in terms of an Aristotelian variety of sensory experience, to be embraced by the intellect as unattainable, and therefore not intended to be primarily erotic. According to John Connolly, it is not a 'hedonistic wallow, but an allegory of the senses', and he illustrates how each of four senses is represented twice in the painting with the exception of sight, which 'is supplied by the viewer.'²³³ However, the known provenance of this picture and others like it might suggest otherwise. It was acquired in 1865 by Khalil Bey, a Senior Turkish civil servant who had served as ambassador to Athens, and St. Petersburg, but lived as a private citizen in Paris, where he is said to have had 'one of the finest private collections in the city'.²³⁴ He particularly favoured nudes and oriental subjects, and was the patron of both Ingres and Courbet. Courbet painted *Les Dormeuses*, 1866 (fig.3.25) for Khalil Bey, and Haskell speculates whether it might have been commissioned specifically as a modern counterpart to *The Turkish Bath*.²³⁵ *Les Dormeuses* is a contemporary image with no allusion to mythology and Courbet has daringly stressed the lesbian overtones to make a far more sexually explicit picture.

Gerard Dillon's Re-working of Gauguin's exoticism

Gerard Dillon did not have the same degree of respect for old masters that le Brocquy had. According to his biographer, James White, he resisted being taught and had a 'stubborn conviction that he must find his way without help', even to the extent of having

²³¹ Some details, such as the distinctive turban, also appear in *Grand Odalisque*, 1816, and other works.

²³² Haskell, 1987.

²³³ John L. Connolly, Jr., 'Ingres and the Erotic Intellect' in *Woman as Sex Object*, ed. by Linda Nochlin and Thomas Hess (New York: Newsweek, 1972), pp.16-31.

²³⁴ Haskell, 1987, p.179.

²³⁵ *Ibid.* p.182. Haskell maintains that this is 'just tenable' time-wise.

a 'horror of being seen to be influenced' by other artists.'²³⁶ When he emigrated to London in 1934, he came into contact with books on art in the house of his friend Pino Saggiotti and the two often visited galleries together, but he saw the old master paintings there as 'symbols of the wealthy and powerful or intellectuals who failed to relate to the working class families' like the one from which he had come.²³⁷

However, Gerard Keenan gives an alternative view in the fictionalised account of Dillon's life that appeared in his novel *Farset and Gomorrah*. He describes the character of Francie Gent, who is based on Dillon, as being highly influenced by Gauguin, so that when he,

'looked at landscape he saw it filtered through a sensibility that was steeped in Pont-Aven and Gauguin...He saw Gauguin's work as a call to escape from the educated in art, to return to primitive roots, which was how Gauguin had seen it also...Gent dramatised his daily life in his paintings in the way that his master had done, though with none of Gauguin's self-pity and in a large, ambitious, successful canvas portraying multiple facets of Gent's London flat, a sort of massive brande-dessinée of One Day in The Life of Francie Gent, the nude figure lying face-down on his bed as a delicious reward at the end of the day was the nude figure from the painting Gauguin called Manao Tupapau.'²³⁸

Although this is a fictionalised account, it points to a very clear intention on the part of the artist to emulate a specific figure from the oeuvre of a great master. Representations of the nude were unusual in Dillon's work at this time. It was not until he joined a life class in Sarah Siddons' Paddington Institute in 1967, that it would become a more frequent subject for him. Therefore it would seem that he was making a very particular point in the exceptional work, *Self-contained Flat*, c.1955 (fig.3.26) This is not so much an act of *homage* as a quotation from Gauguin's *Manao Tupapao*, 1892 (fig.3.27). The specificity of the quote was clear enough to be remarked upon in the press when the painting was first exhibited in the Irish Exhibition of Living Art exhibition in 1955. John O'Cleary wrote in *The Leader*, 'I doubt the wisdom of evoking Gauguin (sic) by the

²³⁶ White, *Gerard Dillon: An Illustrated Biography* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1994). p.32. However, he also points out that Dillon later admitted the influence of Chagall, and White saw the influence of Picasso in the series of Pierrot paintings Dillon began in the 1960s.

²³⁷ *Ibid.* p.33.

²³⁸ Gerard Keenan, *Farset and Gomorrah*, serialised in *The Honest Ulsterman* (1977-8), cited in White, 1994, p.64.

introduction of the nude. This evocation is hardly to Dillon's advantage', though presumably his unease was based on the use of the nude *per se* and not the associations it raised with Gauguin's aims and objectives. In referring to Gauguin, Dillon was not seeking influence in technique or subject matter, but rather, he was stating his identification with certain artistic aims of Gauguin's, namely the escape from academism and the return to the primitive. Furthermore, in making an allusion to a specific iconic work that carried within it its own mythologized meanings, he was surely identifying himself with what Stephen Eisenman has referred to as Gauguin's 'liminal' sexual identity.²³⁹ Dillon's biographer is somewhat reticent on the subject of his sexuality, referring briefly to him as a 'repressed homosexual' who maintained a 'private world confined in a smaller circle which he kept quite separate from the majority of his friends in the world of art and in his family environment'.²⁴⁰ However, for Coulter, Dillon's identification with Gauguin is deeply personal, encompassing as it does, his 'self identification as a modern artist and a gay man'.²⁴¹ The excerpt from Keenan's novel quoted above refers to the nude figure lying on the bed as a 'delicious reward at the end of the day'. Coulter's reading of the painting is based on the androgynous nature of this figure, so that s/he represents the sexual ambiguity in the painter's own life. Drawing on Susan Sontag's definition of the camp aesthetic, as a private code to deliver self-legitimation with humour and without acrimony, she writes; 'Dillon's appropriation of Gauguin's Tahitian nude, his emphasis of its androgyny and re-contextualisation of it within a contemporary urban setting can be read as his engagement with a camp sensibility which both avoids the controversy that would have resulted from the depiction of an unambiguous male nude, and introduces a playful masquerade only legible to an initiated audience'.²⁴² Thus, he is using history 'as a mask', and the reference to Gauguin's 'sexually ambiguous nude' allows him to reveal his own sexual nature without causing controversy. This degree of circumspection was

²³⁹ Eisenman, 1997, p.20.

²⁴⁰ White, 1994, p.42 and p.70.

²⁴¹ Coulter, 'Gerard Dillon: Nationalism, Homosexuality and the Modern Irish Artist', *Éire-Ireland*, 35.3/4, (Fomhar/Geimhreadh, Fall/Winter, 2010).

²⁴² *Ibid.* See also Sontag, 'Notes on Camp', *Partisan Review*, 31 (Fall 1964), pp.515-31.

necessary because as an Irish Catholic nationalist Dillon 'would have internalised a version of Irishness that effectively excluded him', as a gay man.²⁴³

As a keen diarist himself, Dillon may even have read Gauguin's journals. *The Intimate Journals of Paul Gauguin* was banned in Ireland under the 1929 Censorship of Publications Act, and for precisely that reason he may have sought it out in London.²⁴⁴

This book was remarkably similar both in style and content to a popular nineteenth century novel. *The Marriage of Loti* by Julien Viaud was published in 1880, and recounted, in diary form, the exotic experiences of a British sailor Harry Grant, the eponymous Loti, and his marriage to a fourteen year old Tahitian girl called Rarahu. Vincent Van Gogh read it in 1888 shortly before Gauguin's arrival in Arles and it is highly probable that Gauguin read it later that same year and that it influenced their discussions on the desirability of a 'studio of the tropics'.²⁴⁵ Familiarity with Gauguin's journal would have given Dillon an understanding of that artist's frustrations, both social and artistic, in nineteenth century Paris, and doubtless he identified with these feelings as an Irish artist struggling to establish his own identity in twentieth century London. However, to have read about the genesis of the painting *Manao Tupapao*, he would have to have read Gauguin's earlier work, *Noa Noa*, which contained the now infamous passage recalling Gauguin's return to his Tahitian hut one night in darkness:

'Quickly I struck a match and I saw;

Tehura, immobile, naked, lying face downward flat on the bed with the eyes inordinately large with fear. She looked at me, and seemed not to recognise me. As for myself I stood for some moments strangely uncertain. A contagion emanated from the terror of Tehura. I had the illusion that a phosphorescent light was streaming from her staring eyes. Never had I seen her so beautiful, so tremendously beautiful. And then in this half-light which was surely peopled for her with dangerous apparitions and terrifying

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid. Gauguin's journal *Avant et Après*, was published in English as *The Intimate Journals of Paul Gauguin* (London: KPI, 1923). For a full record of the French and English publications see Nicholas Wadley (ed.), *Noa Noa: Gauguin's Tahiti*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (Oxford: Phaidon, 1985), p.154.

²⁴⁵ Vincent wrote to his sister recommending the book to her after 30th March 1888. Letter W3, *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, vol. III (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), p.430. Gauguin arrived in Arles on 23rd October 1888. The Yellow House at Arles, known as the 'studio of the south' proved insufficiently inspirational and Van Gogh and Gauguin soon saw the need for a more exotic 'studio of the tropics'. This became the main focus of Gauguin's ambition after 1888. See *Van Gogh and Gauguin, The Studio of the South* (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 2002).

suggestions, I was afraid to make any movement which might increase the child's paroxysm of fright. How could I know what at that moment I might seem to her? Might she not with my frightened face take me for one of the demons and spectres, one of the Tupapaüs (sic), with which the legends of her race people sleepless nights? The intensity of fright which had dominated her as the result of the physical and moral power of her superstitions had transformed her into a strange being, entirely different from anything I had known heretofore. Finally she came to herself again, called me, and I did all I could to reason with her, to reassure her, to restore her confidence.

She listened sulkily to me, and with a voice in which sobs trembles she said, 'Never leave me again so alone without light...' But fear scarcely slumbered before jealousy awoke. 'What did you do in the city? You have been to see women, those who drink and dance on the market-place, and who give themselves to officers, sailors, to all the world. I would not quarrel with her, and the night was soft, soft and ardent, a night of the tropics...' ²⁴⁶

Gauguin constantly referred in his writing to the androgyny of the savage, and both terms were meant in a positive sense, so frustrated was he with what he perceived as the culturally imposed unnaturalness of relations between the sexes in the West.²⁴⁷ His journals also contain accounts of tentative homosexual longing, which is expressed in terms of wishing to experience the female, submissive role, sexually.²⁴⁸ His description of *Manao Tupapao* as 'on the verge of indecent' in a letter to his wife, seems to bear out the simultaneous fear and longing that the homosexual act aroused in him.²⁴⁹

Homosexuality was acceptable in Tahitian culture, and people there were familiar with and tolerant of the *Mahus*, cross-dressing homosexual men who earned their livings in certain creative trades such as basket weaving.²⁵⁰ If indeed Gauguin was a 'sexual tourist' in Tahiti, searching for 'an indigenous zone of polymorphous sexuality', it is not

²⁴⁶ John Miller (ed.), *Noa Noa: The Tahitian Journal of Paul Gauguin*, trans O.F. Theis (San Francisco, Calif: Chronicle, 2005). The first English translation of *Noa Noa*, by O.F. Theis, was published in New York in 1919. It comprised excerpts from the 1897 and 1901 French editions in an enlarged version which included new text by Gauguin's collaborator, the poet Charles Morice, 1861-1919. See also Wadley, 1985.

²⁴⁷ Eisenman, 1997.

²⁴⁸ Nancy Mowl Mathews, *Paul Gauguin: An Erotic Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), p.183.

²⁴⁹ Letter to Mette Gauguin, December 8, 1892, cited in Mathews, 2001, p.181.

²⁵⁰ See both Eisenman, 1997, and Mathews, 2001.

altogether certain that he found it.²⁵¹ His accounts of his erotic experiences in Tahiti may well have been exaggerated for greater effect, written, as they were, with publication in mind, and an eye on his reputation, as modern artist and adventurer, back in Paris.

According to Matthews, they were only part memoir, and part 'symbolist fiction'.²⁵²

However, aside from representing his sexual exploits, Gauguin had specific and serious artistic intentions in painting *Manao Tupapao*. In his house in Tahiti he had his copy of Manet's *Olympia*, which he had made in Paris, hanging on the wall. *Manao Tupapao* may even have been intended as his response to Manet's shocking and ground-breaking picture. Eisenman maintains that 'No less than Manet's *Olympia*, which Gauguin copied and admired above any other painting, Mana'o tupapa'o (sic) was probably intended as an assault upon the tradition of the European female nude.'²⁵³

Dillon had no such intentions. As has been shown, he had little formal interest in iconic works from the past, and did not consider himself as a painter of the nude at the time. His motivation can be compared to Gauguin's desire to mythologise his artistic persona, coupled with an even deeper desire of his own for sexual self-revelation. Coulter convincingly maintains that *Self-contained Flat* is a 'painted manifesto' for Dillon, declaring his identity as a modern artist and a gay man, following Gauguin's example in *Manao Tupapao*, a painting previously acknowledged by Eisenman as a 'painted manifesto for Gauguin's first Tahitian period'.²⁵⁴ His reading of the painting is of one 'which upholds colonial male perogatives', but also 'undercuts the diamorphic paradigm of sexuality upon which masculinism depends'.²⁵⁵ It is this destabilising of masculinity, as it was understood in the 1950s, that may have interested Dillon above all else. And yet, his reference to Gauguin's iconic painting leads again directly to Manet, and connects Dillon to le Brocquy with a common source.

The nude became a significantly more common theme in Dillon's work in the 1960s.

This was partly due to an increased interest in drawing from the live model after he

²⁵¹ Eisenman, 1997, p.115.

²⁵² Matthews, 2001, p.178.

²⁵³ Eisenman, 1997, p.121.

²⁵⁴ Coulter, 2010. Eisenman, 1997, p.135. *Manao Tupapao* appears in the background of Gauguin's *Self Portrait in a Hat*, 1893, and was the subject of a series of 5 woodcuts, including some of his most ambitious works in the print medium.

²⁵⁵ Eisenman, 1997, p.120-1.

attended life drawing classes in London. It can also be explained by the fact that he was by then well-established and successful as an artist, keen to explore some of the more technically difficult processes, including print making, and more interested in the higher ambitions of his art. In personal terms, having experienced the death of his brothers and his own increasing ill health, it was also a time to find release and pleasure in the escapist forms of dream imagery and decorative motifs that he began to develop. It is also possible to see in the Pierrot figure a more considered coded device for self-revelation than he had managed in his reference to Gauguin in *Self-contained Flat*. As Coulter puts it, in *Self Portrait with Pierrot and Nude*, c.1971, (fig.3.28) the ‘Pierrot can be read as Dillon’s symbol for his partly closeted homosexuality’.²⁵⁶ Here, Pierrot is unmasked, and represents Dillon’s ambiguous sexuality, both concealed and revealed, evidence of his double life as a gay man in a homophobic society. White also acknowledged that Dillon’s sexuality had a greater bearing on his work in later years, and that the Pierrot figure was a means for the artist to ‘project himself personally into his paintings’.²⁵⁷ The subject of the representation of masculinities in the context of developing public discourses, and the emergence of an identifiable homosexual identity in Irish art will be returned to in chapter five.

le Brocquy’s later re-working of Olympia

In 2005 le Brocquy returned to Manet, and others of his youthful *musée imaginaire*, to paint a series of works in homage to those masters. He acknowledges that it was his son, Pierre, ‘who asked me if I would consider going back over the years to that unforgettable experience when, in 1938, I first looked at Olympia in Paris at the Jeu de Paumes; looking beyond *A Family* to recall my original aesthetic joy when face-to-face for the first time with Olympia’.²⁵⁸ The resultant series, *Odalisques I-IV: Looking at Manet* (figs.3.8-3.11) is, in some respects, more indebted to his primary source, than *A Family* had been previously. Even without the aid of the title *Looking at Manet*, the original

²⁵⁶ Coulter, 2010.

²⁵⁷ White, 199, p.71, and p.90.

²⁵⁸ Louis le Brocquy, ‘Artist’s Note’ in *Louis le Brocquy: Early Heroes, Later Homage* (Dublin: Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, 2007), p.21.

source is easily recognizable, and most of the elements of Manet's composition remain in place. However, it is to Titian that he returns for the mood of these late nudes. Although he claims to be reprising the 'quiet sensuality' of *Olympia*, he has reversed those insistent reminders of modernity that we see in Manet's original.²⁵⁹ Narrative details are pared away so that the invitation to touch is contained in the body itself, not its accoutrements. le Brocquy has removed those elements apparently so deliberately included by Manet, and by which *Olympia* is 'made all the more naked by the very richness of her accessories'.²⁶⁰ His *Odalisques* sport no jewellery or accessories, their floral tributes seem to emerge organically from the background, rather than being proffered as tributes, except in *Odalisque IV* where the bouquet is held by the child, in its sole appearance in the series of four paintings, in a subtle reference to his own 1951 painting, *A Family*. The female nude appears dreamy in *Odalisque I* and *III* while her eyes are closed in *Odalisque II* and *IV*. She is returned to her to natural state, her body and her sexuality represented as elements of her essential being.

Much has been written about the indivisibility of the spirit in works by le Brocquy. Dawson has referred to 'the self-contained unity of being, and the mystery of experience', that lies at the heart of his painting and the artist himself has revealed that his 'perception of the ultimate aloneness of the individual has nothing to do with the experience of loneliness, but rather with his or her indivisibility'.²⁶¹ However, this question of indivisibility can be misleading. He elaborates on it when he speaks about the influence of the physicist Erwin Schrödinger, who believed that 'matter could not be destroyed – modified beyond all recognition; perhaps, transformed into energy, for example – but never destroyed.' Schrödinger also believed that the spirit, or consciousness, was indestructible.²⁶² These philosophical ideas naturally affected le Brocquy's approach to painting. As he explains, 'I gradually realized that you couldn't any longer do a style effigy...as a definitive account of an individual. Many factors,

²⁵⁹ McAvera, 2006, p.77. I disagree with Le Brocquy's evaluation of *Olympia's* 'quiet sensuality'. In common with many viewers I see insistent sexuality in Manet's image.

²⁶⁰ Reff, 1976 p.57.

²⁶¹ Barbara Dawson, 'Unfailing Eye' in *Louis le Brocquy: Early Heroes, Later Homage* (Dublin: Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, 2007), p.16.

²⁶² Michael Peppiatt, 'Interview with Louis Le Brocquy', *Art International*, xxiii.7 (October, 1979), p.66, cited in Louis Le Brocquy, *The Head Image* (Kinsale: Gandon Editions, 1996), p.25.

including film, photography and psychology, have firmly established the idea that we are multi faceted beings'.²⁶³ An alternative reading of Schrödinger's phrase 'modified beyond all recognition', might suggest that human beings are marked by division, and that the quality expressed in the *Odalisques* is the mutability of the spirit, its transformation from one state to another.²⁶⁴ As the woman changes from one incarnation to another, we recognize that each is but a facet of a personality, a self that is essentially 'formless',²⁶⁵ represented as 'the flesh of the body bleeds into the spatial envelope'.²⁶⁶ The Serial repetition involved in works such as the *Odalisques* is perfectly suited to convey this idea that only aspects of the human personality can be conveyed in a single image, and that together they make up the composite whole. There is an understanding in this approach that the person is, on some level, unknowable. le Brocquy's exploratory method, allows for the subject to be revealed partially, over time, and never fully explained.

In 1962 the critic Herbert Read addressed some advice to the young le Brocquy, cautioning him not to 'inhibit' his joy in colour, or to try too hard to dominate the motif so that the 'love' was consumed. 'In painterly painting colours *spread*; form thickens' he added.²⁶⁷ Over the intervening years le Brocquy seems to have heeded this advice and gradually the grey 'archetypes' of the 1950s transmuted into the white 'presences' of the 1960s and the 'human images' of the 1990s. The *Odalisques* correct any such colouristic inhibition in the early works. Here, le Brocquy is demonstrative in his admiration for Manet and for the medium of paint and consequently the works contain an unequivocal joie de vivre

²⁶³ Aidan Dunne, 'Children of the Evolution', *Irish Times* (November 26, 2003).

²⁶⁴ In Lacan and Sartre 'the subject is not an individual because he or she is not indivisible, but marked by division'. Locke, 2001, p.8.

²⁶⁵ For a discussion of the idea of the 'Formless Self', based on the writings of the Zen Buddhist philosopher Hisamatsu, see Joan Stambaugh, *The Formless Self* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999).

²⁶⁶ McAvera, 2006, p.73.

²⁶⁷ Read, 1962, pp.23-30.

Conclusion

It has been shown that in the work of all of the artists represented here, the practice of direct copying and of absorbing influences from other artists has resulted in a complex web of associations and allusions, sometimes carried on over centuries. This should be understood as a reciprocal process. As Maria Loh has demonstrated “copies” after Titian or others were also “originals” by, say, Padovanino or Rubens – which resulted in ‘a doubling rather than a reduction of authorship’, and giving both historical and contemporary works, a ‘codeterminacy’, rather than any lessening of power from the original to the copy.²⁶⁸ It is also clear that the motives for making copies varied widely throughout history. In his variants of his own compositions Titian eroticized the nude in response to demand from particular patrons. Manet, on the other hand, sexualized the nude in defiance of the normal code of representation acceptable to the official Salon.²⁶⁹ Le Brocquy followed this Modernist imperative in 1951 and politicized the nude as part of his personal struggle against artistic and social norms in Ireland. His later series of *Odalisques* needs to be understood in terms of a series of works made in homage to the masters, and related to a period in his life when he looked back on a lifetime of making figural mages and acknowledged his sources. Comparing his *A Family* of 1951 and *Odalisques* 2005, both with the same source in Manet’s *Olympia*, his work can be seen to reference both Manet and his own development as an artist. *A Family* draws on multiple sources, most notably it is a reworking of Manet through Picasso, both iconic masters of modernism and both champions of figural painting.²⁷⁰ Although the later work is a more direct homage, and in important aspects most resembles the original, it is at the same time the one which most alters the conception of the work. This is

²⁶⁸ Maria Loh, *Titian Remade: Repetition and the Transformation of Early Modern Italian Art* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2007), p.11.

²⁶⁹ Responses to eroticism are obviously subjective. According to Scruton, Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* ‘neither provokes nor excites’; because her face is individualized she is ‘erotic but not concupiscent’ while Manet’s *Olympia* represents an ‘intense moment of individualization’, which results in a type of beauty that is not derived from the figure, but from the audaciousness of the conception. Roger Scruton, *Beauty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.149 -156.

²⁷⁰ This point was clarified in the discussion, which suggested that Le Brocquy absorbed Picasso’s influence through that of the Polish artist Jankel Adler.

because le Brocquy has developed a mode of representation over the course of a long career, which challenges the very idea of the self in modernist representation. The earlier work accepts positivist notions of selfhood, its political message is clear and confrontational, and in this way it inhabits the same modernist theoretical framework as Manet's original, although the debt might not be obvious to everyone. Its strong statement about the individual marginalized in society mirrors Manet's depiction of the marginalised woman of a century before. The later images re-interpret the subject with less certainty. Having begun with *A Family*, le Brocquy had by 2005 interrogated the human figure down to the point of gut and sinew, and this dissolution of bodily form reflects a less secure idea of self-hood in post-modern society.

The concept of the self was newly defined in modernity, psychologically, socially and politically, and the challenge that Manet undertook was to find a new mode of representing that self, or multiplicity of selves, in Modernist painting. If he can be said to have failed it is only in the sense that the self he tried to depict was indecipherable to his age, because he gave 'visual form to this range of uncertainties' that were beyond the understanding of his contemporaries.²⁷¹ He succeeded, however, in forcing the viewer to enter into the discourse with the painter in an entirely new way. For this reason Foucault has described him as 'a founder of discursivity...in the same way as Darwin, Buffon, Marx or Freud'.²⁷² Perhaps he did try to depict his world with simple sincerity, but he succeeded in depicting something entirely at odds with itself.

In terms of religion Manet was dealing with a society that was rapidly becoming post-Christian, but was still defined in those terms. le Brocquy, who claims to be agnostic, represents the lack of certainty that characterises his age, if agnosticism can be seen to represent the limits of belief in the age of science. His image also reflects the dissolution of being characterised in Buddhism, the fragmentary, unknowable sense of a self which does not exist in the modernist sense. In Buddhist thinking the self is mutable and changing, and ultimately unknowable.

²⁷¹ John House, 'Manet's Naïveté', in *The Hidden Face of Manet*, ed. by Juliet Wilson Barea (London: Courtauld Institute Galleries, 1986), pp.1-19.

²⁷² Foucault, 2009, pp.12-13.

When *Olympia* was reprised in 1951 by le Brocqy, it was misunderstood yet again. Ireland's uneasy relationship with political modernity caused a head on collision with modernism in the arts. Manet's pluralism had not yet found its way to Ireland. It was as if 'the ambiguity inherent in its pluralism was too unsettling for them'.²⁷³ *A Family* is nevertheless 'an important transitional work in the artist's oeuvre' and anticipates the eventual acceptance of modernism in Irish art.²⁷⁴ Clark, writing about Manet's *Olympia*, rejects 'ambiguity' as an acceptable condition of image making, because it allows the 'open, endless procession of possible readings to be the very nature of the text'.²⁷⁵ Rather he demands that 'there has to be a structure of dominant and dominated meanings, within which ambiguity occurs as a qualifier, a chorus, a texture of overtone and undertone around a tone which the trained ear recognises or invents'.²⁷⁶ This is the view of an ideologist, interested in the twin meta-narratives of modernism and socialism. It has been suggested here that the process of recognition (and lack of recognition), has long been seen to be crucial to the experience of Irishness, and its representation in painting. However, the social and political nature of Ireland has changed to allow for the existence of a multiplicity of selves. In the post-modern world, ambiguity is no longer problematic. It is a universally recognizable condition, and well within the bounds of the current modes of representation. Herbert Read praised le Brocqy in the 1960s for exactly this quality, that in painting the self, he approaches 'something beyond the self'. Even today we feel that we recognize Manet's *Olympia* as a 'type', albeit one that is fixed in her own historical and representational context. Similarly we know the woman in *A Family*; she is tragically familiar from countless newsreels of displaced persons, victims of various interchangeable global conflicts. We cannot however, know the later *Odalisque*. She is fragmented, unknowable. But she is not a failure in the sense that Manet's depictions have been called failures. Rather she is the completion of the experiment that Manet began, to find a mode of representation that accurately portrays the dislocation and ambiguity of modern life. This fragmentary condition has in turn become the defining characteristic of post-modernity. The resistance to uncertainty that

²⁷³ S.B. Kennedy, 1991, p.3. He is describing the relationship of modernism to Ireland in the 1920s.

²⁷⁴ Bhreathnach-Lynch, 2003.

²⁷⁵ Clark, 1984, p.31.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p.32.

characterized Paris in the Second Empire and Ireland in the 1950s has given way to a different world in which 'cultural pluralism and ambivalence have replaced the clear-cut value judgements and authoritative readings of the modernist tradition'.²⁷⁷

When Baudelaire wrote to Manet that 'you are but the first in the decline of your art', he surely meant that the artist was at heart a romantic whose spirit was compromised by the age in which he lived, longing for greatness but destined to witness the death of painting.²⁷⁸ It was an unnecessarily gloomy forecast. Artists continue to explore the nature of identity in challenging ways using the medium of paint.

²⁷⁷ House, 1986, p.17.

²⁷⁸ Letter from Baudelaire to Manet (May 11, 1865), cited in Cachin 1983, p.14.

Chapter 4

The Artist and the Model

Introduction

In the making of figurative art which involves a live model, there are at least two actors or participants in the art making process, the artist and the model(s). While the work originates from the artist's observations and creative imagination, it nevertheless depends, to a greater or lesser extent, on the model's presence and physicality.

The model's role is important because they supply vital visual stimulus for the artist, but at the same time they occupy a specific place in a hierarchy of priorities, as defined by Wendy Steiner. In her view, as a model exists prior to the artwork, he/she has a measure of power over its execution. For the artist however, the act of drawing or painting takes priority over the appearance of the model. Very often the finished drawing or painting bears little resemblance to the living model, especially if the impetus for the work is driven by a desire for formal innovation.

Finally, the resultant artwork exists in a context where its monetary and cultural value outweigh the importance of the original model and he/she is then obsolete in terms of the art making process. As Steiner puts it, the model as a 'pre-existing being in her own right...wields some degree of generative power until the image is finished, at which point it replaces her and renders her obsolete'.¹ Considered in these terms, the power of the model in the act of creation is strictly limited. If the model is a professional studio model she is eminently replaceable, even if she has particular physical characteristics that appeal to the artist. Further, if she fulfils the role of a particular muse, her power can often be short-lived. Even where an artist works directly from the figure, the degree of resemblance to the model's body in the finished work will depend entirely on the artist's stylistic approach. As Karen Kleinfelder writes, 'an image drawn from the model implies both a connection to the referent and a disconnection, for the image is never an exact

¹ Wendy Steiner, *The Real, Real Thing: The Model in the Mirror of Art* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), p.15.

equivalent of the model; rather, its relation to the model is always one of signification'.² Because she occupies this paradoxical position of being a particular person and also a signifier of the general female body, the model has been described as a 'troubling ontological blur'.³ Despite being a real person, she acquires another, arguably more important, identity through the transformative power of representation. She is therefore at one and the same time, both a human subject and an art object. If this process involves an inevitable negation of the self on the part of the model this is often seen as a justifiable sacrifice for the prize of being transformed from flesh into art, a process described by Borel as 'transubstantiation'.⁴

From time to time writers, models and even some artists have challenged the seeming inequality in this relationship between the artist and the model and have insisted on the possibility of more equal collaboration. Some even go so far as to suggest an equivalence of creativity between the two, seeing the female model in particular as 'the very formation of painting', upon whose body 'the artist struggles against death'.⁵ However, Frances Borzello, who has written extensively on the history of modelling, doubts whether it is possible for models to share equally in the creative process, observing instead that they remain 'objects', akin to lay figures, and 'part of another's learning or creative process'.⁶ Steiner acknowledges the traditional dominance of the artist but nevertheless insists that, in what she terms our post post-modern age there is 'almost an ethical requirement' for a degree of 'competition for self expression between creator and human model'.⁷

Until the middle of the nineteenth century most models were male and the majority of them remained anonymous.⁸ These men were often soldiers, pugilists and labourers,

² Karen Kleinfelder, *The Artist, His Model, Her Image, His Gaze: Picasso's Pursuit of the Model* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.48.

³ Steiner, 2010, p.2.

⁴ France Borel, *The Seduction of Venus: Artists and Models* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), p.91.

⁵ *Ibid.* p.185.

⁶ Frances Borzello, *The Artist's Model* (London: Junction Books, 1982), pp.6-7.

⁷ Steiner, 2010, p.16.

⁸ Borzello, 1982. Her book focuses on the professional, and largely unnamed, model whose hey-day was in the late 19th century, especially in narrative painting, between 1870-1914.

chosen for their physical fitness and muscle definition.⁹ However, in the middle of the nineteenth century, the relative decline in history painting was mirrored by the rise in popularity of the female studio nude. In Paris, between 1830-1870 the academic model was displaced and modern stereotypes emerged, and that period was credited with the 'invention' of the modern, female model.¹⁰ The so-called *vulgar* model, as described by Susan Waller, owes her invention to developments in industrialization and urbanization, and new discourses on the nature of modernity, as the model became identified for the first time as 'a distinct social type and cultural trope'.¹¹

Several writers have discerned a change in the artist/model relationship beginning with Manet's work in the 1860s. *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, 1863, has been described as a 'behind-the-scenes' look at the 'open-air academy', because of the fact that although it did not depict a modelling scene as such, Victorine Meurent was obviously a model in it, 'self-evidently posing before the painter'.¹² The *Déjeuner* and *Olympia*, 1865, (fig.3.2) can be said to represent a reversal of the usual artistic process, where 'the nude has become a model and not vice versa'.¹³ According to Michael Fried it was Manet who introduced the model as an active participant in the relationship between the artist, the work and the viewer. It is only since Manet, he writes, that 'the ternary relationship painter/painting/model takes ontological precedence over the binary relationship painter/beholder'.¹⁴

Elizabeth Prettejohn, also dates the shift in the use of the model to the middle of the nineteenth century but refers instead to the work of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. In their paintings, she maintains, not only does the model become clearly identifiable for the first time, but her individuality 'is never subsumed into the artist's imaginative

⁹ Martin Postle, 'Naked Civil Servants: The Professional Life Model in British Art and Society', in *Model and Supermodel: The Artist's Model in British Art and Culture*, ed. by Jane Desmaris, Martin Postle and William Vaughan (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), p.11.

¹⁰ See Susan Waller, *The Invention of the Model* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) and also Marie Lathers, 'Changing Tastes: Ethnicity and the Artist's Model', in *Dictionary of Artist's Models*, ed. by Jill Berk Jimenez (Chicago and London: Fitzroy Dearbon, 2001), pp.14-19.

¹¹ Waller, 2006, p.xiii.

¹² Borel, 1990, p.108. Fried, 1996, p.339.

¹³ Borel, 1990, p.114. See also Borzello, 1982, p.164.

¹⁴ Fried, 1996, pp.336-346. Fried discusses Manet's paintings of the 1860s as a response to Courbet's of the 1840s and 50s, in which Manet reverses Courbet's attempts at avoiding theatricality by having the model absorbed in an activity, and introduces the self-conscious model as an actor instead.

conception, but rather persists as an identifiable element in the finished work'. The model's contribution to the finished work therefore becomes 'visually conspicuous'.¹⁵ Prettejohn maintains that, in order to resolve the conflict between such faithful realism and suitability of type to subject, the Pre-Raphaelites deliberately picked certain models with certain features, such as voluminous hair, voluptuous lips and dark or red colouring. These they labelled their 'stunners'.¹⁶ Furthermore, she suggests that they may even have attempted to use models who possessed the particular character traits of the historical and literary characters depicted in their paintings.¹⁷ She argues that the resultant 'typecast model' was an 'expedient solution' to the problem of representation, though it could also be seen as a manipulation of their founding policy of ultimate truth to nature.¹⁸ For the Pre-Raphaelites the act of modelling became very important and particular attributes were considered indispensable for a good model. In particular the Pre-Raphaelites favoured strong facial features and long, preferably red hair.

Wendy Steiner dates another vital change in the relationship between artist and model to the 1960s, and Pop Art's focus on the real and on the cult of celebrity.¹⁹ She identifies this period as the beginning of post-modernism, and a new era of realism. In her book *The Real Real Thing*, Steiner maintains that today's aesthetic controversies 'turn specifically on the issues of truth telling and the ethical treatment of the real in art', by which she means the ethical treatment of the model, and, more specifically, the artist's 'fidelity to the model's image above his artistic vision'.²⁰ She asks whether aesthetics and ethics can merge to produce 'real acts of mutuality, reciprocity and egalitarian justice' and wonders whether the model can be re-cast as 'Role model'.²¹ Steiner sees the potential for transformative works of art being produced through 'the perception of and identification with the model', because the model is real and has the power to incite the empathy of the viewer. She also acknowledges, though, that feelings of identification, empathy and mutuality are more often found in the general viewing public than in art

¹⁵ Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Beauty and Art*, World of Art series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.26.

¹⁶ Ibid. p.30.

¹⁷ Ibid. p.33.

¹⁸ Ibid. p.34.

¹⁹ Steiner, 2010, p.46.

²⁰ Ibid, p.71.

²¹ Ibid. p.4 and p.81.

theorists and critics.²² Most radically, Steiner believes that when the artist and model succeed in reversing the hierarchies of power inherent in the process, it can even effect social change.²³ She maintains that such challenges to avant-garde modernism are beginning to appear in post-post-modernism, an era that, in her view, is already underway.

Through a detailed examination of the historiography of the model, and utilising recorded interviews with contemporary models, this chapter will seek to interrogate the nature of the different relationships between artists and their models, how these have changed over time, and how they have been expressed in a specifically Irish context.

It will also examine the way in which the increased interest in nude portraiture conflates the conventions of portraiture and the nude and in so doing establishes new forms of collaborative practice in the studio. Traditionally a professional studio nude model is not named in the title of a nude painting and so these are rarely considered portraits. On the other hand a sitter for a portrait is inevitably identified in the title as befits the function of the genre. Nude portraiture combines these two functions of painting.

It will ask whether Steiner's proposed reversals of power are possible in the art making process and whether there is evidence to suggest that this thinking has already influenced studio practice in Ireland.

Thus far in these opening remarks, the presumption of the model being female has remained unchallenged. Marie Lathers has argued that the female model was invented as a modern category in opposition to the idealised male life model of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the male body that was posed for the traditional life drawing of the *académies*.²⁴ The modern model was therefore constructed as female, in line with notions of sexual differences prevalent in nineteenth century France. As the term 'model' became synonymous with the female model, so 'women in general came to be associated with the artifices of posing', and the pose of the artist's model was identified as 'a specifically feminine stance'.²⁵ This chapter will therefore treat the model as

²² Ibid.p.81.

²³ Ibid. p.83.

²⁴ Lathers, 2001, p.14.

²⁵ Ibid.

female, and questions arising from this assumption will be considered in the next chapter, which will look at the representation of masculinities.

The model mythologized

In spite of the prevalence of the male model, from ancient times the relationship between artists and particular female models has been eulogised and mythologized, and myths have been established about models that were renowned for their beauty. The first of these women whose name comes down to us is Phryne, who lived from 390-330 BCE. She was an Athenian Hetaera or courtesan, and arguably the first celebrity model.²⁶ According to legend, Phryne was first painted by Apelles as *Aphrodite Coming Out of The Sea*, regarded as the greatest painting in antiquity, having been spotted by the artist bathing nude.²⁷ She was soon lured away by the sculptor Praxiteles, who used her as his model for his Cnidian Venus, (fig.4.1) a statue so erotically charged that it was rejected as immodest by the pious citizens of Kos for whom it had been commissioned and went instead to Cnidas. The Cnidian Venus attracted a degree of attention and devotion that was considered excessive and improper given its religious function and Phryne, as the woman on whom the statue was modelled, was accused of impiety, a crime punishable by death, and brought to the *Areopagus*, or court. She was defended by Hyperides on the basis that her physical beauty did, in fact, equal that of her statue, and therefore there had been no attempt to falsely attribute divine properties to a human subject. To demonstrate this he is said to have revealed her naked body to the court with the words ‘you who worship Venus, take a look at her whom the Goddess of Love could claim as a sister’, whereupon she was acquitted of the charges.²⁸ This legendary episode was the subject of several paintings including one by Jean-Léon Gérôme, (1824-1904) *Phryne Before the Areopagus*, c.1861 (fig.4.2).

²⁶ Muriel Segal, *Dolly on the Dais* (London: Gentry Books, 1972), pp.12-19. See also Kathleen Rooney, *Live Nude Girl: My Life as an Object* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2009), p.21.

²⁷ Segal, 1972, p.13.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p.17.

Another legend surrounding Apelles and one of his models concerned his portrait of Campaspe, the favourite courtesan of Alexander the Great, according to Pliny the Elder. Alexander discerned from the portrait that Apelles loved Campaspe more than he did, and so he gave the woman to the artist and kept the picture for himself.²⁹ This subject became a favourite of artists from the Renaissance until the 19th century and was depicted by artists as diverse as Gian Battista Tiepolo and Jacques-Louis David. In *Apelles Painting the Portrait of Campaspe*, c.1725-6, (fig.4.3) Tiepolo used the vehicle of the story to paint his only portrait of his wife, Cecelia Guardi, whom he had secretly married in 1719, making it resonate doubly as a portrait of a beloved woman.

From Pliny and Cicero comes the story of Zeuxis, who went to Crotona to decorate the temple of Juno and called for the most beautiful women to model for him, from whom he selected five, using the best features of each in a composite image.³⁰ This episode is illustrated in a painting by Francois André Vincent (1746-1816), *Zeuxis Choosing his Models from Among the Beautiful women of Croton*, 1789, (fig.4.4) among many others. A very similar myth later surrounded the artist Raphael, who was said to have used several models for one face as no one model could be found to equal his ideal of beauty.

The contemporary reader can unravel some of these stories surrounding the concept of the inspirational model, and recognize the common and repeated elements that, in myth making, become the building blocks of accepted truths. In the story of Phryne, we can see that mimesis was seen as the primary function of art in antiquity, and once it is successfully demonstrated that the statue of Venus was an exact representation of a living person, the authorities were satisfied that no deception had taken place. This proof of artistic perfection in verisimilitude, the exact observation of nature, is found in many of the myths surrounding Apelles and Zeuxis. However, in the story of Zeuxis choosing his models, this idea of observable perfection in nature gives way to the idea that representation of an ideal beauty surpasses the beauty that is found in nature. The conceptual basis of art begins to gain precedence over the representation of nature.

²⁹ Liana de Girolami Cheney, 'Campaspe' in *Dictionary of Artist's Models*, ed. by Jill Berk Jiminez (London: Fitzroy Dearbon, 2001), pp.99-101.

³⁰ Borel, 1990, p.62.

The story of Phryne also illustrates the antique ideal of a universally agreed concept of beauty. The story depends as much on the number of witnesses to the revelation of Phryne's nakedness, as it does on the unanimity of their opinions, once she has been thus exposed.

More than anything else, the story of Apelles painting of Campaspe concerns the power of patronage. As ruler and patron, Alexander owned both the woman and the artist's representation of her, and, by inference, had considerable power over the artist too. Finally, throughout all these myths, the association of art, nude modelling and sexual attraction or love persists. Phryne is described as the sister to the Goddess of Love, and the 'handmaid and ministrant of Aphrodite' and Campaspe is desired in turn by the patron, the artist and, by inference, the viewer.³¹ This association persists to some extent today, and lies at the heart of Western society's common unease with the depiction of the nude, and its efforts to control or suppress such images.³²

Several other details in these ancient myths have found their way into the ubiquitous stories concerning modern artists and their models. We read of chance encounters between the artist and the model in biographies of Picasso, Pierre Bonnard and Dante Gabriel Rossetti among others.³³ However, one aspect of the story of Phryne stands out for its contemporaneity; the idea that the model was of equal importance to the sculptor to the extent that she 'shared credit with the great Praxiteles' who sculpted the *Cnidian Venus*, is one that would find resonances in some of today's life rooms, but if it was common in antiquity it was not a common attitude in the intervening centuries.³⁴ However, this is more probably a contemporary interpretation of the ancient myth than a reflection of the actual philosophy underlying the story. In reality, in ancient times the model was a marginal figure, who lived outside of traditional female society. As a member of the Hetaerai, Phryne would have had a degree of social freedom unknown to

³¹ Rooney, 2009, p.23.

³² The issue of censorship is discussed at length in chapter two of this study.

³³ Picasso is said to have met his model and later, lover, Marie Therese Walter by chance outside the Galleries Lafayette in Paris in 1927. He is said to have approached her saying, 'I am Picasso. You and I are going to do great things together'. Pierre Bonnard met Marthe Boursin stepping off a tram, and Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal met in the street.

³⁴ Segal, 1972, p.12.

respectable women, and some education.³⁵ The marginality of her social position is illustrated by the fact that although her name is known to us, Phryne was, in fact, only her nickname. As a courtesan she has no right to publicly use her proper name, Mnesarete.³⁶

Although these myths surrounding artists and their models originated in antiquity, the paintings illustrated here date from significantly later periods, demonstrating that the truths they were perceived to contain, and the ideals they represented, remained relevant as subjects in art for several centuries. However, as the modern era dawned, several of the values that they represented began to lose currency. Since the nineteenth century, mimesis is no longer considered the proper basis for all art, the importance of patronage has declined, and female beauty has come to be seen as a more subjective quality, with many different 'types' replacing the once universal ideal. But as these ancient myths went out of fashion as subjects for painting they were replaced by another, which was more in tune with the narrative of modernism, the story of Pygmalion. It was subtly different and fed into the modernist myth of the creative process of the genius, and his power to single-handedly generate the female subject. The myth of Pygmalion centres on male artistic creativity and control of his subject. In the story, the artist, seeing nothing but faults in women, swears himself to celibacy. He carves an ivory figure who so excels real women in beauty that he falls in love with it. When he makes a sacrifice to Venus, the statue comes alive for him. This subject gained in popularity in the nineteenth century and was represented in painting by Jean-Leon Gérôme, *Pygmalion and Galatea*, 1890 (fig.4.5) and many others. Unlike the mythological subjects referred to above, this subject retained its attraction for artists well into the twentieth century, in more unusual examples by Franz van Stuck, *Pygmalion and Galatea*, 1926 (fig.4.6) and Paul Delvaux, *Pygmalion and Galatea*, 1939 (fig.4.7). This final example is a surrealist subversion of the mythological subject matter as it represents a female artist and a male statue. Most depictions of Pygmalion ignore the religious aspect of the story, the artist's prayer to Venus, and concentrate instead on the creative process and the work of art coming to

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ According to Rooney, 2009, p.22, Phryne meant 'toad' and referred to her sallow skin tone. However, Segal suggests an alternative meaning, 'sieve' alluding to the fact that she went through several lovers' fortunes. Segal, 1972, p.12.

fruition under the controlling hand of the artist. In the nineteenth century when the female nude became almost an independent genre, treated as a subject in its own right and no longer requiring any allusion to antiquity, these mythological subjects derived from antiquity developed into the entirely secular theme of the artist and his model, a subject that still remains relevant today.

The Artist and the Model as a Subject in Art

Frances Borzello refers to paintings of the artist and the model in the studio as 'manifesto paintings', belonging to the era of the emergence of modernism, from the middle of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth.³⁷ The idea of painting as 'manifesto' is especially relevant to representations of the nude. Carol Duncan maintains that avant-garde artists invariably resorted to the nude when they needed to present ground-breaking formal discoveries, or when they sought verification of their genius, so that 'more than any other theme, the nude could demonstrate that art originates in and is sustained by male erotic energy'.³⁸ Much feminist art history of the late twentieth century has critiqued the way the female nude was often used as a signifier of male creativity in modernism. Marcia Pointon claimed that woman can 'be understood in representation to signify not only the objectified female body that constitutes art but also the very creativity through which it comes about and which is male.'³⁹ In her view the woman can be seen, in terms of the nature/culture dichotomy, to represent the very act of creation itself, embodied in the male artist's creative urge. In such a scenario 'woman is twice removed from the point of production; she is represented within a re-presentation'.⁴⁰

³⁷ Borzello, 1982. The artists and works she refers to specifically as 'manifesto' paintings are Manet, *Olympia*, Whistler, *The Artist's Studio/Whistler in his Studio*, 1866-7, Seurat, *Les Poseuses*, 1888, Thomas Eakins, *William Rush and his Model*, 1908, Kirckner, *Self Portrait with Model*, 1907, and Schmitt-Rotluff, *Rest in the Studio*, 1910.

³⁸ Carol Duncan, 'Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth Century Vanguard Painting', in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, ed. by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), p.306. She is referring here specifically to the early twentieth century avant-garde art of the Fauves, Cubists and German Expressionists, but maintains that her arguments also apply to much nineteenth and twentieth century depictions of the nude.

³⁹ Pointon, 1990, p.14.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p.24.

According to Duncan, pictures of the artist and the model set in studios reinforce, more than any other genre, 'the *social* expectation that the artist is categorically a male who is more consciously in touch with his libido than other men and satisfies its purely physical demands more frequently'.⁴¹ In her interpretation of early modernist nudes she sees the virility of the artist as posited against the powerlessness and sexual availability of the female model, and she maintains that the resultant images deny women their individuality and relegate them to the domain of nature and biology, with no parallel intellect or consciousness. The female is 'reduced to flesh, she is sprawled powerlessly before him, her body contorted according to his erotic will'.⁴² She points to the difference between these modernist works and earlier depictions of the nude which addressed themselves to the patron's sexual desires. In contrast, modernist works placed the figure of the artist/genius between the model and the viewer and, in so doing, claimed the woman as his. In this way the woman is cast as 'other' and, in the process, high culture is defined as an exclusively male endeavour.⁴³ Duncan's critique is valid when she contrasts the avowed radical politics of many of the artists in the period with the obvious social inequality and poverty of the depicted models. However, her analysis is problematic when she bases her critique on the formal attributes of modernist paintings. Images which she sees as 'mean-looking' or her interpretation of 'distorted, dangerous-looking creatures, potentially overpowering, devouring or castrating', are the subjective experiences of one viewer, and, to some extent, involve a tacit acceptance of prevailing norms of aesthetic beauty.⁴⁴ Creating associations between certain formal devices in painting and moral or ethical political positions is ultimately unsustainable.

Model-manifesto paintings were less common in Europe after the 1920s, as bohemianism became more socially accepted and no longer the sole province of the avant-garde artist. In subsequent decades the nude became 'a subject in her own right'.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Duncan, 1982, p.310.

⁴² *Ibid.* p.297.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Carol Duncan, 'The Moma's Hot Mamas' in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, ed. by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper Collins, Icon Editions, 1992), 347-358 (p.349).

⁴⁵ Borzello, 1982, p.171.

The period of bohemianism in Paris began in the middle of the nineteenth century, and was characterized by a lifestyle and morality that were different to the dominant bourgeois culture, but which was nevertheless accommodated within it. It lasted in some shape or form until the 1950s, when New York replaced Paris as the art capital of the West. French style Bohemianism, as chronicled by Henry Murger in *Scenes de la Vie de Boheme*, 1851, did not arrive in London until the late nineteenth century.⁴⁶ This new spirit of freedom improved the status of the model by 'bringing the artist-model relationship out of its nineteenth-century secrecy' and by giving it 'an exciting image and an acceptable context in which to thrive'.⁴⁷ Previously British artists had mostly been bourgeois themselves, and craved respectability, outwardly at least. The limited forms of bohemianism that existed in England in the nineteenth century were equated either with the gypsy lifestyle imagined to stem from the original Bohemia, or with the male only environs of men's clubs.⁴⁸ Bohemianism had become an established alternative lifestyle in London by the 1920s, when, in the studios of Soho, Chelsea and Hampstead 'models and artists living a bohemian existence according to their own rules within the more sober society surrounding them, became a reality'.⁴⁹ It gave cachet and excitement to the artist-model relationship and the presumed sexual element of that relationship made it all the more seductive, and has influenced how we perceive and imagine the artist's model to this day.

In Ireland, by contrast, the 1920s was a period of war and deprivation. Bohemianism only came to Ireland, to the extent that it can be claimed to have come at all, in the 1940s and 1950s, kick-started during the Second World War by an influx of émigré artists and writers. In his memoir *Remembering Where we Stood*, John Ryan describes the bohemian lifestyle of writers such as Patrick Kavanagh, Anthony Cronin and Brendan Behan, which centred on the pubs in and around Dublin's Grafton Street. He recounts one incident in Jammet's restaurant in the 1950s when Sean O'Sullivan approached a respectable 'dowager' whom he wished to paint with the words, 'Madam, I wish to paint

⁴⁶ Murger's book was translated into English in 1887 as *The Bohemians of the Latin Quarter*. Borzello, 1982, p.87.

⁴⁷ Ibid. pp.86-7.

⁴⁸ From 1905 Augustus John lived a bohemian existence in a gypsy caravan with his wife, children and mistress. Borzello, 1982, p.89.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p.96.

you because you have a bottom like a *meringué*.⁵⁰ A decade later, sculptor Eamon Delaney was enjoying bohemian parties with ‘the Yeatsian combination of lord and native, with the dull middle classes more or less excluded’, in Luggala in Co. Wicklow.⁵¹ However, these were limited and unusual examples of a lifestyle not widely experienced in Ireland at the time.

William Orpen painted several nudes in which the act of modelling is the subject of the painting. In *The Studio (The Model)* c.1910-1915, (fig.4.8) we see the female model posing in a light-filled studio, with a self portrait of the artist at work. There are several layers of identification going on in this picture. The woman’s pose is similar to one from antique statuary, and the generalization of her features contribute to the classical tone of the figure. The light, however, pervades the painting, and brings the image up to date as it filters through the window blind to fall on the body in an impressionistic way. Orpen has included himself in the picture as the artist who, through his knowledge and skill, has conflated the history of the painted nude into this single image. Self portraiture was important to Orpen and he often combined it with images of the nude, illustrating the great importance he gave to the genre, by implicating himself fully in its ambitions.

Portrait of the Artist, 1907 (fig.4.9) shows him again at work in the studio but here he has made a lavish conceit out of the framing of the scene in the elaborate gilt mirror frame in which he scrutinizes his own features. All of the accoutrements of his trade are included, the palette and brushes and oil, and looming over everything a plaster cast of the *Venus de Milo*, situating him firmly within the grand tradition of European painting.

Again in the watercolour *The Model*, 1911 (fig.4.10) Orpen depicts the act of painting in the studio, but this time it represents a fellow artist drawing from the nude model. This is a complex scene within a scene, as Orpen references his own work, *A Woman*, 1906, a sketch of which hangs on the wall behind the couch on which the same model, Flossie Burnett, sits to another artist. However, her look is directed at Orpen rather than his

⁵⁰ John Ryan, *Remembering How We Stood: Bohemian Dublin at Mid-Century* (New York: Taplinger, 1975), p.46. Ryan was an artist, writer and publisher. He organised the first Bloomsday celebration with Brian O’Nolan, published the journal *Envoy: A Review of Literature and Art*, 1949-51, and owned *The Bailey* pub in Dublin where he famously installed the door of no.7 Eccles Street, the fictional home of Joyce’s hero Leopold Bloom.

⁵¹ Eamon Delaney, *Breaking the Mould: A Story of Art and Ireland* (Dublin: New Island, 2009), p.40.

colleague, establishing a proprietorial relationship between the two of them. In this way the image plays with the idea of the gaze and the dynamics of the relationship of the artist and model in the studio.

In a later painting, *Self Portrait with Sowing New Seed*, 1913, (fig.4.11) he depicts himself standing, as it were, in front of his own painting, *Sowing New Seed*, one of the allegorical trio of paintings that has been described as ‘an apposition between the experimental spirit of the new Ireland, and the fixed forms of *ex cathedra* authority’, and constitutes his critique of the educational authorities in charge of Dublin’s art schools at the time.⁵² Despite his frustrations with a post he would leave shortly thereafter, his loyalty to the nude remains undaunted, even to the inclusion of two putti, curiously out of place on Howth Head.

When, in 1953, Picasso returned to working on the theme of the artist and the model he was deliberately choosing to ‘revive a subject that had become an anachronism’.⁵³ These late works, consisting of paintings, drawings and prints, which depict the theme of the artist and his model, date from 1953-1970. They function as investigations of representation, and it has been argued that they also reflect the artist’s fear of sex and death, and his concern for his artistic immortality, through the ‘binary oppositions of man/woman, self /other, art/life’.⁵⁴ Kleinfelder maintains that by parodying his own biographical myth Picasso used the theme of the artist and model as ‘a way to create an alternative identity for himself in order to counteract the inevitable diminishing of powers that comes with old age and his own fears of death’.⁵⁵ However, as Picasso allegedly never actually worked directly from a live model, his working of the theme amounts to a ‘representation of representation’. It is self-referential without being self portraiture, and is therefore more ‘allegorical’ than ‘autobiographical’.⁵⁶ The degree of parody that Picasso attached to these images is illustrated by Bressai’s photograph in which Picasso

⁵² Roy Foster, ‘Orpen and the New Ireland’, in *William Orpen: Politics, Sex and Death*, ed. by Robert Upstone (London: Imperial War Museum, 2005), pp.63-155.

⁵³ Kleinfelder, 1993, pp.14-15.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.p.13.

⁵⁶ Ibid.p.35.

and French actor Jean Marais are seen mimicking the attitudes of painter and model respectively. (fig.4.12)

Michael Cullen is an Irish artist who freely acknowledges the formal influence of Picasso in his work. In the 1980s he made his first series of paintings depicting the artist and his model. In general Cullen's work investigates the act of painting itself, through his use of vivid colour and thick impasto. His approach amounts to an obsession with the medium and its possibilities, and to this extent is somewhat independent of subject-matter. He will paint whatever happens to be around him. But in his two series of artist and model pictures he also interrogates the idea of artistic self-consciousness and subjectivity. An autobiographical element enters into the work in recurring motifs and a cast of characters, including models, which hold personal associations for the artist.

Cullen has an essential belief in the power of art, and the role of the artist as a quasi-religious leader in society. He believes in the possibility of 'transcendence' being achieved through art which, he says, exists at the 'border between 'spirituality and the physical world'.⁵⁷ Yet he believes there must always be self-doubt even if it is not immediately evident, and so he depicts himself in the act of painting with a tone of self-mockery. This is taken to the extreme when, in *Painting Monkey and Model*, 1984, and other works in this series, the artist is depicted as a performing monkey. The artist is the ironic hero, 'a jester or fool, one among many individuals pursuing their destinies in an antagonistic world'.⁵⁸

A subsequent series of paintings dating from the early 1990s deals with similar themes. Works such as *I'm Popeye the Painterman*, 1992 (fig.4.13), and *The Painter and his Nemesis*, (fig.4.14) feature a pink-fleshed, yellow haired, red-lipped, pneumatic model who skips and bounces around the studio. She is gleeful, hysterical even, and funny. The artist engages playfulness in the cause of dissipating despair. By his own admission, laughter is 'an expression of fear' – its function 'to alleviate the sense of dread that is so pervasive in life'.⁵⁹ However, it is never clear whether his fear and dread is caused by the

⁵⁷ Michael Cullen in conversation with the author, 27/9/2011.

⁵⁸ Aidan Dunne, *Irish Art: The European Dimension* (Dublin: RHA Gallagher Gallery, 1990), p.15.

⁵⁹ Brian McAvera, 'Michael Cullen's Mappa Mundi' in *Michael Cullen: Profile* (Kinsale: Gandon Editions, 2007), p.26.

real woman facing him in the studio, the problems he has in representing her on canvas, or the larger complexities of painting itself. He approaches the subject of sexuality in the studio very directly in these paintings. Cullen is no denier of the pleasure principle, seeing sex as a balm for the wounds inflicted by the uncertainty and chaos of the world. The paintings are unruly, chaotic, inchoate, truly reflecting that lack of certainty which Cullen identifies as part of the experience of the outsider-painter, at once both comic and terrifying. He works in series because each picture is a glimpse, an attempt to convey an emotion, yet none is complete in itself. He sees the work as on-going process rather than definitive statement. In these works Cullen shares Picasso's concerns for the questions art raises about the role and identity of the artist. 'Picasso once said that his work was one long autobiography, and Cullen once said that his work was one long painting'. According to Brian McAvera they are 'both versions of the same thing'.⁶⁰

John Byrne's performance piece *Believers* (fig.4.15) is a different working of the theme of the artist and model. Commissioned for Cork City's 2005 Capital of Culture year, it premiered at the Crawford Gallery. In it the artist is seated on a chair, confessing his beliefs to a nude woman who reclines on a chaise longue in the manner of a classical reclining nude. In this apparent inversion of the clichéd positions of a psychiatrist and his patient, it is the naked woman who assumes a position of power and knowledge, through the spoken text of the piece. However, the model depicted here retains all the visual characteristics of the traditional female nude; her nakedness and her reclining pose mark her out as spectacle and reinforce the role assigned to the female nude through centuries of art history. This is the point of the piece. Byrne's work is characterized by humor, satire and parody and in this piece he plays with the traditional role of an artist and his muse, thereby critiquing art itself, by 'questioning the values and assumptions of the art world and its institutions and traditions'.⁶¹

The subject of the artist and the model is much less common among women artists. An early exception is British artist Dame Laura Knight, (1877-1970) *Self Portrait with Nude*,

⁶⁰ Ibid.p.16.

⁶¹ Luke Clancy, <www.john-byrne.ie/press.php?pressId=42> [accessed 16 April 2011].

1913, (fig.4.16) in which she depicts herself in the studio, painting directly from a nude female model. It was painted while she lived and worked in Newlyn, and the model was fellow artist Ella Naper. The fact that the two artists collaborated in making such an unusual image for its time suggests that they were well aware of its power as a 'manifesto' of the female artist laying claim to the higher reaches of academic art. Mainie Jellett painted several studio nudes while a student of Walter Sickert in the Westminster School of Art in London in the 1910s. A comparison of Sickert's *The Studio, Painting of a Nude*, c.1906-7, (fig.4.17) and Jellett's *Nude Model*, c.1917-19, (fig.4.18) demonstrates her stylistic indebtedness to him at this time. However, it is perhaps noteworthy that, unlike Sickert, Jellett did not include herself as artist in the composition.

The Academic Model

Historically, the use of live models in academies dates from end of the sixteenth century, and at that time they were almost exclusively male.⁶² It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that most official European academies used female models, though some private academies already had them by then.⁶³ Before the provision of female models, males were often substituted, and this practice was 'more widespread in studios and academies throughout Europe from the Renaissance to the late eighteenth century than is generally acknowledged'.⁶⁴ The first private English Academy of c.1673 originated in Peter Lely's studio, and was essentially a life class.⁶⁵ A similar Academy was established in Dublin in 1742, where the life drawing element of the teaching was equally important.⁶⁶

⁶² Ilaria Bignamini and Martin Postle, *The Artist's Model: Its Role in British Art from Lely to Etty* (Nottingham: University of Nottingham Press, 1991).

⁶³ Until 1863 only males posed in the École des Beaux Arts in Paris. See Waller, 2006, p.1.

⁶⁴ Bignamini, 'The Artist's Model: From Lely to Hogarth', in Bignamini and Postle, 1991, pp.8-15 (p.11). From drawings and written sources, Bignamini specifies the artists Godfrey Kneller and Peter Agnellis who were known to have used male models for female figures.

⁶⁵ The English Academy was attended by the Irish portrait painter Garret Morphy. See Lindsay Stainton and Christopher White, *Drawing in England from Hilliard to Hogarth* (London: British Museum, 1987).

⁶⁶ See Bernard Denvir, *The Eighteenth Century: Art, Design and Society 1689-1789* (London: Longman, 1983).

Shortly after the foundation of the Royal Academy, London, in 1768, a female model was hired but her employment was erratic.⁶⁷ The Academy had strict rules governing the employment of models and restricted access to the female model to male students who were married or were over twenty years of age.⁶⁸ Regulations governing the study of the figure remained largely unchanged during the nineteenth century.⁶⁹ From 1860-1880 the ratio of male to female models in the RA increased, and during this time there was a proposal to ban female nude modelling altogether, but this was ultimately rejected.⁷⁰ Students progressed from the Plaister Academy, which contained casts of antique statues, to the Academy of Living Models, where a live model was posed, depending on their proficiency at drawing. Here they were supervised by the Visitors, established artists who took classes, with varying degrees of teaching skill. The Royal Academy's rules stated that only those artists approved by the Academy's council could draw from life, and this amounted to about a quarter of the annual intake of students.⁷¹

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively, the Royal Academy's Visitors had included Irish artists James Barry and William Mulready. William Pressley informs us that, 'throughout his career Barry delighted in making life drawings, and the fact that he was often a Visitor at the Royal Academy schools afforded him an opportunity of sketching from a model without incurring any expense'.⁷² Barry's drawing, *Male Nude in the attitude of Hercules*, c.1777-80 (fig.4.19) is a study for the statue of Hercules in the *Crowning of the Victors at Olympia*, in the Society of Arts, 1777-84. He drew the figure from life instead of the rather more usual approach of utilizing the famous *Farnese Hercules*, (fig 4.20) as a model.⁷³ According to Martin Postle, there are eighteen extant life drawings by Barry, five of these are of the female nude, such as *Female Nude*, (fig.4.21) Barry arrived in London in 1763, and studied casts and life modelling at St.

⁶⁷ Alison Smith, 'The Academy and the Professional Model in the Nineteenth Century' in *Dictionary of Artist's Models*, ed. by Jill Berk Jiminez (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp.26-30.

⁶⁸ Postle, 2006, pp.9-25.

⁶⁹ Martin Postle and William Vaughan, *The Artist's Model from Etty to Spencer* (London: Merrell Holberton, 1999).

⁷⁰ Postle, 2006, p.14 and note 21, p.24.

⁷¹ Postle and Vaughan, 1999, p.10 and note 2, p.19.

⁷² William L. Pressley, *The Life and Work of James Barry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), p.256. Barry was made professor of painting at the RA in 1782, but was expelled in 1799

⁷³ Bignamini and Postle, 1991, p.55.

Martin's Lane Academy. His practice was based on observation from life but his ideas were clearly informed by academic idealisation. In 1809 he wrote: 'a great mind can raise great and virtuous ideas, though he shows all parts of the body in the natural way; whilst the Cheapside prints of the Buck and Quaker give, the chorus of the Garter and of the High Wind, are proofs that very lewd ideas might be produced, though very little of the naked be discovered'.⁷⁴

William Mulready (1786-1863) was born in Ennis, Co Clare, moved to London with his family aged just four years, and in his subsequent life was said to have 'concealed his Irish nationality as much as possible'.⁷⁵ He studied at the Royal Academy School and was later a Visitor there.⁷⁶ Although he produced few painted nudes, he continued to draw from life with an obsessive zeal throughout his career, influenced by his study of the antique and his special admiration of the Venetian school of painting.⁷⁷ He was also a close friend of the English painter William Etty (1787-1849), who was the chief exponent of the nude in England at that time. Ruskin said of Mulready's nude drawings that they were 'more degraded and bestial than the worst grotesques of the Byzantine or even Indian image makers'.⁷⁸ They were exhibited at Gore House in 1853, where they were admired by Queen Victoria who bought five of them for her husband, Prince Albert.⁷⁹ (fig.4.22)

By the end of the nineteenth century the system of academic training in art was so rigidly old fashioned that it was said to have become 'moribund'.⁸⁰ Because of this many artists decided to embark on further study abroad, in the freer atmosphere of the ateliers in Paris, which were more socially mixed and where women artists were also admitted.⁸¹ Some of

⁷⁴ Edward Fryer, *The Works of James Barry*, vol.2 (London: 1809), cited in Bignamini and Postle, 1991, p.59.

⁷⁵ Anne Crookshank and the Knight of Glin, *Ireland's Painters 1600-1949* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), p.241.

⁷⁶ Bignamini and Postle, 1991, p.72.

⁷⁷ For the life and work of William Mulready see Kathryn Moore Heleniak, *William Mulready* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.158.

⁷⁹ Crookshank and the Knight of Glin, 2002, p.241.

⁸⁰ Postle and Vaughan, 1999, p.9.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.10.

them eventually returned to found private academies in London.⁸² In comparison to the strict decorum imposed on British art students, the ateliers of Paris were 'democratic and lively workshops'.⁸³ British and Irish art students were attracted to them because they could receive far more comprehensive training than they ever could at home.⁸⁴ Bruce Arnold suggests that, in the case of Irish artists, they chose European ateliers over British art schools not in order to obtain an alternative style of teaching but to gain 'independence' of approach and a greater 'challenge'.⁸⁵

The situation in Irish art schools was even more stultified than that in Britain. The Dublin Metropolitan School of Art came under the jurisdiction of the U.K. Department of Science and Arts, based in South Kensington.⁸⁶ The South Kensington system, as it was known, included life drawing as part of a wide curriculum that was more appropriate to the applied arts, and not intended as fine art education. This is somewhat ironic, as one commentator maintained that the Kensington system was 'invented by two Irishmen, Maclise and Mulready', both of whom were practitioners of figure painting, and both accomplished painters of the nude.⁸⁷ Students' training progressed in three phases, similar to those practised in London's Royal Academy described above, from the copying of drawings, to antique statuary, and lastly to drawing directly from the model. It was a formulaic system, described by George Moore as 'more like land surveying than drawing'.⁸⁸ In contrast, it was possible for students at the RHA to progress to life drawing as soon as they had demonstrated a certain level of competence.⁸⁹ Even so, when William Butler Yeats briefly attended the RHA the headmaster told him that 'We can't make artists, to become an artist you must go to Paris'.⁹⁰ However, as Postle points out, by the time that most British and Irish artists were eagerly making their way to the

⁸² John Zephaniah Bell, Charles Lucy and Baron Gros all returned from Paris and started ateliers in London.

⁸³ Stuart MacDonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education* (London: University of London Press, 1970), p.285.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p.286.

⁸⁵ Bruce Arnold, 'The Irish Renaissance and the Visual Arts', in *Ireland and the Arts*, ed. by Tim Pat Coogan (London: The Literary Review, 1984), pp.192-197 (p.194).

⁸⁶ For a comprehensive history of the DMSA see John Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin since the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1995).

⁸⁷ Thomas Ryan, 'William Orpen', *The Dubliner*, 3.4 (Winter, 1964), pp.22-32.

⁸⁸ George Moore, *Modern Painting*, new enlarged edition (London: Walter Scott Press, 1898), p.65.

⁸⁹ Turpin, 1995, p.176.

⁹⁰ R.Edward Lyne, headmaster of the DMSA from 1863 until 1888, quoted in Turpin, 1995, p.176.

ateliers of Paris in the early 1900s, they had in their turn become 'deeply clichéd, the resort of gauche art students from Britain and America clinging to the remnants of a bygone educational regime'.⁹¹

Lady Glenavy described what happened when John Hughes attempted to create the atmosphere of a French atelier in his modeling class in the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art. Hughes advised his students to watch the human figure in motion at all times and not just while the model was posing. During breaks between poses, the students mingled freely with the male model, and 'when the Inspector of the Board of Education came round, this behaviour led to some shocked comments'.⁹² Hughes received an official instruction that the nude models were not to associate with the young female students, but he received no official censure. This situation was not unique to Britain or Ireland. Thomas Eakins was dismissed from the Pennsylvania Academy in 1886 for removing a male model's loincloth, and famously charged with corrupting female students.⁹³

In 1906 there was a parliamentary inquiry into the teaching in the DMSA and the RHA, and whether it was practical for both to conduct life classes. Neither institution came out of it well. In the case of the RHA the report identified a 'want of talent' in the students commensurate with a 'want of teaching' in the Academy.⁹⁴ The DMSA fared a little better but was nevertheless judged not to be a school 'intended for professional painters' because it was not 'controlled and taught by the best artists'.⁹⁵

The South Kensington system continued to be practiced in the DMSA until the 1930s.⁹⁶ However, it received a much needed injection of energy and enthusiasm under the influence of William Orpen, who returned to teach at the DMSA in 1902. Orpen 'brought about a revolution in the life-class'.⁹⁷

⁹¹ Postle and Vaughan, 1999, p.10.

⁹² Lady Beatrice Glenavy, *Today We Will Only Gossip* (London: Constable, 1964), p.27.

⁹³ Smith, 2001, pp.26-30.

⁹⁴ Report by Committee of Inquiry into the work carried on by the Royal Hibernian Academy and the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art, 1906, section 58, p.xi/809.

⁹⁵ Ibid. section 65, p.xii/810.

⁹⁶ The DMSA came under the jurisdiction of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI) from 1900-1923. After the 1922 Treaty DATI became the Department of Agriculture. From 1924-1971 the school came into the remit of the Department of Education.

⁹⁷ Glenavy, 1964, p.37.

Orpen was a product of the South Kensington system himself, having studied at the DMSA, but he later went on to study at the Slade in London, where Alphonse Legros (1837-1911) had devised a system of 'precise point-to-point line drawing' and had tutored students in intense study of the model to the extent that they could draw the figure from memory.⁹⁸ During Orpen's years at the Slade, under the direction of Frederick Brown (1851-1941), Wilson Steer (1860-1942) and Henry Tonks (1862-1937), he was inculcated in this rigorous study of the life model and acquired 'an exacting standard of line draughtsmanship'.⁹⁹ These he passed on to his ablest students in Dublin. He also had novel ways of dealing with the lack of availability of life models in Ireland, bringing 'girl models from London', some of whom 'added much to the social life of the Bohemian element of the city.'¹⁰⁰

After Orpen's departure from the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art in 1914, the quality of teaching declined, as no permanent professor of painting was appointed until 1936. Part-time teaching was done by Margaret Crilly, Sean Keating, James Sleator, Charles Lamb and Patrick Tuohy. However, until the appointment of Maurice MacGonigal in 1934, there was little continuity of teaching, and from 1926-1934, there was only one part-time teacher of painting, Seán Keating. According to Arnold, Orpen's followers had learned his technique but he had failed to 'transfer the spirit and cohesion of his own artistic inspiration' to them. Years after his departure he was still a 'hero' in the school to students who had never met him.¹⁰¹

The scarcity of models continued to cause problems for students. In 1927, during the crisis visit of the French Committee to the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art, a spirited correspondence was conducted through the letters page of the *Irish Statesman*. Patrick Trench, a student at the school, wrote; 'One of the student's greatest obstacles is the lack of models in Dublin. It appears that owing to the chastity of the Dublin mind the press cannot print advertisements for models.'¹⁰² The issue of the lack of availability of models remained a problem well into the succeeding decades. Remembering the situation during

⁹⁸ MacDonald, 1970, pp.271-2.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p.275.

¹⁰⁰ Glenavy, 1964, p.37.

¹⁰¹ Hilda Van Stockum, 'Dublin Art Schools in the 1920s', *Irish Times* (March 16, 1985), p.14.

¹⁰² Patrick Trench, letter to the editor, *Irish Statesman*, 8.11 (May 21, 1927), pp.255-256.

the Second World War, Lady Glenavy wrote that 'it was sometimes hard to get models. I remember one girl who had come from London to get away from the bombing'.¹⁰³

In 1936 the DMSA became the National College of Art, with Keating as professor of its school of painting. Keating did not possess Orpen's skill in teaching. The brief flourishing of instruction in life drawing in the school had depended on the 'personality, drive and status of Orpen himself' rather than any structural approach on the part of the school.¹⁰⁴ By 1941 the RHA had ceased teaching altogether. Maurice MacGonigal succeeded Keating in 1954, and remained till 1969, by which time the period of academic painting promulgated by Orpen had ended. In *A Dublin Studio*, c.1935 (fig.4.23) MacGonigal has provided us with a rare glance at a life class in progress. Seated and standing around the model are Harry Kernoff, F.R. Higgins, Frank O'Connor, Sean O'Sullivan, Seán Keating, Ernest Hayes and Mícheál de Búrca. The model is treated as a studio prop, necessary to the exercise in hand but hardly at all to the tone and meaning of the painting, which depicts the artists absorbed in their work. It functions as a group portrait, celebrates the artists relationship to each other and even includes the viewer by posing one of the artists looking directly outwards towards us.

Access to the nude model had always been even more restricted for women artists. The Stockholm Academy was the first European art institution to admit women, in 1839. In Britain, both the Slade and the Glasgow School of Art admitted women in 1870, followed by the South Kensington Schools in 1885 and the Royal Academy in 1893. In Paris women were permitted entry to the ateliers of Jules Lefebvre, Carrier-Belleuse, Whistler and Rodolfe Julian but classes were segregated and they paid double the rate that men were charged.¹⁰⁵ London's first all female art school, was founded in 1842, followed in 1857 by The Society of Female Artists, where women painted from costumed models from 1863, and from the nude model by 1866. The first woman admitted to the RA in 1860, Laura Herford, didn't paint from the nude there, but she attended private evening classes by Eliza Fox where she could avail of this facility.¹⁰⁶ The Slade School of Art

¹⁰³ Glenavy, 1964, p.157.

¹⁰⁴ John Turpin, 'The Education of Irish Artists', *Irish Arts Review*, 13 (1997), 188-193 (p.191).

¹⁰⁵ Smith, 2001, pp.26-30.

¹⁰⁶ Clayton, 1876, p.83.

was established in 1870-1, and its founding principle was the teaching of drawing from life, under its first professor of fine art, Edward Poynter.

Women students were admitted to the Slade, and by the time the Royal Academy allowed women to paint from a semi-nude figure, they were already drawing from the nude at the Slade.

Arguments about how much nudity could be seen by women were really bound up in issues concerning inequalities in both class and gender. One woman, Frances Strong, later Lady Dilke, well accustomed to exercising her class privileges 'gained special permission to work from the living model at the National Art Training School, South Kensington, simply by insisting on her right to do so'.¹⁰⁷ Many other women artists simply avoided the subject altogether, nervous of societal disapproval or the proximity of unwholesome male models.¹⁰⁸ Even women who excelled at academic life drawing and painting seldom pursued the genre in their subsequent careers. Nudes were not seen as appropriate subjects for women painters and in any case were, and remain, difficult to sell for any artist.

Belfast painter Kathleen Isabella Metcalfe Mackie attended the Belfast School of Art and progressed to the Royal Academy in London. She attended classes in the RA between 1921 and 1924, when both Orpen and Walter Sickert were regular visitors. During this time she exhibited at the RHA, where she received the Taylor prize in 1922 for *St. Brigid and the Fox*, and at the Paris Salon of 1925. Some of her life studies completed at the RA, such as *Standing Female Nude*, (fig.4.24) and *Standing Female Figure*, (fig.4.25) both 1924 demonstrate genuine ability. However, marriage in 1926 and subsequent motherhood inevitably relegated her talent to the status of a hobby. She continued to paint while on holidays in Donegal, but was thereafter largely restricted to landscapes, still life and family portraits. Even had she continued her career as a professional artist, it is difficult to see how she might have maintained an interest in painting the nude. All

¹⁰⁷ Postle and Vaughan, 1999, p.15.

¹⁰⁸ Louise Jopling, *Twenty Five Years of My Life*, (London: 1925), p.86, cited in Alison Smith, *The Victorian Nude: Sexuality, Morality and Art* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), p.234.

of her extant nudes were painted at the RA, probably the only place in which she could have had access to a model at the time.¹⁰⁹

Mainie Jellett was also an accomplished painter of the nude, both at the DMSA and later, at the Westminster School in London, where she studied under Walter Sickert. In Dublin she was heir to Orpen's artistic legacy but she described her time with Sickert as the first of her artistic 'revolutions', in which she shifted from realism to the more impressionistic technique that he had learned in Paris, when studying there with Degas in the 1880s.¹¹⁰ Her indebtedness to Sickert is clear in the comparison of his *The Studio, Painting of a Nude*, and her *Nude Model*, above. The similarity in style has prompted Paula Murphy to suggest that Jellett 'submitted entirely to the superior talent of a recognised master and held her own creative spontaneity in check'.¹¹¹ Jellett continued to paint nudes after her departure for France, where she studied under André l'Hôte. *Three Female Figures*, c.1921, (fig.4.26), while adopting his Cubist inspired aesthetic, remains rooted in the observation of the figure. However, her figures became ever more stylized after she began to work with Albert Gleizes in the 1920s. She described how, in this, the third of her 'revolutions' she had 'gone right back to the beginning' and that the subject was now entirely subsumed by technique.¹¹² Further influences on her later work were derived from pre-Christian abstract forms and ancient Chinese art, so that when the figure reappears in her work of the 1930s, it is highly stylized, devoid of the voluptuous, the particular and the erotic. Cyril Barrett maintained that it was 'a disaster both for her own art and for Irish modernism' that Jellett chose to study with Albert Gleizes in France, because Gleizes had become the arch academician of Cubism.¹¹³ However, Jellett fits into an already existing schema in this regard. Aidan Dunne makes the point that ever since Irish artists had travelled abroad to French and Belgian ateliers in the middle of the

¹⁰⁹ For the life of Kathleen Mackie see Eamonn Mallie and Paddy Mackie, *Kathleen Isabella Metcalfe Mackie* (Belfast: 2009).

¹¹⁰ Mainie Jellett, 'My Voyage of Discovery', 1943, reprinted in Fintan Cullen, *Sources in Irish Art: A Reader* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000), pp.86-91.

¹¹¹ Paula Murphy, 'Re-reading Mainie Jellett', in *Mainie Jellett* (Dublin: IMMA,1991), p.35.

¹¹² Jellett, 1943.

¹¹³ Cyril Barrett, 'Mainie Jellett and Irish Modernism', *Irish Arts Review Yearbook*, 9 (1993), pp.167-173 (p.170).

nineteenth century, they had invariably been drawn to the most conservative teachers there.¹¹⁴

Unlike in the case of Kathleen Mackie, Jellett's abandonment of the naturalistic nude came about not through force of social circumstance but as a result of stylistic change and aesthetic choice. However, while she undoubtedly advanced the cause of modernism in Ireland with her pioneering attitude and her singular vision, she did little to advance attitudes towards the depiction of the body. Murphy sees the apparent 'repression' of the body in her later figural subjects as evidence that her avowed cosmopolitanism may have been in doubt, at least socially, if not artistically.¹¹⁵ Even if only by coincidence, her Celtic-inspired imagery was more in tune with the forces of the dominant conservative aesthetic than with those searching for new ways of imagining and depicting the Irish figure.

These educational and social restrictions no longer apply to female artists, but still the genre of the nude is not always popular or commercial. Speaking in 2011, Irish artist Una Sealy maintained that her studio remained full of nude studies because of all her pictures they are the least likely to sell.¹¹⁶

The final blow was dealt to the academic nude in the 1960s, when student revolts in art schools worldwide resulted in life drawing being removed from curricula as emphasis was placed on contemporary methodologies and new media. New theories of art history and practice made it difficult for students to pursue the nude as a subject. Having been demonised by Catholic and Nationalist ideology, the nude was now problematised by feminist ideology. From the outset, feminists argued bitterly over whether the nude could be a suitable subject for representation, some arguing that its exploitative traditions rendered it taboo, while others insisted that the subject could and should be re-interpreted by women artists on their own terms.¹¹⁷ These questions are considered in depth at the end of this chapter.

¹¹⁴ Aidan Dunne, *Irish Art: The European Dimension*, an exhibition to celebrate Ireland's presidency of the E.E.C., (Dublin: RHA Gallery, 1990).

¹¹⁵ Murphy, 1991, p.41.

¹¹⁶ Una Sealy in conversation with the author, 28/06/2011.

¹¹⁷ See Mahon, 2007, pp.205-15.

Teaching re-commenced at the RHA in 2001 after a hiatus of sixty years, with life drawing at its centre. The new RHA School's first president was Mick O'Dea, and he was succeeded by Joe Dunne in 2011. Now, every Thursday some thirty or more artists gather to draw and paint from live models. For some, like James Hanley, this is seen as 'return to first principles' especially as his period in art school in the 1980s coincided with the ending of the teaching of life drawing in Irish art schools and he had always felt disadvantaged by this gap in his education.¹¹⁸ Although not initially intended for exhibition or sale, in 2011 Hanley held an exhibition of his RHA nude studies. He describes these studies, completed in a day or less, as a kind of release from the painstakingly slow and controlled approach he takes to commissioned portraiture. They represented, for him, a release of energy, and a renewal of commitment to the act of painting, because, being painted quickly, they resulted in a more direct involvement with the medium of paint. Works such as *Emma*, c.2010 (fig.4.27) and *Des*, c.2010 (fig.4.28) are clearly unfinished, particularly around the hands and feet, and areas where the under-painting shows through contrast with patches of saturated colour. Certain elements are out of the artist's control. The scale of the works depends on whatever canvas is available, and the pose and viewpoint are dictated by the conditions of an often overcrowded life room. This shared aspect of the experience clearly affects both the work and the artists involved, as the sense of communal engagement and interaction is evident in those involved.

In December 2011 the RHA launched its 3D animated film, a teaching tool for both art and medical students, in association with the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, Trinity College, Dublin, and Science Foundation Ireland. The enterprise was inspired by a course of study in anatomy undertaken by the artist Una Sealy in Edinburgh. For artists this return to the study of anatomy represents a complete reversal of twentieth century teaching practice, and a return to long-standing traditions. Meanwhile the curricula of third level art institutions remain unchanged and life drawing is still not practised there.

¹¹⁸ James Hanley in conversation with the author, 19 January 2011.

The Status of the Model

In May 1860 Lord Haddo moved a motion in the U.K. parliament to remove grants to government-funded art schools who engaged nude models in the life class.¹¹⁹

Charles Bowyer Adderley, M.P. and Vice President for the Committee for Council on Education, replying to Lord Haddo, used as an example of art school impropriety, the case that in the Royal Hibernian Academy in Dublin the life school had been 'irregularly conducted' and that 'young men in large numbers had been permitted to be present when the models were sitting, and that they attended not for the purpose of study, but for the indulgence of an impure curiosity'.¹²⁰ These claims were based, he said, upon the report of Mr. McLeod of 1858, into the workings of the Academy.¹²¹ The RHA immediately entered into heated correspondence with Adderley, the *Art Journal*, and the Prime Minister, Viscount Palmerston, in which the educational interests of the art world were seen to be at odds with the perception, held by politicians and public alike, that nude modeling and illicit sexual behaviour were analogous. Eventually, Lord Haddo's motion was defeated by one hundred and forty seven votes to thirty two, but by then, regulation was the solution generally favoured by institutions, and 'by 1863 only eight provincial Government sponsored schools ran life classes.'¹²²

The mid 1880s marked the height of the campaigns of the Purity Alliance and the Church of England Purity Society to eradicate the use of nude models completely, and even the nude itself as a subject in art. The Feminist movement agreed, arguing that all women were entitled to the same degree of respect and that it was hypocritical of artists to use women as models for work they wouldn't allow their wives and daughters to do.¹²³ Clearly, the real concerns of the campaigners against nude modeling were with public morality. At the time most female models came from low-income, working class backgrounds, and many were associated with the theatre and other forms of popular

¹¹⁹ *Art Journal*, September 1859, p.277. See also Smith, 1996, pp.30-32 and Isabella Evangelisti, *The Nude in Irish Art*, MPhil thesis, 2005, for a complete account of this episode.

¹²⁰ *Art Journal*, July 1860, p.277.

¹²¹ *Art Journal*, August 1860, p.245.

¹²² Postle and Vaughan, 1999, p.12.

¹²³ Borzello, 1982, p.76.

entertainment such as the 'tableaux vivant' popular in less salubrious theatrical establishments.¹²⁴

In reality there *was* an overlap between modeling and prostitution as both professions tended to be driven by desperate need, and prostitution presented 'an alternative or a supplement to female models' wages' when many working class women were surviving on the bread line.¹²⁵ Earning between one shilling an hour and one shilling and nine pence in 1885, female models were paid more than most other working class women, but the work was irregular and unsteady.¹²⁶ In the Royal Academy they were paid twice what the male models were but this was because it was regarded as 'shame money'.¹²⁷ Like prostitution, modeling was often seen as a 'last resort', and not entered into willingly.¹²⁸ As Alison Smith explains, 'with modeling and prostitution construed as interchangeable activities, both requiring encounters in private, enclosed spaces, it is not difficult to understand why the studio was equated with the brothel'.¹²⁹

The link between modelling and prostitution was established in ancient Greece, where models were commonly also courtesans, and since then, her status had always been indeterminate.¹³⁰

When James Barry was painting his murals in the Society of Arts in 1782, the February meeting of the society was informed that 'since embarking on the project he had received only forty five pounds in order to pay his models', and that more money was urgently required.¹³¹ Pressley has deduced from this memo that the 'payments were made to the artist rather than direct to the models because of the female sitters' desire to remain anonymous'.¹³²

During most of the nineteenth century the female model occupied a peculiarly contradictory space, seen as immoral for taking off her clothes for money, yet connected

¹²⁴ Smith, 1996, p.25. *Tableaux Vivant* were entertainments, in which actors and actresses clad in tight fitting, flesh-coloured garments called 'fleshings' would perform still poses in imitation of famous works of art.

¹²⁵ Postle and Vaughan, 1999, p.61.

¹²⁶ Borzello, 1982, p.45.

¹²⁷ Postle, 2006, p.12.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* p.13.

¹²⁹ Smith, 1996, p.27.

¹³⁰ Borzello, 1982, p.72.

¹³¹ Pressley, 1981, p.89.

¹³² *Ibid.* note 17. p.215.

to the moral virtues of purity and beauty that were then still associated with the ideals of high art. She therefore became 'the site for irreconcilable notions about nudity in art (good) and nudity in life (bad)'.¹³³ Alison Smith explains the relationship between this 'social indeterminacy' of the model in nineteenth century Britain and the 'cult of celebrity', as some women were able to exploit their notoriety to become the 'supermodels' of their day.¹³⁴ However, in general the status of female models continued to be 'compromised by sexual politics and fluctuating moral codes' throughout the nineteenth century.¹³⁵

Hilda Van Stockum, a student at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art in the 1920s, provides a revealing eye witness account of prevailing social attitudes to the models. Two of the models she remembered were Doris O'Shannon, wife of the Labour leader Cathal O'Shannon, and a male philosophy student called Biddulph. She wrote later, 'I thought it exciting to make friends with Doris, and rather alarmed my mother by inviting her home. Mother only vaguely differentiated a model from a fallen woman'.¹³⁶

Ultimately, however, the purity campaigns were ineffective. Women thus scrutinized and suspected of prostitution were pushed into private academies, where their activities were more secret and even more suspect.¹³⁷

In the face of opposition from the purity campaigners and the public and press, British artists went on painting nudes, though never to the same extent as was common in France. Then, as the life class gave way to the studio the cult of the female model emerged in the last decade of the nineteenth century. However, real change did not come about until the twentieth century, when the public attitude to nudity changed with the rise of naturism and fitness cults, and the body came to be seen as 'natural'. In modelling, class barriers were removed and social mixing between artists and models became the norm, making their relationships more egalitarian and more socially acceptable.¹³⁸ But

¹³³ Borzello, 1982, pp.73-83.

¹³⁴ Alison Smith, 'Modelling Godiva: the female model as performer in Victorian England' in *Model and Supermodel: The Artist's Model in British Art and Culture*, ed. by Jane Desmaris, Jane, Martin Postle and William Vaughan (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp.61-74. She writes specifically about the Lady Godiva pageants begun in Coventry in 1678 and revived in Victorian times.

¹³⁵ Postle, 2006, p.11.

¹³⁶ Hilda Van Stockum, 1985, p.14.

¹³⁷ Postle, 2006, p.14.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.20.

despite new ways of thinking about gender, the age-old associations between nude modelling and sexual lasciviousness have not yet been completely dispelled. Even in contemporary society, where artists no longer have economic or sexual power over models, and where many artists are women themselves, certain myths prevail.

For this reason, the relationship of the artist and the model has sometimes been seen as an exploitative one, especially in the historically traditional studio scenario, where the artist is male and the model female. This is largely due to the perennial and persistent association of nude modelling and the perceived sexual availability of models.

If the model is to be considered simply in terms of form, it is possible to accept McCauley's assertion that 'The artist at work is lost in the contemplation of lines and shadows and, like Paris judging his three goddesses, apparently deflects his libidinal instincts into his critical faculties'.¹³⁹ In like manner, the experienced artist's model is expected to 'shed her culturally imposed shame with her clothes and return to an Edenic innocence'.¹⁴⁰ However, both artists and models are complex sexual beings, and although personal accounts of the studio encounter of an artist and a nude model differ significantly, many do acknowledge an air of 'sexual frisson'.¹⁴¹ In the studio there is an often 'underplayed but nevertheless inevitable eroticism', according to Paul Karlstrom, who describes the 'studio dance' as a particular kind of choreography involving both physical and psychological movements which lead ultimately to a 'very specific intimacy between the artist and model'.¹⁴²

Because, in the past, so few models have written memoirs, historians have had to rely on artists' statements and these have tended to 'reinforce assumptions about the link between models and prostitution'.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Anne McCauley, 'Sex and the Salon' in *Manet's Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, ed. by Paul Hayes Tucker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.62.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁴¹ See Peggi Taylor, 'A View from the Platform', in *Dictionary of Artist's Models*, ed. by Jill Berk Jiminez (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp.1 – 4. Quote, James Hanley in conversation with the author, 03/02/2011.

¹⁴² Paul Karlstrom, 'Eros in the Studio', in *Art and the Performance of Memory: Sounds and Gestures of Recollection* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp.121-2.

¹⁴³ Smith, 2001, p.28

At a recent public lecture in the Ulster Museum Irish artist Mick O’Dea told a story about one of his nude paintings, *Reclining Nude*, 2011, (fig.4.29) to the great amusement of the audience gathered there.¹⁴⁴ He related how a friend commissioned him to paint a portrait of his wife and when he spoke to the woman to arrange sittings she decided it would be a novel idea for it to be a nude portrait as a surprise for her husband. According to the artist, she went to the gym regularly before sittings commenced, in order to look her best, while he discussed the project with his girlfriend so that there could be no misunderstandings between them. This anecdote, and the way in which it was told and received, not only implies a tacit acceptance of the nearness of artistic and erotic nudity, but it treats the subject as humorous, precisely in order to divest it of its sexual power.

Orientalism and its Variations: The Female Model as ‘Type’

After the invention of the modern model in the middle of the 19th century there was a tendency amongst artists to search out ever more unusual and exotic models and to value them for their racial differences. In this context ‘Irish’ was seen as a distinctive ethnicity, characterized by particular features and colouring. Models’ ethnic identities were thus ‘written onto the body and then read as essential attributes’.¹⁴⁵

But the desire for difference and exoticism pre-dates this period, and its roots can be traced much further back.

The interest in oriental subjects in the arts in Western Europe dates from the publication in translation of Schererazade’s *Alf Laylah wa Laylah*, known in French as *Les Mille et Une Nuits* and in English as *The Arabian Nights*. The first French translation was in 1704, followed by English translations in 1838-40, 1885, and a 16 volume version in 1899-1904. At the same time, cultural influence also came through diplomatic missions to and from the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Public lecture given by Mick O’Dea, in the Ulster Museum, Belfast, 18/11/2011.

¹⁴⁵ Marie Lathers, ‘Changing Tastes: Ethnicity and the Artist’s Model’, in *Dictionary of Artist’s Models*, ed. by Jill Berk Jiminez (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001) pp.14-19 (p.15).

¹⁴⁶ The first English translation of *The Arabian Nights* by Egyptologist Edward Lane was published in 1838-40. Richard Burton’s more sexually explicit version appeared in 1885, and his wife Isabel Burton later produced a sanitized edition of her husband’s translation. The stories were illustrated by Léon Carré in

So great was the popularity of the Arabian Nights stories that they created a vogue for *turqueries* in the theatre, literature, music, art, fashion and interior design. Wealthy patrons indulged themselves with portraits *à l'orientale*, a fashion which lasted until the 1770s in France and longer in Britain. An example of the genre is the portrait, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, c.1718-1720, by Irish born artist Charles Jervas (c.1675-1739), now in the National Gallery of Ireland (fig.4.30)¹⁴⁷ In it she wears a long black *curdée* trimmed with sable over an orange coloured caftan, decorated in an Islamic design consisting of crescent moons and stars. Her costume is accessorized with a girdle, jewelled Turkish slippers and a head-dress known as a *talpock*.¹⁴⁸

Lady Mary was unusual in that she had actual experience of life in the East, having accompanied her husband Edward Wortley Montagu on his diplomatic mission to Turkey in 1716, where they remained for two years. During her time there Lady Mary took to wearing Turkish inspired costume in an effort to experience fully the authentic daily life of the Turks, especially the women. She famously described the scene in a Turkish bath or *hammam*, where men would not be admitted, due to the proprieties of Islam.

'The first sofas were covered with cushions and rich carpets on which sat the ladies; and on the second their slaves behind them, but without any distinction of rank by their dress, all being in the state of nature, that is, in plain English, stark naked, without any beauty or defect concealed yet there was not the least wanton smile or immodest gesture amongst them'.¹⁴⁹ Also in the National Gallery's collection is Jervas's *Portrait of Elizabeth, Countess of Bridgewater*, c.1710-1720. She is depicted wearing Turkish-style dress comprising a magnificent blue satin antery, or overdress, trimmed with white, worn over a long skirt of white satin called a *salvar*. (fig.4.31)¹⁵⁰

France and by Edmund Dulac in England. However, it was Dr. Joseph-Charles Mardrus's 16 volume French edition in 1899-1904 that caused a craze for Orientalism in the arts. Lynne Thornton, *Women as Portrayed in Orientalist Painting* (Paris: ACR Poche Couleur, 1994).

¹⁴⁷ Lady Mary was painted several times by Charles Jervas, and by several other artists including Gervase Spencer (1715-1763), and Jonathan Richardson (1665-1745).

¹⁴⁸ [www.onlinecollection.nationalgallery.ie/view/objects/asitem/search\\$0040/2/sortNumber-asc?t:state:flow](http://www.onlinecollection.nationalgallery.ie/view/objects/asitem/search$0040/2/sortNumber-asc?t:state:flow).

¹⁴⁹ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, 1817, cited on <www.montagumillennium.com/familyresearch/h-1762_mary.htm> [accessed 12 June 2012].

¹⁵⁰ [www.onlinecollection.nationalgallery.ie/view/objects/asitem/search\\$0040/2/sortNumber-asc?t:state:flow](http://www.onlinecollection.nationalgallery.ie/view/objects/asitem/search$0040/2/sortNumber-asc?t:state:flow) [accessed 11 June 2012].

Interest in orientalism grew in the nineteenth century. In works by Ingres, from the *Valpinçon Bather*, in 1808 to *The Turkish Bath*, in 1862, the tradition of orientalism and the genre of the nude met and the sub-genre of the nude *odalisque* gained in popularity. The term *odalisque* stems from *oda* meaning room or chamber, which were the courts of the senior women within the *seraglio* or palace. The *odalisques* were slaves who served the sultan's women. Far from being nude, in reality they commonly wore complex layers of clothing. The art historical nude *odalisque* is therefore more indebted to the Western tradition of the reclining nude that derives ultimately from Titian and Giorgione.¹⁵¹ Kenneth Clark has referred to the 1860s in Paris as 'the high-water mark of nineteenth century prudery', because, he maintained, it was only for reasons of social respectability, class and academic sanction that Ingres's sexualized painting, *The Turkish Bath*, (fig.3.24) was praised when, only one year later, Manet's arguably less sexualized work, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, was vilified.¹⁵²

The situation in Britain was somewhat different as the Victorians did not generally approve of the depiction of overt sexuality, and so paintings of *odalisques* were rare. As Clark pointed out, during 'the great frost of Victorian prudery' the nude only survived as a subject in British art because of its classical origins and associations, and because of the tradition of life drawing in the academies, especially as practised by its chief exponent, William Etty.¹⁵³ Orientalist nudes were suspect because they were perceived to 'contravene' these 'hallowed classical conventions'.¹⁵⁴ Orientalism was introduced to British viewers by French artists such as Jean-Léon Gérôme who painted a series of pictures set in Turkish baths between the 1870s and the 1890s. His painting, entitled *Esclave a Vendre* (fig.4.32), depicting an Eastern slave market, was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1871, and attracted an 'outburst of critical indignation'.¹⁵⁵ Depictions of slavery were slightly more acceptable than harem scenes because the narrative elements, which usually tacitly accepted the prevailing colonialist discourses, could be seen as instructive or moralistic. The press response to Gérôme's *Esclave a Vendre*, for instance, implicitly criticized Islam itself for its perceived barbarism and cruelty. The

¹⁵¹ Thornton, 2007.

¹⁵² Clark, 1956, p.149.

¹⁵³ Clark, 1956, p.150.

¹⁵⁴ Smith, 1996, p.168.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p.168.

British also saw these images of proof of a French degeneracy which had led to political instability and ultimately to the disastrous Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71.¹⁵⁶

Though mostly set in the Middle-East or North Africa, images of slavery were sometimes also set in ancient Rome.¹⁵⁷ They made the nude more acceptable by distancing it from the norms of Western culture, but they were also coyly erotic, voyeuristic and titillating.

Despite their attestations to the contrary, many Victorians viewed images of slave markets with 'prurient fascination'.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, it is generally accepted today that some element of sexual fantasy is 'fundamental to the genre' of the orientalist nude.¹⁵⁹

After increasing exposure to French orientalist art, slave scenes came into fashion in Britain in the 1880s. Typical of the genre are works by Ernest Normand (1859- 1923) such as *The White Slave*, 1894 (fig.4.33). Like these, *The Victory of Faith*, 1890, (fig.4.34) by Irish-born artist St. George Hare, combines the themes of slavery and the nude, depicting, as it does, two early Christian women in a cell beneath the Coliseum awaiting their martyrdom. The subject matter may have seemed 'innocently sentimental' to contemporary audiences, but it would be difficult to deny its overt erotic intent today.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, Honour argues that 'no more farfetched solution to the problem of clothing the female nude with an aura of sanctity was ever devised'.¹⁶¹ When the painting was shown at the RA in 1890 an apt quotation from Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* was printed in the exhibition catalogue, presumably to reinforce the painting's somewhat spurious religious theme.

In 1904 Hugh Lane included *The Victory of Faith* in the exhibition of Irish art which he organised at London's Guildhall, a decision which called Lane's artistic judgement into question according to his biographer Robert O'Byrne.¹⁶² However, Lane was merely reflecting a taste for such works which were widely admired by the viewing public. Just prior to Lane's exhibition his friend William Orpen had executed a pastel and chalk

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. pp.169-171.

¹⁵⁷ Thornton, 2007, pp.166-7.

¹⁵⁸ Smith, 1996, p.168. See also Thornton, 2007, p.164.

¹⁵⁹ Roger Benjamin, 'Orientalism, Modernism and Indigenous Identity' in *Art of the Avant Gardes*, ed. by Steve Edwards and Paul Wood (New Haven and London: Yale University Press and the Open University, 2004), pp. 85-108 (p.97).

¹⁶⁰ Hugh Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art: From the American Revolution to World War One* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1989) p.183.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. p.183.

¹⁶² Robert O'Byrne, *Hugh Lane 1875-1915* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2000), p.55.

drawing that could be described as belonging to the orientalist tradition. *Lady with a Parrot*, 1903, (fig.4.35) was based on drawings Orpen had made three years earlier when, as a student in the Slade School of Art in London, he had chanced upon a troupe of acrobats performing near Fitzroy Street. While at the Slade Orpen had a reputation for his pursuance of 'strange and unusual models' in the company of his fellow students Augustus John and Albert Rothenstein, and the female acrobat he called 'Fatima' fulfilled his ideals of an exotic beauty in her Eastern costume.¹⁶³ He made several semi-nude drawings of her, which served as preliminary sketches for this more highly finished work.¹⁶⁴

From the middle of the nineteenth century in Paris, modernists, while perpetuating the interest in orientalist themes, also attempted to up-date it. Manet's *Olympia* has been described as an attempt to 'rewrite orientalist discourse as modernity' by making the reclining *odalisque* into a Parisienne.¹⁶⁵ It is precisely his attempt to re-localise the subject that marks a shift between the orientalist and the modernist outlook.¹⁶⁶ This drive to re-work subjects for contemporary audiences and in line with changing discourses continued unabated in modernism and beyond. Chapter three, above, looked in depth at the strategies employed by Louis le Brocquy and Micheal Farrell in their respective borrowings from Manet and Boucher. At the same time modernists also exploited the 'otherness' of their subjects. Gauguin had travelled to Tahiti in 1891 and from there to the Marquesas Islands in search of ever more exotic subjects. Renoir visited Algiers in 1881-2, but found that he had to use French rather than native models. Picasso's dependence on African and Iberian art is well documented, and Matisse travelled to the Maghreb several times in the early twentieth century. All of these exploits sought to give orientalism a 'new complexion'.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ John Turpin, 'William Orpen as a Student and a Teacher', *Studies*, 6.271 (Autumn, 1979), 173-192 (p.178).

¹⁶⁴ Bruce Arnold, *Whyte's Important Irish Art*, sale catalogue, 2007, p.59.

¹⁶⁵ Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 247-317.

¹⁶⁶ Benjamin 2004.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.86. In 1912 Matisse visited Tangiers, but he used Jewish women and prostitutes as his models, Thornton, 1994, p.184.

It is particularly in relation to his *Portrait of Laure*, c.1862-3, (fig.4.36) that Griselda Pollock credits Manet with having created a modern portrait devoid of any ethnic assumptions regarding class or status. Unlike in *Olympia*, where the same model's individuality 'is completely submerged' this is a very sympathetic portrait of a particular, named, woman.¹⁶⁸ However, very little else is known about her. She was variously described as a woman of French, African or Caribbean nationality, who earned her living as a model but whose dates and origins remain unknown.¹⁶⁹

A nude study that is similar in both tone and intention is American artist Thomas Eakins's, *Portrait of a Black Woman*, 1867-9, (fig.4.37) which was painted while Eakins was studying in Paris from 1866 to 1869, initially under Gérôme. It was painted from the live model and for its time it is an unusually sympathetic rendering of a nude black woman in that it does not depict the woman in stereotypical orientalist terms, but as a straightforward portrait. There was no demand for depictions of slavery in the USA, where they would only serve as reminders of political tensions related to the slave trade which had only finally been abolished in 1865, and there was a high degree of prudery in relation to the nude in general.¹⁷⁰

Black models were relatively rare in Britain until the twentieth century, so would have been unknown in Ireland. Paintings of black models were especially rare among Irish artists, and only one has been identified for this analysis, and it was painted in Britain. Dublin born artist William John Leech (1881-1968) was educated at the DMSA and the RHA, and subsequently attended the Académie Julien in Paris, and it was there that he painted his first nude in 1901. Though not primarily a painter of the nude he considered it 'the closest search for beauty' open to the artist, and he had painted several, including one of his wife May.¹⁷¹ From around 1936-8 he was working with a black model in London, and he produced a series of nudes, including *The Refugee*. (fig.4.38) It was exhibited at the Dawson Gallery and at the RHA in 1947. Leech was clearly pleased with the picture, as in a letter to Leo Smith of the Dawson Gallery he wrote that in his opinion

¹⁶⁸ Honour, 1989, p.206. He suggests that Laure may also be the model who appears in Jean-Frédéric Bazaille, *La Toilette*, 1870, Musée Fabre, Montpellier. Laure also modelled for Manet's *Children in the Tuileries Gardens*, 1862.

¹⁶⁹ Lathers, 2001, pp.14-19.

¹⁷⁰ Honour, 1989.

¹⁷¹ Denise Ferran, *William John Leech* (Dublin: NGI; Merrell Holberton, 1996).

The Refugee should be in the National Gallery of Ireland instead of that 'blownup watercolour' (*A Convent Garden, Brittany*) and he wondered if an exchange could yet be made.¹⁷²

Leech's work is a very far departure from the orientalist tradition subscribed to by St. George Hare. It is a naturalistic study of a particular model, whose ethnicity doubtless interests the artist for its formal and tonal possibilities, but is separated from any narrative or colonialist context.¹⁷³ This type of sensitive portrait co-existed alongside the orientalist tradition from the middle of the nineteenth century. Leech's work is therefore closely related to Manet's *Portrait of Laure* and Eakins's *Portrait of a Black Woman*, and should be described as genre portraiture. These paintings were called portraits, but they functioned more as decorative subject pictures rather than portraits in the specific sense of having a known and identifiable sitter. They were popular among collectors for their attractiveness based on the ethnicity of the model.

Even before the nineteenth century the *belle Juive* (beautiful Jewess) was an archetype in French art, a positive symbol of modernity, unlike her Jewish male counterpart whose features distinguishing him from the white male were viewed in a negative light. The Jewish woman was perceived to be sensual, similar to the *orientale*, and consequently was the most popular type in Paris in the 1830s and 40s.¹⁷⁴ Jews and Italians were particularly used in genre painting for their perceived picturesqueness. However, as type becomes stereotype, so the attribute of sensuality can change from positive to negative. In the mid to late nineteenth century this sexual aspect became stronger 'when fears and anxieties concerning syphilis, prostitution, and other woes of the modern city were projected onto the Jewish body, including that of the Jewish woman'.¹⁷⁵ Somewhat later, the Jews who modelled in London also held a romantic fascination for artists based on their apparent sensuality. This was linked to the romantic fascination with the imagined

¹⁷² Ibid., p.256.

¹⁷³ As Thornton points out, Orientalists never painted black odalisques. Thornton, 2007, p.165.

¹⁷⁴ Lathers, 2001, p.16.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. p.16.

animal sensuality of an un-baptised woman, thought to possess the ‘female knowledge of the ages’.¹⁷⁶

Meanwhile, in France, between 1852 and 1870, the preference for the Jewish model was replaced by a preference for the *Italienne* as emigration from Italy increased dramatically during the Second Empire, to the extent that Paris became ‘flooded with Italian models’.¹⁷⁷ Italians became a distinct ethnic ‘type’, classified as ‘coloured’, and perceived to have oriental features.¹⁷⁸ Both males and females, and even whole families were in demand as models.

The number of Italian models in London increased during the Franco Prussian war of 1870-71, with increased emigration from Paris. They settled in Clerkenwell, and were admired by Leighton, Burne-Jones, Poynter and Watts.¹⁷⁹ They were rated highly as models because of their professionalism, conscientiousness and reliability as much as for their relatively exotic appearance. However, while modelling had been seen as a suitable profession for whole families in Italy, in London it was usually only the men who were thus employed. ‘A survey of the names of models working at the RA during the early twentieth century reveals that, while the majority of female models appear to have been of British or Irish origin, their male counterparts were mainly Italian’.¹⁸⁰ It was probably these Italian men that Oscar Wilde had in mind when he praised them for their ‘natural grace’ and the ‘picturesqueness of their colouring’.¹⁸¹

An Italian model also made an appearance in Irish art. In his memoir *Stories of Old Ireland and Myself*, William Orpen recounted his first encounter with a nude female model, as a student of art in Dublin, at the tender age of twelve. Orpen recounts how, the model’s name being Angelina Esposito, a fellow student, Atty McLean, politely asked her, “Signorina, pardon me, can you speak English?” The lady raised her head, and in the worst Dublin accent I have ever heard, said, “Oh, indeed I can. Me father tried to teach me Italian, but I couldn’t take the trouble to learn the b___ language.” That remark made

¹⁷⁶ Borzello, 1982, p.45.

¹⁷⁷ Borzello, 1982, p.39.

¹⁷⁸ Lathers, 2001, pp.14-17.

¹⁷⁹ Borzello, 1982, p.45.

¹⁸⁰ Postle, 2006, p.19.

¹⁸¹ Oscar Wilde, ‘London Models’, *English Illustrated Magazine*, 64 (January, 1889), pp.313-9.

us feel on safer ground. After all, this goddess was mortal, one of us. The Olympian clouds dispersed, and we saw her clearly under the blaze of electric light, of the earth earthy.’¹⁸²

By the 1880s in Paris the *Italienne* was still popular with the mainstream but replaced in the avant garde by the *Parisienne*, who was entirely white. The Baudelairean concept of *modernité* underpinned the type of the *Parisienne*, a type undoubtedly indebted to Victorine Louise Meurent (1844-1927), ‘arguably the most recognizable female model of 19th century France’.¹⁸³ Victorine modelled for Manet from 1862-74 and also for Degas, Puvis de Chavannes, Alfred Stevens, and was Thomas Couture’s studio model. Her slight and wiry physicality and pale colouring were seen as authentic for the time, and she became ‘the body of Realism’.¹⁸⁴ Nicknamed *La Glu* or *la Crevette* (the shrimp) Victorine epitomised the *Parisienne* model. A generation later, a French model known by the English sounding name Sarah Brown (1869-unknown) was the favoured *Parisienne* model.¹⁸⁵ She had white skin, light coloured hair, and an independent, strong willed and hysterical nature. She and three other models were arrested for public nudity after the 1893 *Bal de Quat’z Arts* (2nd Annual Artists’ Ball) when she posed as Cleopatra in a tableaux vivant, based on Rochechouart’s *Last Days of Babylon*. Their arrest provoked a student riot against repression of artistic freedom, in which a bystander was killed.¹⁸⁶ The *Parisienne* reached her apogee not in representations of the nude but in the work of James Tissot whole female subjects were predicated on the idea of difference between male and female, and closely allied to the ideals and vicissitudes of fashion.¹⁸⁷ Oscar Wilde wrote in 1889 that ‘the poor are completely unconscious of their own picturesqueness’, adding that certain ‘types’, such as acrobats and gymnasts make good models because, in them, ‘beauty is an unconscious result not a conscious aim’.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸² William Orpen, *Stories of Old Ireland and Myself* (London: Williams and Northgate, 1924), pp.24-26.

¹⁸³ Benjamin, 2004. Quote, Lathers, ‘Victorine Louise Meurent’ in *Dictionary of Artist’s Models*, ed. by Jill Berk Jiminez (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp.370-372 (p.372).

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Her real name was Marie (Marie- Florentine) Roger (or Royer). Marie Lathers, ‘Sarah Brown’, in *Dictionary of Artist’s Models*, ed. by Jill Berk Jiminez (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp.86-88.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Tamar Garb, *Bodies of Modernity: Figure and Flesh in Fin-de-Siècle France* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), pp.81-113.

¹⁸⁸ Wilde, 1889, pp.313-9.

However, the social and political realities are rather more stark, and the history of modelling has been described as ‘a history of exclusions’.¹⁸⁹ The constant search for ever greater exoticism had, in fact, very little cultural specificity. As Griselda Pollock explains, ‘from the Renaissance to the modern period the trope of the ‘dark lady’ occurs in European culture without being tied to particular geographies or specific ethnicities’.¹⁹⁰ In this process assumptions are made about entire groups of women based on the appearance of ethnicity, and the complexities between different experiences of femininity are overlooked. Similarly, important determinants such as the social structures upon which the representation of women are based are not taken into account.

In the passage of popularity from one ‘type’ to another, there was some room for overlap or entirely personal preferences on the part of the artist. As Borzello explains, in Britain ‘the black browed Mediterranean type vied with the sandy-lashed redhead as the favoured female colourings’ in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁹¹ When it came to defining the Irish model as a ‘type’ there were two distinct possibilities; she could be either dark of complexion or fair and red-haired, two stereotypes that can be seen to persist to this day.

In Lucian Freud’s painting *Irishwoman on a Bed*, 2003-4 (fig.4.39) we are presented with a dark-skinned Irishwoman, often depicted as typical. Meanwhile, Sophie Merry, a model at the RHA school in Dublin, pictured in P.J.Lynch’s *Sophie*, c.2011 (fig.4.40) is valued not only for her great skill and experience in modelling but also for her striking pale complexion and red hair.

Artist’s memoirs regularly recount tales of the appeal of Irish models. William Powell Frith (1819-1909) recalled seeing an orange seller of ‘a rare type of rustic beauty’ with a ‘bewitching’ smile, in the street, and being compelled to ask her to model for him.¹⁹² Her beauty was matched by her innocence, and, being a Catholic, she had to ask her priest if it was acceptable to model for the artist. Frith wanted her only to model the head, laughing, but in the warmth of the studio she fell asleep and the painting became *The Sleeping*

¹⁸⁹ Lathers, 2001, p.19.

¹⁹⁰ Pollock, 1999, p.249-254.

¹⁹¹ Borzello, 1982, p.40.

¹⁹² William Powell Frith, *My Autobiography and Reminiscences*, vol.1 (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1887), pp. 248-9.

Model, 1853 (fig.4.41). In the telling of this anecdote Frith didn't record the woman's name.

In 1891 John Lavery painted a genre portrait entitled *An Irish Girl*, for which the model was a flower seller he had met by chance in the street in London a few years previously. He recalled that he was 'so struck by her extraordinary beauty' that he asked her to sit for him.¹⁹³ Her 'appearance and accent' suggested to Lavery that she was Irish, and she said her name was Kathleen McDermott, but he discovered later that she was Welsh and that her name was Annie Evans.¹⁹⁴ The fact that she was evasive about her origins suggests that she was aware of the desirability of Irish models, and that she was willing to be whatever the artist wished her to be. She accompanied him to Glasgow, and shortly afterwards they were married. Kathleen died in 1891 shortly after the birth of their daughter Eileen. Lavery painted her again many years later as *Kathleen (The Flower Girl)*, c.1938.¹⁹⁵

Sarah Purser's favourite female model, Kathleen Kearney, was also a redhead. An ardent republican nationalist, she worked for Maud Gonne, in a capacity described as 'not really a servant, more a receptionist' by Beatrice Behan in her memoir.¹⁹⁶ Gonne introduced her to Purser, knowing the artist was in need of models, and she became her favourite model from c.1923 onwards.¹⁹⁷ Purser painted Kathleen a total of five times, and two of these were nudes. *Seated Nude with her Head Thrown Back*, c.1923 (fig.4.42). and *Semi-Nude with a Cigarette*, also c.1923 (fig.4.43) The *Seated Nude* employs many of the usual conventions of the nude, she is shown in a kneeling pose, in front of a decorative painted screen. The treatment of the figure is sketchy and left unfinished in parts and the coarse weave of the canvas adds to its liveliness and vibrancy. The other picture is very different in tone. The model is shown in a state of semi-undress, with a cigarette in her mouth, and turning to look provocatively at the viewer. It has a sense of being sexed-up, and in this way resembles Harry Kernoff's unusual, undated, *Female Nude*. (fig.4.44).

¹⁹³ John Lavery, *The Life of a Painter* (London: Cassell and Co., 1940), p.66.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p.67.

¹⁹⁵ Kenneth McConkey, *Sir John Lavery* (Edinburgh: Canongate Press, 1993).

¹⁹⁶ Brian Behan, *Mother of All the Behans* (London: Arena, 1984), pp.47-8.

¹⁹⁷ John O'Grady, *The Life and Work of Sarah Purser* (Blackrock: Four Courts Press, 1996), p.267.

After her modelling career had ended Kathleen married Stephen Behan, and gave birth to her son, Brendan. But family lore only remembers the clothed portrait that Purser painted of Kathleen that is now in the National Gallery of Ireland, *The Sad Girl*, c.1923 (fig.4.45). Beatrice Behan remembered that ‘while working for Maud Gonne MacBride she met Sarah Purser, who painted a beautiful portrait of her which now hangs in the National Gallery of Ireland’.¹⁹⁸ Nor are either of the nudes mentioned in other biographies of the Behans, though it would seem to be a notable fact that Brendan Behan’s mother was a nude model. Ulick O’Connor outlines the fierce independence of Kathleen’s character, when he says that, she ‘saw nothing inconsistent in being a communist, a Catholic and a Republican at the same time. She was always an ardent Catholic’.¹⁹⁹ Despite her political views and strength of character, perhaps it was her ardent Catholicism that prevented her from mentioning her past as a nude model to her family and friends. It seems Kathleen was not alone in her reticence. As Diarmuid Ferriter points out, while there was a culture of greater sexual freedom in Ireland among Revolutionary circles, this was not necessarily acknowledged in memoirs or diaries that might eventually find their way into the public realm.²⁰⁰ For a woman like Kearney, modelling was probably an opportunity to find some personal expression outside of the quite restrictive social lives led by ordinary Irish people in the 1920s, as much as a source of valuable income. She appears to have had a relationship of affection and trust with Sarah Purser, who maintained her silence on the identity of her model until she painted her for the last time in 1935, simply as *Kathleen* (fig.4.46).

Because of the mainly mono-cultural population in Ireland until recently Irish artists did not have access to models of other ethnicities, and Irish paintings of the nude reflect this homogeneity in all but a very few exceptions. However, for models, as we have seen, Irishness was seen as a very identifiable and desirable ‘type’ in representational terms, and the Irishwoman appears in paintings from Frith to Freud. In both these cases she is dark complexioned but her alternative look is pale skinned with red hair. These types remain identifiable today and are still valued for those same characteristics. However,

¹⁹⁸ Behan, 1984, p.137.

¹⁹⁹ Ulick O’Connor, *Brendan Behan* (London: Abacus, 1993), p.26.

²⁰⁰ Ferriter, 2009, pp.89-99.

contemporary Irish artists also seek out models from other ethnicities in the age old search for difference.

The Model as Muse

Paul Karlstrom has described the model's need to be seen as a muse as 'a protective and idealistic concept' necessary to the more reticent model.²⁰¹ The idea of the muse is in fact a conflation of the original nine Greek muses into one generic source of inspiration that seeks to explain the mystery of art as something other than divine inspiration.²⁰²

The concept of the muse depends on a deep mental or physical attraction between the artist and his female model. It is a problematic notion because it retains the traditional power relationship between the dominant male artist and the passive female subject. The model may enjoy playing her part but she is obliged to fulfil a very specific function in order not to stunt the male creative power. For that reason it is very seldom, if ever, that we encounter examples of a female artist and a male muse. Hence, post feminism, the idea of the muse has lost credibility and is increasingly seen as an aspect of the mythologised male creative urge which relies on the acceptance of the notion of the generative power of the artist and the largely passive female subject. The concept of the muse has become anachronistic because it reinforces 'the destructive stereotype of the creative, productive, active male and of the passive female, at once worshipped and degraded'.²⁰³ More often, today, the idea of place or country has replaced the female muse,²⁰⁴ except in the fashion industry, where the power of the muse is still acknowledged, though her influence there is based almost solely on physical attributes.

²⁰¹ Karlstrom, 2002, p.122.

²⁰² These nine were distilled from an original three mountain muses, Melete (study), Mneme (memory) and Aoide (song), daughters of the marriage of Gaia (earth) and Ouranos (heaven) described by Pausanias in the second century. None of the nine muses were associated with the visual arts. They were linked to epic poetry (Calliope), history (Clio), music and lyric poetry (Euterpe), comedy and bucolic poetry (Thalimia), tragedy (Melpomene), choral dancing (Tepsichore), erotic poetry (Erato), sacred poetry, rhetoric and geometry (Polyhymnia) astronomy and astrology (Urania) However, Greek writers disagreed about the muses' specific associations, their provenance and their names. Julia Forster, *Muses: Revealing the Nature of Inspiration* (Herts: Pocket Essentials, 2007), pp.13-29.

²⁰³ Francine Prose, *The Lives of the Muses: Nine Women and the Artists they Inspired* (London: Arum, 2003), pp.8-9. Her book includes, Hester Thrale, Alice Liddell, Elizabeth Siddal, Lou Andreas Salome, Gala Dali, Lee Miller, Charis Weston, Suzanne Farrell and Yoko Ono.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.12-13.

But even among feminists there is disagreement on the viability of the muse. Camille Paglia comments on the *femme fatale*, a concept closely related to the muse. She writes; 'Through stars like [Elizabeth] Taylor, we sense the world-disordering impact of legendary women like Delilah, Salome and Helen of Troy. Feminism has tried to dismiss the femme fatale as a misogynist libel, a hoary cliché. But the femme fatale expresses women's ancient and eternal control of the sexual realm'.²⁰⁵

Despite Paglia's claims for the inspirational qualities of modern-day film stars, the only person ever to have received official recognition for her role as muse was Alice Liddell (1852-1934), who as a child was immortalised by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) in his book *Alice in Wonderland*. As well as being the inspiration for his writing she also sat for his photographic studies, such as *Alice Liddell as a Beggar Girl*, c.1859 (fig.4.47) Interestingly the book's illustrations by Punch cartoonist John Tenniel were based on another child, Mary Hilton Badcock, as Carroll did not want Alice herself to be depicted in them.²⁰⁶ Liddell was said to have been 'fascinated by the whole process', of her relationship with Dodgson, although her parents later disapproved of the friendship and intervened to end it.²⁰⁷ In 1932, Alice Liddell Hargreaves was awarded the only ever hon. PhD from Columbia University New York, for 'musedom'.²⁰⁸

The relationship between artist and muse is not always a conventional one, though love or sex are often involved, the need to create being sometimes seen as parallel to the need to pro-create. More significantly, the muse has been said to represent 'the search for the long-lost half of the self, the desire for good and for beauty'.²⁰⁹

Historically, the role of muse was well delineated and rather limited. For example, the muse could never take credit for the work. Furthermore, she should be 'content to inspire without demanding to be thanked or to marry her artist, or to become an artist herself'.²¹⁰ Therefore wives or lovers do not necessarily make the best muses, the domestic nature of

²⁰⁵ Camille Paglia, 'So Bold, Bad and Beautiful', *The Sunday Times, News Review* (27 March, 2011), pp.1-2.

²⁰⁶ Forster, 2007, p.106.

²⁰⁷ Cathryn Spence, 'Alice Liddell in *Dictionary of Artist's Models*, ed. by Jill Berk Jiminez (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), p.323-326.

²⁰⁸ Prose, 2004, p.1.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.373-4.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

the relationship tending to domesticate the artist in turn.²¹¹ As Oscar Wilde put it, 'for an artist to marry his model is as fatal as for a *gourmet* to marry his cook, the one gets no sittings, and the other gets no dinner'.²¹² However, in reality, wives and lovers are often the most available models and for that reason become muses. Sometimes, though, the role of model ceases once the role of wife has commenced.

Robert Ballagh painted his wife Betty, nude, on several occasions. *Inside No.3*, 1979, (fig.3.22) was influenced by his reading of *Ways of Seeing* by John Berger. Berger's discussion of the proprietorial nature of the painted nude as an aspect of the inequalities between patron and painter, and between men and women, interested him at the time. At the same time he had in mind Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No.2*, 1912 (fig.4.48). 'I saw myself as operating in a pro-feminist fashion' he said, 'in that the female figure...is very consciously turning away from the viewer and the observer, and I thought I was very clearly making a feminist statement'.²¹³ He was dismayed that some people at the time considered the image chauvinistic. Asked why he used his wife as a model, he said, 'I wouldn't have had the nerve to ask anyone else, to be honest, at that time. It's just being honest and truthful, that's the woman that I lived with then and I still live with now and if I was going to make a statement about anybody, she had to be the person that would participate'.²¹⁴ Ballagh goes on to explain that his depictions of the nude are 'not sensuous or erotic', but more intended as humorous jibes at society's, and art's, tendency to take itself too seriously.

John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, 1972, was a timely and challenging investigation of the role of art in society, which included his thoughts on the representation of the nude. In a later work he developed his ideas on the depicting of a loved subject. He describes the loved subject as 'indescribable', not because 'love is blind, but because the lover has discovered and has been shown something which is habitually hidden'.²¹⁵ 'To be loved is to be unmasked', he writes. He goes on to re-work his original discussion of the naked versus the nude, itself an inversion of Clarke's famous dichotomy, as a positing of the

²¹¹ The views of French historian and philosopher, Etienne Gilson, cited in Prose, 2004, pp.15-17.

²¹² Wilde, 1889, p.315.

²¹³ Ballagh in conversation with the author, 15/05/2010.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ John Berger, 'preface', in *Maggi and Henrietta: Drawings of Henrietta Moreas by Maggi Hambling*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), n.p. Here Berger is specifically referring to portraits of Henrietta Moreas by Maggi Hambling.

masked against the un-masked. To unmask, he writes, 'suggests that what lies behind the mask is ignoble, that the mask is being worn to put a better face on something which, if disclosed, would be undesirable. When love unmasks, the sense is reversed, and the conclusion is the opposite: what lies behind the mask is found to be more loveable (perhaps even sometimes nobler) than what the mask is pretending. No love without nakedness.'²¹⁶ In Berger's definition, a mask can be a look, a reputation or a lifestyle, all of which can be undone by love, hence its potential for 'subversion'.²¹⁷

James Mc Neill Whistler named the Irish model Joanna Hiffernan, whom he painted for the first time in *Wapping*, 1860, as his muse. Joanna is said to have fascinated him, especially for 'her coppery-red hair and her remoteness', though another biographer puts it more fulsomely when he writes: 'she had in her favour copper hair, long, trim legs, high breasts, and a look of recently awakened, possibly unorthodox sensuality which, for young men who had read *Les Fleurs du Mal* and would shortly be reading Swinburne's fleshly Poems and Ballads, was difficult to resist'.²¹⁸ Hiffernan became his favourite model and his lover, at times living with him as his common law wife though her social position remained precarious. Being an artist's mistress did nothing to elevate her socially and she would have known never to have expected marriage and respectability as a consequence of their relationship.²¹⁹ Whistler painted Joanna many times, though never nude.

When Whistler and Hiffernan travelled together to Trouville they met his friend Gustave Courbet. He was interested in Joanna and he painted her portrait as *Jo/La Belle Irlandaise*, 1865 (fig.4.49). Later, when Whistler was abroad, and Hiffernan was alone and lacking funds, she travelled to Paris to pose for Courbet again. *Le Sommeil*, 1866, (fig.4.50) depicts 'two provocatively naked, entwined lesbians, exhausted after what appears, from the way their jewellery is scattered on the bed, to have been a particularly

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Stanley Weintraub, *Whistler: A Biography* (London: Da Capo Press, 2001), p.65. See also Roy McMullen, *Victorian Outsider: A Biography of J.A.M. Whistler* (London, Macmillan, 1974), p.91. Whistler also described her 'superlatively whorish air' in a letter to his friend, the French artist Fantin-Latour, See de Montfort, 'Joanna Hiffernan' in Berk Jiminez, 2001, p.277.

²¹⁹ Weintraub, 2001, p.89.

ardent session of lovemaking'. The red haired figure is 'unmistakeably Jo Heffernan'.²²⁰ The painting evokes Baudelaire's poem *Femmes Damnées*, on the initiation of a virgin into the Sapphic passion, and depicts the lesbian lovers Delphine and Hippolyta, or 'beauty robust' and 'beauty frail'. Courbet conflates this source with another of Baudelaire's poems celebrating a woman's long tresses of hair, in order to make good use of the contrasting flesh tones and colouring of his two models.²²¹

Heffernan appeared in several other nudes by Courbet in the 1860s. One of these may have been *Origine du Monde*, 1866 (fig.4.51) though this is uncertain. It is listed in the *Dictionary of Artists Models*, under her name as an 'associated work', suggesting that she may have posed for this highly erotic painting, though no direct evidence is given for this.²²²

Heffernan is said to have enjoyed her role as an artist's muse, considering herself to be a collaborator rather than a 'passive object'.²²³ According to Weintraub, and in contravention of the traditional requirements of a muse, she was a 'sometime painter herself', and she occasionally hawked small drawings, watercolours and prints by Whistler in Bond Street, though some of these were her own, unbeknownst to the dealers.²²⁴

Although William Orpen was a very accomplished and successful portrait painter, many of his commissioned portraits have been criticised for their technical facility, but lack of emotional involvement. However, he often painted nude portraits of women with whom he was intimately involved and it has been noted that in these there is a real 'sense of connection with the sitter'.²²⁵ The model in *The English Nude*, 1900 (fig.4.52) is Emily Scobel, to whom the artist was briefly engaged, and who regularly sat for him. A 'frustrated architectural student', she also briefly modelled professionally at the Royal

²²⁰ McMullen, 1974, pp.139-40. The painting was originally titled *Pareses et Luxure (Sloth and Lewdness)*.

²²¹ Weintraub, 2001, p.121.

²²² Patricia de Montfort, 'Joanna Heffernan' in *Dictionary of Artist's Models*, ed. by Jill Berk Jiminez (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp.275-278 (p.278).

²²³ *Ibid.* p.277.

²²⁴ Weintraub, 2001, pp.71-5.

²²⁵ Robert Upstone, 'Love and Beauty in an Age of Extremes', in *William Orpen: Politics, Sex and Death* (London: Imperial War Museum, 2005), p.24.

Academy on London.²²⁶ The very un-English look of the painting results from the influence of Rembrandt, a fact which prompted Orpen's biographer to compare her to Hendricjke Stoffels. Orpen had attended a major exhibition of Rembrandt's works in the National Gallery, London, the year before the picture was painted. Although his relationship with Scobel did not last, Orpen kept the painting, a gesture which may have been due to his regard for his model or to the fact that painting a 'pure nude' in Britain at that time was considered somewhat 'risky'.²²⁷ Another nude with similar dark tonality and painterly brushwork, *A Woman*, 1906, (fig.4.53) was painted during his time teaching at the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin. Although it was 'the subject of much comment' at the time, it was not exhibited until the following year at the New English Art Club, where it caused a sensation, no doubt for the directness and candour of its eroticism.²²⁸ The model, Flossie Burnett, was one of the young women Orpen had brought to Dublin from London, to work as models, and she also became his mistress. The liaison obviously did not have the same seriousness as his relationship with Scobel, as even while he was painting it he wrote to his wife in London, remarking that it was 'the most trying job I've ever done'.²²⁹ After being exhibited at the New English Art Club *A Woman* was sold to a private collector in Leeds. When it was loaned to the Dublin International Exhibition in 1907, Orpen received a commission for a life-sized copy for another private collector in Tokyo.

Orpen was renowned for his easy transference from one stylistic language to another, indeed he was often criticized for it, as we have seen in Keating's remarks about him, in chapter three, above. In *Early Morning*, 1922, (fig.4.54) he utilizes a completely different set of formal qualities and technical skills, more indebted to Impressionism at this stage of his career. The woman's slightly awkward position and the high viewpoint may have been influenced by Degas. The painting depicts his young lover Yvonne Aubiq, and it is probably the most personalized and erotic of all the nudes, due to the informality of the pose and the context of casual intimacy that it suggests, and despite its

²²⁶ Postle, 2006, p.20. See also Bruce Arnold, *William Orpen: Mirror to an Age* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981), p.77.

²²⁷ Upstone, 2005, p.24.

²²⁸ Ibid. p.27.

²²⁹ Ibid.

generic title. According to Smith, a high degree of personalization, such as this, is a necessary characteristic in a 'truly erotic work of art.'²³⁰

Another relationship which fits the criteria of artist and muse was that which existed between Francis Bacon and Henrietta Moreas.²³¹ John Berger describes the relationship between them as one of 'complicity' based on the fact that 'they both accepted the same proposition, namely that the worst had already happened!'²³² Moreas was one of the most famous and celebrated bohemians of the post-war period in London, a frequenter of the Colony Room, the Gargoyle Club and The French House. Bacon painted her at least sixteen times over a period of twenty years. As well as her friendship with Bacon she was the model and lover of both Lucian Freud and Maggi Hambling. She published a memoir, *Henrietta*, in 1994. In it, she recounts how she became a model by chance when she dropped out of secretarial college and out of the blue telephoned all the art schools in London asking for modelling work. When she realised the pay was more for figure than head, said agreed to model nude.²³³ She modelled at Camberwell Art School, Heatherley's, Kenington and Chelsea. 'The first time, standing naked on a platform with lots of eyes scrutinizing every inch of my body was rather unnerving' she wrote, 'but I soon became unself-conscious'.²³⁴ She met Lucian Freud at a party, immediately began a relationship with him and modelled for him for over a year.

Later Francis Bacon asked her to pose for him, but not directly. He couldn't work with the model present because, he said, 'if I like them, I cannot do the things which I inflict on them in my work'.²³⁵ Instead she posed, splayed on a bed, for photographs by John Deakin (fig.4.55). In her autobiography she related how Deakin did a series of photos shot from the feet up, but Bacon had wanted them shot from the head and they had to be redone. Moreas later discovered Deakin in a pub selling the first lot of photographs to a group of sailors.²³⁶

²³⁰ Smith, 2002, p.57.

²³¹ Moreas's real name was Audrey Wendy Abbott, 1931-1999. Katherine Mellor, 'Henrietta Moreas' in *Dictionary of Artist's Models*, ed. by Jill Berk Jiminez (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp.379-382.

²³² Berger, 2001, n.p.

²³³ Henrietta Moreas, *Henrietta* (London: Penguin, 1992), pp.23-4.

²³⁴ *Ibid.* p.24.

²³⁵ Borel, 1990, p.183, quoting Bacon in an interview with David Sylvester.

²³⁶ Moreas, 1994, pp.71-73.

It has been said that Bacon 'assassinated' bodies, to the extent that they can no longer be considered nudes in the conventional sense, but resemble 'écorchés'.²³⁷ Not content to represent the outward appearance of his subjects, Bacon wanted to convey the visceral sense of embodied being. Yet his *Portrait of Henrietta Moreas on a Blue Couch*, 1965 (fig.4.56), perhaps more than any of his other nude studies, encapsulates some of the qualities of the traditional reclining nude. Its sumptuous colour, its fairly traditional and uncomplicated pose, the curvaceousness of the body, all fix it firmly within the conventions of the traditional reclining nude, despite the contortions of the face. Other paintings in the same series, painted from Deakin's photographs, are less forgiving, such as *Lying Figure with Hypodermic Syringe*, 1963 (fig.4.57).

Maggi Hambling met Moreas in 1998, and beginning shortly thereafter, she drew her every day for two hundred and thirty five days. Attesting to the powerful presence of her model she declared, 'I have become Henrietta's subject, rather than she mine'.²³⁸ Moreas died on 6th Jan 1999, and Hambling continued to draw her in the hospital on her death bed and in her coffin on the morning of her funeral, then continued to draw from memory after her death.

Other instances of this practice of posthumous portraiture are cited in this in Jill Berk Jiminez's *Dictionary of Models*.²³⁹ Rossetti began painting *Beata Beatrix* (c.1864-70) approximately two years after Elizabeth Siddal's death. Pierre Bonnard painted his wife Marthe Boursin after her death, as he had painted her obsessively in life. Stanley Spencer continued to paint his ex-wife Hilda Carline after their divorce, and then after her death. When in 1971 George Dyer, Francis Bacon's lover, died in a Paris hotel room of a drug overdose, the iconography of suicide and desperation entered into Bacon's work and remained a constant theme subsequently. The figure of Dyer in *Triptych in memory of George Dyer*, 1971 appears again in *Triptych May June 1973*. These paintings and Bacon's relationship with Dyer are discussed at length in chapter five.

²³⁷ Borel, 1990, p.180.

²³⁸ Maggi Hambling, 'My Spirited Model', *The Guardian* (January 8, 1999).

²³⁹ Jill Berk Jiminez, 'The Eternal Vision', in *Dictionary of Artist's Models*, ed. by Jill Berk Jiminez (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp.31-36.

The Nude Portrait

Recently, there has been an increased interest in nude portraiture in Ireland as elsewhere.²⁴⁰ Nude portraiture is not an entirely new departure as it has its precedents in the history of art. Rubens painted a nude portrait of his wife Helene Fourment, *Het Pelsken* in 1630s (fig.4.58) It is a portrait in the proper sense, rather than the merely convenient use of his wife as a model, though it was intended for private use and was not sold or even exhibited publicly. Among modern artists, Pierre Bonnard specialised in nudes, using his wife Marthe as a model for many years. She is recognisable as a figure type in his work rather than for her facial features. Likewise, Picasso had a series of female partners who functioned as model and muse in his work, though these are more or less recognizable depending on the degree of abstraction with which they were painted. In both these cases, the works were more about the identity of the artist than the sitters. The women, whether named or not, more or less retained their relative anonymity despite repeated representation and public exhibition. The works therefore obey the conventions of the nude more than those of portraiture. A nude portrait, on the other hand, deliberately sets out to represent a particular model's identity and personality by depicting all of their physical characteristics and not just the face and hands, on which most portraiture relies.

Nude portraiture can take one of two forms. It can be a privately commissioned portrait in which the sitter is un-named and not recognised to any but his/her closest friends and associates. In such a case the painting conforms to the rules and conventions of portraiture and the person commissioning it has a considerable degree of control over the final image. Alternatively, the artist chooses the subject because of their physical characteristics or personality, they subject themselves to his/her artistic vision, and the painting is sold on or becomes part of a public collection. Consequently, the artist is in complete control of the image. However, some recent examples of nude portraiture have seemed to blur these boundaries and to conflate the genres of the portrait and the nude, and the roles of the sitter and the model. Mick O'Dea's *Reclining Nude*, 2010, (fig.4.29),

²⁴⁰ Steiner, 2010, p.69, writes about the trend in celebrity portraiture and 'the sudden popularity of life modelling classes' in the USA.

mentioned in the discussion on the status of the model, above, is a case in point. It functions as a traditional portrait because it was commissioned by the sitter, who presumably felt that the artist had achieved an acceptable likeness. The sitter's identity was not revealed when the picture was exhibited at the 2011 RHA show, or subsequently, but this is not necessarily unusual in a portrait commissioned by a private individual. For the viewer, however, an un-named sitter fulfils the same function as a professional model. She is a signifier for the body and the artist's response to it, and the painting is therefore governed by the conventions of the nude. In many cases it seems impossible to separate these two different approaches to two essentially different genres.

British painter Lucian Freud (1922-2012) had no difficulty reconciling these seemingly contradictory conventions of painting, referring to all his nudes as 'portraits' regardless of whether the sitter was named or not in the title or indeed whether they were a public or private figure. He explained his practice thus; 'My horror of the idyllic; and a growing awareness of the limited value of recording visually observed facts, has led me to work from people I really know. Whom else can I hope to portray with any degree of profundity?'²⁴¹ He looked for particularity of appearance and of personality that he could only find in people he related to, and that search led him to choose many untypical sitters, models that did not fit the idealized trope of the academic model, such as Julie Radford, who posed for *Benefits Supervisor Sleeping*, (fig.4.59) or Leigh Bowery, a performance artist whose forceful persona was equal to that of the artist's, thus making him a challenging subject. Freud's habit of painting those he knew was useful to him as an artist but he did not consider it relevant to the viewer's response to the finished work.

However, another kind of nude portraiture depends utterly on the viewer's recognition of the sitter. The recent increased interest in this latter type of nude portraiture depends to a large degree on the interest in celebrity in the media age. According to Steiner, this interest began in the 1960s, at the inception of post-modernism, when Pop Art began to focus on the 'real' and on celebrity culture.²⁴² It has come to fruition in the first years of the twenty first century, in every medium. The public's apparently insatiable thirst for

²⁴¹ Lucian Freud, *20th Century Portraits* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1978), cited in *Artist and Model* (Manchester: Whitworth Art Gallery, 1986), p.12.

²⁴² Steiner, 2010, p.46.

confessional autobiography has resulted in the growth of non-fiction, memoir, and reality T.V. shows of all types, from the pseudo-scientific to the downright exploitative. In the visual arts it is most clearly identified with the confessional work of artists such as Tracey Emin, who uses the most intimate details of her life as the basis for her work. The celebrity nude portrait fits into this schema, the willingness to 'bare all' taken as proof of a greater truth and honesty than can be achieved with a clothed subject. The nude portrait can be regarded as an entirely new sub-genre in Irish art. It simply would not have been acceptable in the past for well known personalities to be painted nude. We have seen how Kathleen Kearney, who posed nude for Sarah Purser in the 1920s, apparently did not even tell her family about it.

In 2008 Irish-American artist Daniel Mark Duffy began working on a series of nude paintings representing well-known Irish women. He is in the process of painting a series of pictures of older women who had made a contribution to society, and to show the vulnerability of the aging process in their bodies. He intends eventually to exhibit this body of work in Ireland. Most of the women who agreed to take part in the project did so because they identified strongly with his premise that older women become socially and professionally invisible, and that society's gaze should be re-focussed on them in a positive way.

Mischief, 2011 (fig.4.60) is a preparatory drawing for a painting of Pat Donlon which is, as yet, unfinished. Donlon, former director of the National Library and the first woman director of any national institution, said it was 'flattering to be asked. And when you're sixty five, it's doubly flattering to be asked. I don't expect to be asked again'. She agreed that older women become invisible, adding that 'I don't feel invisible, I don't feel any different than I ever did'.²⁴³

Writer and journalist Nell McCafferty, is also aware of the aging process and the invisibility and loss of power that accompanies it. She wonders how long she will remain mobile, how much more she can do professionally, and admits to thinking increasingly about death. McCafferty utterly rejects the values of the beauty industry, and she doesn't believe in dieting, colouring her hair or shaving her legs, much less more invasive solutions to ageing such as Botox. She advises women to 'just be, don't apologise for

²⁴³ Pat Donlon in conversation with the author, 06/05/2011.

what you are'.²⁴⁴ She also believes she looks better naked than clothed but at the time she was asked to pose she had had a heart attack, had gained weight, and was depressed and emotional. She did not like herself, which was unusual for her. She was aware of the dead muscle in her heart. McCafferty disagreed with Duffy's insistence that he sees beauty in old age and decay, she 'just wanted to put it out there', but listening to him 'he had me believing it', she said. In a small way, she said, her posing nude 'helped women'.²⁴⁵

Both of these confident women felt they were collaborating in a project, and saw themselves as subjects rather than models. Duffy too, insists that it is a collaborative project, and freely and repeatedly acknowledges his indebtedness to his models generosity. His work depends to a great extent on the viewer's recognition of the subject, and plays with their previous assumptions about that person. In the case of a very public person like McCafferty this will inevitably lead to strong reactions, both positive and negative. The first of the finished paintings to be exhibited was *Nell McCafferty*, 2008, (fig.4.61) at the RHA annual exhibition in 2008. It caused a controversy in the press, and on RTE's *Late Late Show*, largely because in the interview McCafferty exploited the potential for publicity by discussing the bravado involved in the act of posing nude rather than the issues underlying the artist's creative vision.²⁴⁶ As she said, well known people come 'clothed in their history', and as far as she was concerned her fame and notoriety were greater than Duffy's and so it was she who had created the sensation, not he.²⁴⁷ Asked if he had regretted using her as a model, Duffy admitted that he had, briefly.²⁴⁸ McCafferty is a seasoned media performer and she implicitly understood that, unlike professional models, celebrities are 'not rendered irrelevant by their images', but rather each new representation of them serves to 'increase their cultural value, focusing on them rather than their media replica'.²⁴⁹ McCafferty embraced the project and the experience, and it became, for her, a way of perpetuating her public persona and guaranteeing her media exposure, as well as showing older women in a positive light. She saw no

²⁴⁴ Nell McCafferty in conversation with the author, 07/07/2012.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Duffy in conversation with the author, 10/08/2008.

²⁴⁷ Nell McCafferty in conversation with the author, 07/07/2012.

²⁴⁸ Duffy in conversation with the author, 10/08/2008.

²⁴⁹ Steiner, 2010, p.47.

contradiction in that position, as the artist had used her fame to establish his reputation in Ireland, so she used his painting to perpetuate that fame. It was, to her, a fair exchange. Despite some loss of control of the project due to the public performance of one of his models, Duffy's project seeks to engage positively with the idea of celebrity, and in the process to make of the model a 'role model'.²⁵⁰ Ironically, though, one of his most successful drawings of the series is *Helen*, 2009, (fig.4.62). The subject is the artist's ninety-two year old aunt, who is since deceased. This drawing epitomises the ambitions of the entire project in the way it movingly illustrates the frailty and vulnerability of the aged sitter. It is the very fact of her anonymity that allows the artist to transpose his ideas from the particular to the general, and to create a universal motif of vulnerable old age.

The subject of nude celebrity portraiture was also the subject of Gerry Horgan's documentary film, *Naked*.²⁵¹ The film features three artists, Nick Miller, Una Sealy and Sahoko Blake, working on portraits of three well known personalities, journalist John Waters, curator and critic Gemma Tipton and Olympic swimmer Melanie Nocher, respectively. Gemma Tipton considered the process as a 'collaboration' between herself and the artist. She had posed nude before, for Nick Miller, in 2006 and was comfortable with the process, while admitting that 'taking all your clothes off, giving that responsibility to another creative person is a huge giving up of all the things we do to determine who we are'. On seeing the finished work, *Critic and Horse*, 2011, (fig.4.63) she declared 'It's definitely me'.²⁵² She explained that each person, in her view, has different selves, and that Sealy had painted 'the self she wanted to be'.²⁵³ So happy was she with the result that she bought the painting, because it represented the version of herself that she wanted to have as a reminder of her youthful self as she aged.²⁵⁴ John Waters also discussed the idea of the portrait as self-revelation. The nude, he said is 'the person without the mask. Our clothes are really various layers of mask that we put on in order to present ourselves to the world and when you take them off you must in

²⁵⁰ Steiner, 2010, p.81.

²⁵¹ Made by Midas Productions, *Naked* was broadcast by RTE on June 14th 2011 as part of the *Arts Lives* series.

²⁵² Gemma Tipton, speaking in *Naked*, 2011.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ I am grateful to Una Sealy for this information.

some way be able to get some insight into what's inside the person'. He hoped the artist would see him for who he is.²⁵⁵

The third model, swimmer Melanie Nocher, as a sportswoman, thought more about her body in terms of its fitness, strength and usefulness. She was well matched as a subject to the artist Sahoko Blake who spoke about her 'intense fascination with the beauty and power of human anatomy'.²⁵⁶ Blake doesn't see herself as the originator of the work but merely a copyist, crediting nature with the creative process. She insisted that the model should also sign the finished work, as a co-creator. The model, while adding her signature to the piece, rejected this notion saying 'I just did the standing bit, you did the art bit'.²⁵⁷

The comments made by both Tipton and Waters seem to suggest that they felt the artist had a power to uncover, literally, their true identities, in a way that could not be achieved if they were clothed. Each subscribed in their way to the idea of clothing as a mask, a layer of culture that clouds the essential nature of the person, and functions as a barrier between the self and the world. However, the question of whether the artist has achieved a true likeness, brings another traditional function of portraiture, the need to flatter the subject, into the discussion. It must be remembered that this was a T.V. documentary, and the presence of a television crew in the room, not to mention the assumed 'presence' of the audience, complicated the relationship of artist and model, a fact acknowledged by Sealy. The television camera imposed a degree of artificiality on the normally private process and it also necessitated a degree of self editing that would not otherwise be necessary. As Steiner has observed, 'In a world of simulacra, identity is a matter of copies and representations, and everyone is constantly modelling'.²⁵⁸

As the popularity of nude portraiture has grown, so has the desire to engage in many other nude activities, as we have seen. This trend can roughly be dated to the Women's institute charity fund-raising calendar in Britain in 1999, which inspired the film *Calendar Girls*, in 2003. Following this example, many organisations began to produce nude calendars as fund-raising ventures. The film was adapted for the stage in 2008, and

²⁵⁵ John Waters, speaking in *Naked*, 2011.

²⁵⁶ Sahoko Blake, speaking in *Naked*, 2011.

²⁵⁷ Melanie Nocher, speaking in *Naked*, 2011.

²⁵⁸ Steiner, 2010, p.67.

played to Dublin and Belfast audiences in 2011 and 2012. The popularity of the play, which is regularly re-staged, illustrates the public's desire for ever greater 'realism' in story telling. Not only is the action live rather than recorded in a play but the cast is usually made up of celebrity actors, well known figures from popular television who can maximise interest and publicity. Inevitably the pre show publicity will focus on how they have prepared their bodies for the role, in terms of trips to the gym or the salon.

As well as nude calendars, the trend towards public nudity has grown to include other events such as the *Dip in the Nip*, a charity swim begun in 2009 by Máire Garvey and Gráinne Gilmartin. In 2010 the event included men for the first time, and was followed up with the production of a calendar and a photographic exhibition in the Wine Street Wellness Centre, Sligo.

In other events the raising of money is supplanted by the idea of self-empowerment as a reason to be photographed nude. In 2010, fifty-six people in Cork took part in the *Naked Bike Ride* as part of the city's Cycling Arts Festival, in turn part of a larger event first organised since 2001 in twenty-five countries world-wide. This event had no fund-raising function, but was intended to encourage cycling and expressions of public nudity, invariably seen as 'freeing'. A plethora of T.V. programmes such as *How to Look Good Naked* (channel 4) have promulgated the idea that to reveal oneself naked will help to dispel fears and concerns relating to body dysmorphia, which is especially common in women. The November 2012 edition of the Irish women's magazine *Stellar* featured an article in which six young women appeared nude, and were reported as finding the experience personally uplifting and encouraging. The desire to 'get naked' and express your true self also has commercial possibilities. Boudoir photography is now available in many towns in Ireland, and growing in popularity. Women come to the studio for a hair and make-up session, before being photographed nude or wearing lingerie, complete with soft focus lighting effects. In recent years pole dancing classes have sprung up throughout the UK, promoted as opportunities for fitness and 'empowerment'.²⁵⁹

In 1977 George Eisler observed that 'commercialism of sensual experience, thanks to the mass-media has...brought with it a massive standardization and the emergence of the

²⁵⁹ Natasha Walter, *Living Dolls* (London: Virago, 2010), pp.3-5, p.41.

universal sex symbol against which reality must inevitably compete'. This 'synthetic ideal' he continues, changes quickly with the fashion and exerts 'a rigorous dictatorship'.²⁶⁰ At around the same time Susie Orbach, in her groundbreaking work *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, described how women 'are encouraged to aspire to physical perfection through a rhetoric of power'.²⁶¹ According to Natasha Walter, despite decades of feminist activism, little has changed in this regard. As she observes in her recent work *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism*, the liberation that feminists once imagined as involving an 'honest acceptance of girls' sexuality has now morphed into something altogether less enabling'.²⁶² She argues that the image of female perfection to which women are encouraged to aspire in the West, has become more and more 'defined by sexual allure', as part of a new 'hypersexual culture', that is sold to women in 'quasi-feminist rhetoric' of freedom and empowerment.²⁶³

In her book *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolfe describes these efforts of the beauty industry as a political backlash against the gains feminism has made for women. As women gained political and economic power, she maintains, this backlash was part of a strategy to keep them feeling insecure about their appearance. It is, she writes, part of a 'currency system...determined by politics'.²⁶⁴ In fact the driving forces behind the beauty industry are more about economics than politics, though, of course, the two are inseparable.

Lynda Nead writes about 'body-fascism', maintaining that 'as health has become increasingly commodified, so we have been enticed to consume by the prospect of the perfectibility of the body and have been surrounded by advertising images displaying young, able and beautiful female bodies'.²⁶⁵

These are not simply puritanical arguments, as feminists are often accused of making. Sexual explicitness is not at issue here. In fact, Wolfe endorses explicitness, she maintains, 'if explicit meant honest and revealing'.²⁶⁶ In pornography, from which so much fashion imagery is derived, the 'representation (of female bodies) is heavily

²⁶⁰ George Eisler, *From Naked to Nude: Life Drawing in the Twentieth Century* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1977), p.6.

²⁶¹ Susie Orbach, *Fat is a Feminist Issue* (New York and London: Paddington Press, 1978), p.66.

²⁶² Walter, 2010, p.68.

²⁶³ Ibid. pp.3-5

²⁶⁴ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (London: Vintage, 1991), p.120.

²⁶⁵ Nead, 1997, p.77.

²⁶⁶ Wolfe, 1991, p.135.

censored', it is 'not explicit, but dishonest'.²⁶⁷ The genuine concern of some feminists today is that through all of these influences 'women are being surrounded by a culture in which they are all body and only body'.²⁶⁸ We need to ask whether the current trend for nude portraiture is a breaking away from the repressions and strictures of the past, or whether, as Steiner wonders, it is 'merely 'the replacement of a traditional misogynist plot with what has become a pop-feminist cliché'.²⁶⁹

The Nude Self-Portrait

Most figurative artists have painted self portraits, whether in the cause of self-aggrandizement, self-examination, or even for as banal a reason as the lack of availability of other models. Fewer artists have chosen to represent themselves nude, but there are still many examples in the history of art, including Durer's, *Nude Self Portrait*, c.1503, Jacopo Pontormo, 1525, Schiele, (several), Van Dyck, Bonnard (several, including *The Boxer*, 1931, *S.P in Bathroom Mirror*, 1938-45), and others. Gabriel Metsu's nude self portrait, in *A Hunter Getting Dressed after Bathing*, c.1654-6 (fig.4.64) shown in the National Gallery's 2009 Metsu exhibition was un-expected because it was in complete contrast to the rest of the artist's oeuvre.

Among Irish artists very few have chosen the nude as a form of self representation, though there are three in the National Self Portrait Collection, Jack Crabtree's, *Self Portrait*, 1988, pencil on paper, (fig.4.65) Dorothy Cross's, *Overlap*, 1991, cibachrome print mounted on wood, (fig.4.66) and Graham Gingles, *Self Portrait*, 1998, mixed media box.(fig.4.67)²⁷⁰

Robert Ballagh has painted himself nude on several occasions. He had painted his wife Betty nude in *Inside No.3* (fig.3.22) in 1979 and felt that he should then do a 'male counterpart'. He thought that because he had used his wife as a model in the first picture,

²⁶⁷ Ibid. pp.135-6.

²⁶⁸ Walter, 2010, p.125.

²⁶⁹ Steiner, 2010, p.132. Steiner's discussion covers several different media and here she is commenting on the representation of women in popular fiction, specifically Tracy Chevalier's *Girl with Pearl Earring*.

²⁷⁰ William Gallagher, *The National Self Portrait Collection of Ireland, 1989-1999* (Limerick: Limerick University Press, 2006).

then ‘honesty demanded’ that he should paint himself in the sequel, because both were intended as part of a series depicting the artist’s family, a concept he felt was frowned upon at the time, especially for realists. He didn’t like the idea of painting himself nude at all, but as he said, ‘I braced myself for it and decided to do it’.²⁷¹ The painting, *Upstairs No.3*, 1982, (fig.4.68) carries the theme of the domestic interior from downstairs to upstairs, and depicts both husband and wife in the bedroom. Because the male figure is naked from the waist down it attracted some controversy, and a print of the painting was removed by the police from a gallery in Galway, an incident that was reported on the RTE radio news. However, Ballagh believes that people have misread his intentions, as he sees the female figure in the painting as the more ‘in charge sexually, because she’s looking at a Japanese pillow book, in which there is ‘an outrageous depiction of a Japanese member...which to this day, nobody noticed’.²⁷²

Unconcerned by the controversy surrounding *Upstairs No.3*, Ballagh returned to nude self portraiture in *Self Portrait in the Italian Style*, 2006, (fig.4.69) He was initially influenced by Lucian Freud’s *Nude Self Portrait*, (fig.4.70) which he had seen in the Whitechapel Gallery, in London. ‘I just thought it was a great picture because he seemed to be defiant to the last’. Seeing Freud’s picture immediately suggested to him ‘well maybe you should try another one, and I just said no, I couldn’t bear all that controversy again’, so the idea was shelved, but it remained in the back of his mind. The painting finally came about through a silly joke between friends. Friends Campbell Bruce and Jackie Stanley came back from the Venice Biennale and they brought Ballagh a pair of underpants with a detail of Michelangelo’s David printed on them, and these suggested to Ballagh a way of doing the painting.²⁷³ ‘I can do this picture that is a nude self-portrait but it’s not a nude self-portrait...like so much work dealing with the nude, it’s about fun, it’s about humour’, he said.²⁷⁴

Nude self portraits by female Irish artists are relatively rare and one strikingly original example is Elizabeth Cope’s, *Nude Self-Portrait*, undated (fig.4.71) Cope approaches

²⁷¹ Ballagh in conversation with the author, 15/05/2010.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid. Campbell Bruce was head of fine art in NCAD and his wife is a painter.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

painting through the materiality of the medium and she is more interested in the process of painting than she is in the value of particular kinds of subject matter. For her 'all painting is abstraction'. However, she acknowledges a problem for women artists, 'seen to be fiddling around with still life', and wants to be seen to engage with more serious subjects.²⁷⁵ Hence she is a prolific painter of the nude.

Her nudes have been described as sexually violent images, but it is a mundane comic-book type of violence that is underwritten by black humour. It is the artist's way of addressing 'the ridiculous vulnerability of women' while at the same time giving expression to their strength and durability.²⁷⁶ Her self-portrait is more indebted to the ancient Irish *Síle-na-Gig* tradition than it is to the more decorous and decorative conventions of the reclining nude. However, she is an instinctive painter who does not dwell on symbolism or agonise over interpretations of meaning. Her work addresses not what it 'looks like to be human, but what it feels like', and it reflects her personality which is hyper-active and voluble.²⁷⁷ Her self-portrait combines a sense of outrageous fun with a deeply serious commitment to the interrogation of the body through the medium of paint.

The efficacy of self-portraiture lies in the fact that it immediately erases the inequality between artist and model, so that 'the model engages the real and incites interaction and empathy'.²⁷⁸ The same can be said of performance art. While Amanda Coogan rejects the term 'the nude' as defined in the tradition of European art, as an appropriate description of her work, she has nevertheless performed a piece which, while presenting its own challenges to the tradition, complies with some of its aesthetic forms. In *After Manzoni*, 2000 (fig.4.72) she autographed her own back, mimicking the gesture made by Italian artist Piero Manzoni when he signed one of his 'living sculptures' in 1961. The gesture was intended as a rebuke to the idea of the male creative genius as inscribed in modernist thinking, and as such it offers a critique of the kinds of images of the (male) artist and (female) model in the studio that have been discussed above. Coogan has

²⁷⁵ Elizabeth Cope in conversation with the author, 03/07/2012.

²⁷⁶ Hilary Hope Guise, 'Notes on the Paintings', <<http://elizabethcope.com/essay>> [accessed 22 May 2012].

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Steiner, 2010, p.83.

subverted that role by removing the male artist and assuming his identity into her own, which now becomes that of artist and model conflated. Uncomfortable with what she sees as the exploitative nature of the nude, she is only prepared to engage with it when she can dictate the terms of the representation. Crucially, this centres on her use of her own body rather than that of a passive model.

However, in several ways the work or at least the photographic image of it, conforms to the aesthetic norms of the genre. The back view, the contraposto pose with the head turned and the right arm lifted, the way the light falls on the body from the right adding to the subtle modelling of the form and the subtle tonality all recall elements of classical painting. It is this element of display that Rozsika Parker calls into question when she notes that 'women performance artists who use their own bodies as the instrument of their work continually live on the knife-edge of the possibility of joining the spectacle of women'.²⁷⁹ An alternative reading of Coogan's self portrait might see it as one which dares to be beautiful, but in a way in which the feminine presence re-states itself powerfully as both object and subject, and is therefore autonomous.

For other female artists, the revelation of the self in a nude self portrait is more directly part of their political activism. In relation to the discussion on the pressures for women to conform to a particular image within consumer society, Nead has observed that 'the image of the 'imperfect' or incomplete female body can only be managed within consumer culture by rendering it invisible, or by subjecting it to... stereotypical narratives'.²⁸⁰

Mary Duffy (b.1961) is an artist and equality rights activist, who was disabled through the effects of the drug Thalidomide.²⁸¹ *Cutting the Ties that Bind* (fig.4.73) is an eight-panel photographic piece with accompanying text, commissioned by the Arts Council of Ireland in 1987 for a touring exhibition for schools entitled 'Heroes'. The first image

²⁷⁹ Rozsika Parker, 'Feminist Art Practices in 'Women's Images of Men', 'About Time', and 'Issue', in *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970-1985*, ed. by Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (London, Pandora, 1987), p.236.

²⁸⁰ Nead, 1997, p.78.

²⁸¹ Thalidomide was first produced in West Germany in 1953. It was marketed in Europe between 1957-61, for the treatment of insomnia and morning sickness in pregnant women, but was withdrawn after it was found to cause deformation of foetal limbs as well as blindness, deafness and defects in vital organs. It remains in use in South America.

depicts a standing figure wrapped in strips of white fabric resembling bandages. Subsequent images show the gradual removal of the fabric to reveal a partly draped, armless figure that resembles antique statuary such as the Venus de Milo, with all its associations of perfect beauty. The final image in the series shows the completely naked body of the artist, striding away from the discarded pile of wrappings.

Duffy began to explore her own image as a disabled woman because 'on a very fundamental level I did not feel seen...I never felt that I received a response to my presence in the world that was clear and unambiguous...it always felt filtered through an ablest perspective...Being seen and being understood is central to my work'.²⁸²

In her work she hopes to oppose cultural norms, and the allusion to classical statuary in this piece challenges ideas concerning ideal beauty in both art and society. As Lynda Nead points out, disabled women are doubly subjected to stereotype, firstly because of their disability and secondly, in a gendered way, as 'deviations from particular sets of feminine norms'.²⁸³ As Duffy explains; 'I had to search for an image of disability I could be proud of, an image that did not reek of emotion or pity, an image that reflected disability as being a part of being human and all the richness and diversity which that entails'.²⁸⁴

Cutting the Ties that Bind is a triumphant piece. In the last frame there is the powerful image of the figure striding away from the restraining, disguising wrappings. As well as revealing an alternative and equivalent physical reality, this image 'takes on the additional metaphorical force of the rejection of the cultural, social and economic restraints that face disabled women'.²⁸⁵

Another of Duffy's performance pieces, *Stories of a Body*, 1989, (fig.4.74) was inspired by a visit to a new G.P. in a town to which the artist had recently moved. The doctor responded to meeting her by making a speech about the tragedy of Thalidomide, and the responsibility of the medical profession, that left her feeling that he needed and wanted her forgiveness. She, wanting only to be treated as any other patient, was angry because this brought back memories of the disempowerment she had felt as a child, and of how

²⁸² <www.maryduffy.ie> [accessed 23 May 2010] .

²⁸³ Nead, 1997, p.77.

²⁸⁴ <www.artscouncil.ie/Publications/Heroes.pdf> [accessed 23 May 2010].

²⁸⁵ Nead, 1997, p.78.

she had been repeatedly 'objectified and desensitized' by the medical profession.²⁸⁶ Her performance was based on adult memories of the child's feelings of frustration and humiliation. In it, she stood naked on the stage, while abstract linear forms were projected onto her body, as a kind of protective shield against the scrutiny of the medical profession, which all the while she described verbally. As well as being highly critical of the medical profession, inherent in the piece was a challenge to the audience. As she stood before them, naked, and recounted her humiliation, she was making them question the nature of their voyeurism.²⁸⁷ As Mo White, who was present at the performance, described, 'where her story tells of the gaze that is directed at her, the audience is forced to examine their own gaze, which reproduces exactly the same conditions of looking as she tells of...My gaze, as a member of the audience, is returned and I am implicated in this process of looking. It has revealed something of myself in me'.²⁸⁸

Duffy's work has influenced British artist Matt Fraser, who was also disabled by Thalidomide. His performance piece, *Tali-domida Vale Tudo*, 2005, (fig.4.75) was based on his research into the continuing use of Thalidomide by pregnant women in Brazil. It was performed in Zagreb as part of an event entitled *Physical Behaviour and Cultural Apartheid in a Body-Fascist World*, which included performance and lectures.²⁸⁹ Duffy's work probably comes closer than any other example in Irish art to Steiner's call for an art that can confront and reverse hierarchies of power, and effect social change.

Working in performance, with herself as model, she becomes a 'role model', with all the 'potential for transformation, healing and growth released in the perception of and identification with the model', that that involves.²⁹⁰ This is the blending of the aesthetic and the ethical that Steiner predicted would be the product of post-post-modernism.

Irish Art and Feminism

In the 1970s feminist thinking began to identify the ways in which representations of women in art could be seen to be dependent on male economic and sexual power over

²⁸⁶ <www.maryduffy.ie> [accessed 23 May 2010].

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Mo White, 'Mary Duffy', *Circa*, 72 (1995), p.52.

²⁸⁹ The performance took place on 1st June 2005 in the MM Centre in Zagreb.

²⁹⁰ Steiner, 2010, p.81.

women, and that their continued production served to reinforce and perpetuate that unbalanced power relationship.²⁹¹ Women artists and art historians became concerned with the way in which their respective disciplines were instrumental in preserving patriarchal power and in contributing to accepted clichés concerning gender difference not just in art but in society.²⁹²

The ideas within feminism can be seen to have developed simultaneously with post-modernism; both are systems which are characterised by polyvalence and diversity. Feminist ideas were indebted to poststructuralist theory, to Foucault's idea of the role of power in the construction of knowledge, and Derrida's view of history as an unstable text, susceptible to multiple interpretations and constant change. The key to understanding hegemony and how to challenge it lay in knowing how to identify and manipulate the language with which it was perpetuated.²⁹³ For those concerned primarily with the visual arts, image functioned as text within this argument, and therefore images had to be interrogated in relation to their function in propagating patriarchy.

Feminism was especially indebted to Ferdinand de Saussure's analysis of 'difference', 'the inclusion of an implied opposite in the definition or meaning of a given term (as in masculine-feminine) and Derrida's identification of such binary oppositions as inherently hierarchic within the Western tradition'.²⁹⁴ Finally, from Lacanian psychoanalysis came the idea of gender as a 'socially constructed category', which focussed feminist artists on the project of developing an alternative vision of gender and new ways in which to represent it.²⁹⁵

Within feminist analysis of art, the nude became especially problematised, as one of its primary functions was clearly and undeniably a stimulus for male desire. Crucially, the debates about the representation of the female body in art were influenced by the debates on pornography that were ongoing in the USA and Great Britain at that time. While we have already seen that exceptions to the normal patterns of male patronage and collection have existed historically, as was the case in Queen Caroline of Naples's patronage of

²⁹¹ Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1981).

²⁹² Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* (New York: Harper Collins, Icon Editions, 1992).

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., p.3.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

female nudes by Ingres, these were cases in which the privilege of class could override the repression of gender.²⁹⁶ We must also acknowledge the diversity of women's pleasure as viewers, and respect their autonomy to exercise that pleasure and to recognize that moral or other objections to images of the nude depend on points of view that can be informed by a number of influences, whether social, political or religious. These considerations notwithstanding, it is clear that the nude in art, and especially the reclining female nude, was well established to serve the male gaze and that its conventions and norms had been tailored to that viewpoint since antiquity.²⁹⁷

The argument for women then, both as makers and consumers of art, was whether the subject should be avoided as inappropriate or whether there was a possibility of finding new and subjective ways of representing the female body outside of the long established patriarchal system of art. There was considerable disagreement over these relative positions, the debate roughly dividing along constructivist/essentialist lines.

Constructivists saw gender itself as a socially constructed concept, rather than as an inherent characteristic of the subject, dependent on their sex. They therefore rejected attendant notions of femininity which attached to traditional images of the female nude, conveyed through its conventional poses and its dominant mode of display and spectacle. They further maintained that to focus on the woman's body confined her to the sphere of nature, a position to which she had been relegated for centuries through male hegemony, and denied her intellectual capacity. This separation of the body from the mind has been identified by Susan Bordo as the 'Cartesian Masculinisation of Thought', a process which began in the Enlightenment and thereafter played a crucial role in the social and political separation of the sexes.²⁹⁸ There was a deep distrust within this viewpoint of the ability of women artists to redress this balance through the production of their own images of the female body. As Rozsika Parker wrote in 1987, 'somewhat bitter experiences have shown feminists that so-called 'positive images of women', though an important means of consciousness raising amongst women, have not been able to radically challenge the

²⁹⁶ See the discussion of Queen Caroline's patronage of Ingres's nudes in chapter one of this thesis.

²⁹⁷ Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2003).

²⁹⁸ Susan Bordo, 'The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought', *Signs* II.3 (Spring, 1986), 439-56. An analysis of Bordo's seminal essay forms part of the discussion in chapter one of this thesis.

narrow meanings and connotations of women in art'.²⁹⁹ She further maintained that 'because meanings depend on how the art is seen, from what ideological position it is received, the most decisively feminist of a woman can be represented as body, as nature, as object for male possession'.³⁰⁰ Women artists who were influenced by these ideas turned away from the body and traditional art practice to show how images of women are culturally produced and reproduced. They embraced the new media of video, performance and installation in order to make art outside the confines of the gallery system as a way of drawing attention to the commodification of the art product and the concomitant commodification of images of women's bodies in Western culture. These new media offered a 'strategy of resistance/resilience' outside of the established commercialism of the studio which was identified as a central function of patriarchal capitalism. Along with the theory of the gaze, they were the most powerful tool of the women's movement to create alternative representations of the feminine.³⁰¹

In contrast to the constructivist view, those who believed in the essential difference of women in their embodiment and in their lived experience felt that femaleness, being centred in the body and known only to women, should not only be articulated but celebrated in art. Feminists of this type advocated a celebration of the female body in all its functions and corporeality. Subjects such as pregnancy and childbirth, so long shrouded in silence and privacy, were seen as appropriate images of women because those events were so central to most women's lived experience.

Pauline Cummins's *Celebration, the beginning of labour*, 1984 (fig.4.76) celebrates childbirth as a joyous and sensual event in a woman's life, as something to be celebrated in song and dance rather than veiled in secrecy and shame. As she said, 'I wanted it as a tribal remembrance of women and the importance of childbirth'.³⁰²

Rita Duffy also depicts pregnancy, in one of the panels of her *Self Portraits* (fig.4.77). Here the artist uses humour and irony to represent the many different selves that constitute a woman, as mother, lover, worker and housewife. She shows the balancing act that is involved in fulfilling all of these roles simultaneously, and the apparent chaos

²⁹⁹ Parker, 1987, p.236.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ There is a detailed discussion on theories of the male gaze in the introductory chapter to this thesis.

³⁰² Pauline Cummins, Ailbhe Smyth, Beverley Jones and Pat Murphy, 'Image Making: Image Breaking', *Circa*, 32 (1987), 13-19 (p.18).

that emerges when the public mask of the working woman falls away to reveal the reality beneath.

While there has been a general shift within feminist art from an initial disregard of the body to a recognition of body politics and the focus on 'the inescapable relationship between embodiment, power and knowledge', in practice there has been considerable overlap between these relative positions for many women artists.³⁰³

This is especially evident in the work of Pauline Cummins, whose first collaborative work with Canadian artist Sandra Vida, *The Autonomous Eye*, 1992, (fig.4.78) was just such 'a response to the debates surrounding the female body in the 1980s and 1990s'.³⁰⁴ Made initially as part of an exhibition entitled *The Instability of the Feminist Subject*, in Banff, Canada, it set out to question whether female artists, 'looking back with the power gained from shared experience, could undermine the power of male framing?'³⁰⁵ In the piece, both artists are naked as they move around a space filming each other filming each other, 'as if to emphasise that the nude is a production of the lens, the eye and the mind'.³⁰⁶ The artists thus take control of the viewpoint to a certain extent, each being both filmed and filming, subject and object, sign and signifier. However, other viewpoints are integrated into the performance via the gaze of the audience and the reflections of the filmed images in strategically positioned mirrors on the stage, drawing attention to the fact that, as objects, it is impossible, ultimately, to retain subjectivity. The position of one inevitably compromises the integrity of the other. This work does not purport to make a more authentic image but to illustrate the way in which images are manufactured, how the process operates and the inherent difficulty within it for the female subject. The artists don't make any claims that they can offer a more positive alternative view of the female subject, but they maintain that 'if there is no possibility for autonomy, *The Autonomous Eye* reminds us that emancipation can nevertheless reside in the awareness of how everything is constructed, controlled and monitored'.³⁰⁷

³⁰³ Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, *Feminist theory and the Body: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) p.17.

³⁰⁴ Mireille Perron, *Between One and Another* (Paris: Centre Culturel Irlandais, 2012) n.p.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

We have already seen, in discussions on censorship and on bohemianism in previous chapters, how social change often came a decade or more later to Ireland than to larger, more industrialized and urbanized societies. Writing in 1987 Joan Fowler commented that 'feminist issues are only just beginning to take effect', in Irish art.³⁰⁸

The American art historian and critic Lucy Lippard had visited Ireland in 1984 and found little art which in her view could be termed 'activist'.³⁰⁹ Instead, she wrote that 'the complexity of Irish political life appears to be paralleled by the layered, contradictory images that I often found tantalizingly indirect'.³¹⁰ It is interesting that she used the very term 'indirect' which Brian O'Doherty had used to describe approaches to the nude in Irish art more than a decade earlier.

Two issues emerge from Lippard's observations, firstly the idea of indirectness in dealing with feminist issues, and secondly, the nature of activist art. Her identification of indirectness in art could be seen to be an integral part of an Irish approach, not just to feminist approaches to art but to politics in general. Ireland is a socially and culturally homogenous society and, despite the sometimes entrenched hatreds that long survived the Civil War, its political culture has latterly veered towards a more consensual approach. If the feminist art world was 'comparatively insubstantial in Ireland', then this was probably due in part to the nature of Irish political culture.³¹¹ Ailbhe Smyth suggests that the women's movement in Ireland grew out of the initial 1968 ad hoc committee comprising rights organizations such as the Irish Housewives association, the Irish Countrywomen's association and others as much as it developed from the more radical liberationist organizations that followed.³¹² The focus was on legislative change to

³⁰⁸ Joan Fowler, 'Contemporary Women Artists: Practices and Issues into the Future', in *Irish Women Artists from the Eighteenth Century to the Present Day* (Dublin: NGI; Douglas Hyde Gallery, 1987), pp.71-78 (p.71).

³⁰⁹ Joan Fowler, 'Speaking of Gender...Expressionism, Feminism and Sexuality', in *A New Tradition: Irish Art of the Eighties* (Dublin: Douglas Hyde Gallery, 1990), pp.53-67.

³¹⁰ Lucy Lippard, 'Activating Activist Art', *Circa*, 17 (July/August, 1984), 11-17. Lippard was comparing the situation in Ireland to that in the USA, where there was a more developed community art scene evidenced by the existence of organizations such as PADD (Political Art Documentation/Distribution).

³¹¹ Fowler, 1987, p.72.

³¹² The 1970 committee was comprised of ten organizations of 'established – or establishment women', and was set up to investigate discrimination against women in Ireland. It produced a memo to government in 1970 which established the Committee on the Status of Women. Ailbhe Smyth, 'The Contemporary Women's Movement' in *Women's Studies International Forum, Special Issue: Feminism in Ireland*, ed. by Ailbhe Smyth (New York: Pergamon, 1988), 1988, p.233.

improve the status of women in the home and in the workplace and Smyth remembers 'relatively little theorizing around the areas of concern'.³¹³

That is not to suggest, however, that Irish women artists did not respond to feminist thinking, merely that their strategies were less confrontational and more subtle. Irish women artists were no doubt exercised by feminist ideas but their practice seldom involved some of the extreme feminist interventions that were seen in the USA for example. As artist Pauline Cummins wrote prior to the establishment of the Women Artists Action Group in 1987, 'women artists have reacted, alone in their studios, but until now there has been no collective concerted response'.³¹⁴

Moreover, the aim of WAAG, which was to instigate collective practices that addressed women's issues more directly, was not ultimately sustainable. As Fionna Barber explains it, 'the contradictions present from the outset between feminist aims of collectivity and the necessity of individual artists to develop their own professional practice became hard to reconcile'.³¹⁵ Barber's comment highlights the second issue that emerges from Lippard's comment on Irish feminist art; that is the inherent difficulty in reconciling autonomous art practice with social and political action. The idea of the autonomy of art as 'art for art's sake' has been challenged in post-modernism, but artists are individuals who strive to find visual expression for their own ideas. Yet at the same time they are social beings, who are influenced by the political and cultural milieu in which they live, and which often impacts upon the work they make. For feminists in particular, whose rallying cry was 'the personal is the political', there is an implicit contradiction here, and it hinges on the difference between art that is socially engaged and 'activist' art. The former primarily serves the individual artist's voice while the latter primarily serves a cause.³¹⁶ The indistinctness which may be seen to characterize Irish feminist art is at least partly due to the relative lack of extreme politics attached to the women's movement in Ireland.

³¹³ Ibid., p.337.

³¹⁴ Pauline Cummins, 'The Women Artists Action Group', in *Women's Studies International Forum*, ed. by Ailbhe Smyth, 1988, p.403. WAAG continued until 1991. Along with its sister organization in Northern Ireland, NIWAAG, it organised exhibitions and conferences in Ireland and promoted international exchange with Irish artists.

³¹⁵ Fionna Barber, *Art in Ireland Since 1910* (London: Reaktion, 2013), p.204.

³¹⁶ Fowler, 1991, p.287. Lippard, 1984, p.14, distinguishes between these concepts as 'socially concerned' versus 'socially involved', and sees value in both.

Kathy Prendergast is a case in point, as she insists on the primacy of interiorized meanings, describing her *Body Maps* series as a search for 'a personal geography' rather than as feminist statements.³¹⁷ (figs 4.79-4.82) This series of drawings of the female body are difficult to place within the genre of the nude because the clarity of their diagrammatic form removes all traces of the sensuousness usually associated with the female nude.³¹⁸ They more closely resemble medical or geographical surveys, functioning within systems of transmission of quantifiable knowledge rather than of feeling. As Catherine Nash puts it 'they evoke anatomical drawings of female organs which functioned in the medico-moral politics of the late nineteenth century'.³¹⁹ She goes on to explore the association with mapping of the landscape, linking the topographical surveying associated with colonial conquest of the land and the uses made of the female body in patriarchal society. The body here is mined for its resources and valued for its usefulness above all else. Such a reading of the work is accentuated by the fact that the bodies depicted are all headless.

However, these images chart embodied experience as well as navigable terrain and the use of inscribed text allows for a more subjective or ambiguous reading of the work. Arbitrary words function as signs and markers to the viewer, but like the marks on treasure maps they are at once leading and misleading. These apparently simple drawings which seem at first to yield up their information to the viewer, ultimately resist simplistic interpretation. The clarity of the drawings is counteracted by the opacity of the meanings inscribed therein. Conor Joyce also acknowledges this troubling contradiction in the images. He considers an integrationalist reading of the maps, where the body is 'continuous with the earth', but he rejects this idea in favour of an isolationist reading of the work, in which the body is separated from place. His reading of the mapping technique is as a 'process of abstraction', in which the map functions not as a reliable

³¹⁷ Catherine Nash 'Gender and Landscape in Ireland', in *Sources in Irish Art: A Reader*, ed. by Fintan Cullen (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000), pp.302-308, (p.303). The series comprises eleven drawings in ink and watercolour.

³¹⁸ Fowler, 1987, p.76.

³¹⁹ Nash, 2000, p.303.

diagram but merely as 'a trace of place.'³²⁰ Seen in this way, he maintains that the 'integration of person, place and map into one comes hand in hand, necessarily, with a disintegration of person, place and map'.³²¹ Through this subversion of nominal readings of images of the female body as maps, the artist can viably maintain her insistence on their purpose in the creation of a personal geography that ventures beyond gender identity.

Despite the ambiguity in the works and their openness to multiple readings, it is difficult not to make a connection between these drawings and socio-political events in Ireland at the time they were made. 1983 saw the bitterly contested abortion referendum, followed three years later by the referendum on divorce. The same decade witnessed the infamous Kerry Babies case and the death of fifteen year old schoolgirl Anne Lovett while giving birth alone in a Marian grotto in Granard, Co. Longford, almost four months after the passing of the abortion referendum. During the abortion referendum campaign, women's bodies, normally hidden from view and from discussion in Ireland, were now being talked about in the most intimate detail nightly on television, to the extent that 'wombs, periods, eggs and sperms, unpius ejaculations and ectopic pregnancies became the terms of political debate'.³²² As Fintan O'Toole wrote, 'at no time and in no country can there ever have been so much body in the body politic, can the functions of the human body have formed so great a part of the public realm'.³²³

Ailbhe Smyth has described the period 1983-1988 as one in which there was a 'right wing backlash' against the achievements of Irish feminism in the 1970s, during which the Catholic Church sought to reassert its dominance in the Irish state.³²⁴ These issues surrounding women's bodies, fertility and reproduction that became so emotive in the 1980s continued to stimulate younger women artists well into the following decades, and

³²⁰ Conor Joyce, 'Kathy Prendergast: A Geography', in *Kathy Prendergast* (Dublin: The Douglas Hyde Gallery/The Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 1990) pp.7-17 (p.15).

³²¹ *Ibid.* p.7, p.15.

³²² Fintan O'Toole, 'Light Rain and Governments Falling: Ireland in the eighties', in *A New Tradition: Irish Art of the Eighties* (Dublin: The Douglas Hyde Gallery, 1990), pp.6-11 (p.9).

³²³ *Ibid.*

³²⁴ Smyth, 1988, p.334. Smyth acknowledges that there were other factors instrumental in the repression of the 1980s, a decade which was characterized by economic hardship, national question, church and emigration.

it is noteworthy that they still retain a particular relevancy today. The debate on the acceptability of abortion is still a very live one in Ireland in the twenty first century. The artist Amanda Coogan, born in 1971, was just thirteen when Anne Lovett died in 1984, so it may be her memory of that event or the way in which it contributed to the appalling narrative of 1980s Ireland which prompted her to make her *Madonna Series*. For Coogan it was ‘an iconic feminist story, a tragic story and quite specific to Ireland’.³²⁵

The *Madonna in Blue* (fig.4.83) originated as a site-specific performance piece in which the artist, placed on a high pedestal, stands completely motionless, holding one naked breast for a period of time depending on the situation and the conditions, the longest performance being two hours in duration. In all of the images in the series the artist relies on traditional Christian iconography to convey the quasi-religious nature of the works. Blue is the colour which traditionally symbolises the Virgin’s purity, while the bared breast recollects images of the Virgin breastfeeding the Christ Child, as well as being associated with the secular symbol of charity. Another image is entitled *The Black Madonna* referencing an incarnation of the Virgin Mary who is the object of particular devotion in Poland. The *Milltown Madonna* (fig. 4.84) most closely approximates the original setting of Anne Lovett’s tragic death as the artist stands on a plinth in an outdoor setting, which is decorated with a cross and obviously once held a religious statue. Further to these separate performances, the artist also produced a small postcard-sized print of the *Madonna in Blue*, which functions as a keepsake or token, in the way that many Irish Catholics had ‘holy pictures’ tucked into their prayer books or wallets. The performances in the *Madonna Series* were acts of remembrance in which the artist acted as witness to this most secret and shameful event. The shame falls on the society which has to live with the awful consequences of the failure of church and state to protect a vulnerable young woman’s life. The image of the Virgin as the bearer of succour and

³²⁵ Mike Fitzpatrick, ‘Through my Eyes and my Body’, in *Amanda Coogan: Profile* (Kinsale: Gandon Editions, 2005), p.17.

intercession is transformed into a contemporary Madonna where 'Coogan becomes symbolic of sacred nourishment and sensuous seduction and brutality'.³²⁶

In a related piece *The Fountain*, 2001, (fig.4.85) Coogan goes further in interrogating the sense of shame and disgust attached to Ann Lovett's death, by taking an ordinary bodily function and problematising it by placing it well outside its normal, acceptable boundaries. Despite its direct reference to Duchamp's iconic work of the same name, and the fact that it was sparked by an event the artist observed on a Dublin street, the piece was conceived as a companion to the Madonna series, though the two have never been shown together.³²⁷

By her own admission the artist found the piece 'shocking' and 'extremely difficult' to perform, but she believes that through such performances the 'the shameful or the everyday can become shamanistic'.³²⁸

Conclusion

This chapter set out to examine the relationship between the artist and the model in the context of the changing social circumstances of the twentieth century. Within the scope of that time-frame we have witnessed the progression from the anonymous academic model of the academy, to the emergence of the *vulgar* model of modernity, to the recent emergence of the celebrity model in post-modernity.

We have seen that the Irish academies were hampered by the lack of availability of models throughout their existence, and that artists often had to travel abroad in order to work directly from the model. Perhaps because of this rarity, and in part due to the way the model was mythologized as a passive but vital contributor to male creative power, an aura of sexuality has attached itself to her. The concept of the muse is dependent on this dynamic between female sexuality and male creative power. This ultimately had a negative effect on the status of the model as she came to be seen as sexually available and even indistinguishable from a prostitute. Throughout all of these developments it has

³²⁶ Apinan Poshyananda, 'The Celtic Slant', in *Amanda Coogan: Profile* (Kinsale: Gandon Editions, 2005), pp.11-13 (p.12).

³²⁷ Fitzpatrick, 2005, p.18.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.17.

been shown that an interest in the formal possibilities of particular complexions has fostered an interest in pursuing models from different ethnicities, and it is clear that in that context, 'Irish' was often identified within a range of ethnicities connoting 'otherness'. In the course of the twentieth century however, changes in the social status of women and feminist interventions into art practice and theory have rendered these ideas obsolete and models are today often seen, or see themselves, as more equal contributors to the art making process. Women artists continue to negotiate new ways of representing the female body that is neither voyeuristic nor exploitative.

Chapter 5

Exploring Gender in Representations of the Male Nude

Introduction – Approaches to Gender and Sexuality

For the sake of discussion, the previous chapter allowed the assumption of a stereotypical norm in studio practice, that of a male artist and a female model, to remain in place, and unchallenged. This facilitated an interrogation of the power relationships that can exist between the artist and model in the studio, when the one wielding that power is male and the other is female. That led on to a discussion of the ways in which feminism challenged this norm theoretically in its debates surrounding the suitability of the female nude as a subject in art. Finally it analysed the types of images that women make as alternatives to the stereotypical image of the female nude.

However, as we have seen, the nude has been theorized almost exclusively in terms of the female nude only since the nineteenth century. Before that it was, since ancient times, more usually focussed on the male body. Before the advent of modernism in the nineteenth century, the representation of the male body was deeply encoded with a range of symbols and ideals, which were subsequently discarded, so that in modernism the male nude became a relatively 'forgotten subject'.¹ This final chapter will therefore focus on representations of the male nude.

As we have seen, the advent of second-wave feminism in the 1970s made the nude a topic ripe for re-investigation and critiquing in political terms. Crucially, at this period, the idea of the male gaze was explored extensively by feminist art historians. Much of that scholarship accepted that images of nude women were painted by men, for a male viewer. Carol Duncan, for instance, maintained that 'most images of female nudity imply the presence (in the artist/and or the viewer) of a male sexual appetite'.² Not only was

¹ Walters, Margaret, *The Nude Male: A New Perspective* (London: Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1978), p.7.

² Carol Duncan, 'Virility and Domination in early 20th century Painting', in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, ed. by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), pp.293-314.

the production of the nude seen in sexually dichotomous terms but so was its consumption.

Elsewhere, Duncan argued that 'recurrent images of sexualized female bodies actively masculinise the museum as a social environment'.³ While arguments like these contributed to the understanding of gender as a site of power, they allowed no room for a diversity of opinion in either the artist or the spectator. In the first place such thinking does not properly take account of the full expression of female sexuality, including the possibility of a female gaze, and the question of whither that gaze might be directed. Even while a collective feminist viewpoint was being advocated some women artists asserted their individual right to be the arbiters of how they wished to represent women and how they wished to be represented in turn. The sexualized female nude was not universally rejected by women artists or viewers.

The feminist reading of the exploitative nature of the female nude that was prevalent in the 1970s rests on an assumption that the relationship between artist and model, and between the work and the viewer, operates within the limits of heterosexuality. However, the assumption of a male artist, a female subject and a male viewer excludes the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered viewpoints. One critique of such feminism thinking was that while it rejected gender divisions, much of its theory was concerned with 'drawing attention to gender and its inequalities and oppressions'.⁴ Because of this, feminism ultimately failed to present and maintain a coherent position on the issue of exploitation in the representation of women. Of course feminism was no longer a cohesive movement by the 1980s; it had fragmented to produce a variety of discourses. Just as the women's movement can no longer be seen as a unified lobby, so, 'in the visual arts, women's issues can not be summarised within a single range of aims and practices'.⁵

Feminism did not address issues surrounding the representation of men, yet as Sean Nixon has suggested, feminist theory was the starting point for new theories of masculinity, the earliest of which stemmed from the men's anti-sexist movements in GB and the USA. These theories took account of 'the fears, anxieties and pain expressed by

³ Duncan, 'The MoMA's Hot Mamas', in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, ed. by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Collins, Icon Editions, 1992), pp.347-357.

⁴ Mary McIntosh, 'Queer Theory and the War of the Sexes' in *Activating Theory: lesbian, gay, bisexual politics*, ed. by J. Bristow and A. Wilson (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993), pp.30-52 (p.31).

⁵ Fowler, 1991, p.57.

these men in relation to established scripts of masculinity'.⁶ These early attempts at a theory of masculinity were oddly dichotomous, in that a single conception of masculinity was advanced, but also acknowledged the 'the burden of masculinity for men'.⁷ More recent studies challenge this unitary conception of masculinity, and tend to use the plural, 'masculinities'. Incorporated into this pluralist approach is an understanding of homosexuality as one of the authentic forms of masculinity.

Several authors have identified that the concept of homosexuality as an identity dates from the late nineteenth century.⁸ This is not to suggest that homosexual practices were not common before then, but rather that, out of a broader scientific discourse on sexuality, there emerged 'new conceptualizations of homosexuality', and the beginnings of a 'recognizably "modern" male homosexual identity'.⁹ It took another generation for lesbian identity to emerge, in the 1920s, among professional educated women.

The public discourse on homosexuality took place within the context of the social purity campaigns of the 1880s which targeted male and female prostitution and 'saw both prostitution and male homosexuality as products of undifferentiated male desire'.¹⁰ The avowed aim of these campaigns was to protect the family, and they impacted on social attitudes to nude modelling, as we saw in the previous chapter. According to Weeks the emergence of definitions of homosexuality and the corresponding deepening hostility to it should be seen as part of the restructuring of the family and work in modern consumer capitalism. Therefore, while homosexual behaviour occurs universally, homosexual identity, being historically specific, is very recent in Britain, and only became radicalized

⁶ Sean Nixon, 'Exhibiting Masculinity' in *Representation: cultural representation and signifying practices*, ed. by Stuart Hall (London: Sage; The Open University, 1997), pp. 291-336 (p.296).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* vol.1 (London: Penguin, 1979) and Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Quartet, 1983). The term 'homosexuality' was invented in 1869 by the Swiss doctor Karoly Maria Berkert, and did not enter English currency until the 1890s, Weeks, 1983, p.3. See also David Halperin *One Hundred Years of Sexuality* (New York; London: Routledge, 1990). Mary McIntosh, 'The Homosexual Role' in Kenneth Plummer, (ed.) *The Making of the Modern Homosexual* (London: Hutchinson, 1980), pp.30-44, and Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, (London: Gay Men's Press, 1982) place the emergence of homosexual identity at the end of the seventeenth century, based on the existence of an identifiable sub-culture rather than public discourse.

⁹ Jeffrey Weeks, 'The Construction of Homosexuality' in *Queer Theory: Sociology*, ed. by Steven Seidman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp.41-63 (p.48., p.56).

¹⁰ Ibid., 1996, p.52.

in the 1960s, with the foundation of the Gay Liberation Movement. The emergence of gay identity was much slower in Ireland and will be discussed further below. Weeks suggests that legislative control has served to reinforce rather than repress homosexual behaviour and identity.¹¹

The science of sexology, then, has only been in existence for a little over a hundred years. Early practitioners, such as Havelock Ellis acknowledged variations of sexuality and saw these as essential to human beings and a crucial component of individual identity.¹² However, despite its initial liberationist approach sexology, once established, began the scientific control of sexuality and became part of an essentially patriarchal discourse. This was later challenged by studies in the USA by Kinsey (1949) and then Master and Johnson (1970) who both refuted the opposition of the active male and the passive female, suggesting that men and women had equally strong sexual drives. Despite these alternative views, a strand of essentialist thinking remained which defined men and women in opposition to one another. Since then the debate has broken down largely along essentialist versus constructivist lines. An essentialist approach with its emphasis on explicit differences between the sexes inevitably marks the homosexual out as different and therefore deviant.¹³

More recent approaches to the study of gender have served to complicate the issue further by suggesting that gender is, in any case, not a fixed identity but one that is socially created and constantly shifting. Judith Butler addresses the heterosexual assumptions in some feminist theory, and claims that its acceptance of the received notions of masculinity and femininity render it homophobic. She maintains that non-normative sexual practices call into question the stability of gender as the basis for analysis. She suggests that, by breaking down these gender binaries and confronting the heterosexism of traditional feminist thinking, it is possible to 'open up the field of possibility for

¹¹ Ibid. p.59.

¹² Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (New York: Random House, 1923), originally published in 1897.

¹³ Weeks, 1983.

gender'.¹⁴ To this end she suggests a new way of thinking about gender as 'performance', which is socially sanctioned, normalized through repetition and ritual, and reinforced by language.

Her definition of gender as performative suggests that it relies on an incessant activity that is performed without knowledge or intent, outside of the self and primarily for others. As such it places more emphasis on social than psychical power but becomes interiorized through the means of normalizing.¹⁵

Another view of gender derived from psychoanalysis posits 'feminine' and 'masculine' as psychical rather than biological oppositions, 'cultural constructions rather than essential oppositions'.¹⁶ The psychoanalytical view of sexuality is based on Freud's idea of infant polymorphous perversity, which is repressed in adulthood, separating the essentially bisexual person into masculine or feminine through the formation of the super-ego. Freud argued that sexual polarity has no biological or physical basis.¹⁷

Both these approaches throw doubt on the existence of 'trans historical sexual identities'.¹⁸ Seen in these terms, the formation of gender identity is a socially and psychically determined process and is therefore both tenuous and in constant flux.

'Queer' as a political strategy dates from the 1980s. It emerged from gay and lesbian rights organisations, from debates within feminism and was motivated by the AIDs epidemic.¹⁹ Queer Theory came into common usage and debate in the late 1990s, and was highly influenced by the writings of both Foucault and Butler. Academically, it is indebted to postmodern theory and post-structuralism in linguistics. It approaches the question of gender in a newly radicalized way, calling for 'a celebration of a diversity of identities' but also, crucially, 'a cultural diversity that surpasses the notion of identity' altogether.²⁰ It rejects all notions of identity that seek to impose binary oppositions or

¹⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1989).

¹⁵ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York; London: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁶ Catherine Craft Fairchild, *Masquerade and Gender: Disguise and Female Identity in 18th Century Fictions by Women* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1993), p.7.

¹⁷ Segal, 1997, pp.197-9.

¹⁸ Craft Fairchild, 1993, p.7.

¹⁹ The debates on feminism, sexuality and pornography were begun by the 1982 Barnard Conference, entitled 'The Scholar and the Feminist', which posed sex-radical feminists against anti pornography activists.

²⁰ Iain Morland and Annabelle Willox, (eds), *Queer Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.3.

essential differences. Instead, it embraces diversity within homosexuality, and refuses to comply with pigeon-holing of categories. Mc Intosh defines queer as 'a refusal of labels, pathologies and moralities', in a quest for 'authenticity'.²¹ In this way it also embraces ambiguity as a positive attribute. As Butler says, 'There are advantages to remaining less than intelligible, if intelligibility is understood as that which is produced as a consequence of recognition according to prevailing social norms'.²²

Because of its inclusivity, queer theory purports to offer a liberationist agenda for all, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. Gavin Butt, defines it as 'any discourse or strategy that 'enables not only gay men, but also heterosexual and lesbian women, and perhaps heterosexual men, to express their discomfort with, and alienation from, the normative sex and gender roles assigned to them by straight culture'.²³ He identifies queer strategies in art from the Neo-Dadaism of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg of the 1950s onwards, which include a 'homosexualization' of forms and a 'camp appreciation of mass culture'.²⁴ Such practices had been to the fore in representing a gay identity even before the birth of the political gay rights movement in 1969, attesting to the role of representation in the creation of social and sexual identity. In art, the male nude 'gained a new meaning with the increased visibility and political activity of gay culture'.²⁵

The imagery of male homosexuality gained a mainstream foothold in the 1980s, with the 'explosion of new imagery' in American fashion advertisements which began to depict a newly passive masculinity.²⁶ Nixon credits this imagery with influencing the formation of 'the attributes and characteristics of masculinity through which real historical men came to live out their identities as gendered individuals'.²⁷ Susan Bordo also acknowledges that it was through these advertising images that the sexualized male nude of gay culture was brought into the mainstream by Calvin Klein and sold to straight men

²¹ McIntosh, 1993, p.31.

²² Butler, 2004, p.5.

²³ Gavin Butt, 'How New York Queered the Idea of Modern Art' in *Varieties of Modernism*, ed. by Paul Wood (New Haven and London: Yale University Press; the Open University, 2004), pp.315-338.

²⁴ Butt, 2004, p.318.

²⁵ Mahon, 2007, p.215.

²⁶ Nixon, p.294. He particularly cites the famous Levi's advertisements, and the Athena poster as sources for such imagery.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.301.

and to women. She sees this as a triumph of consumerism over 'homophobia and the taboos against male vanity, male "femininity" and erotic display of the male body'.²⁸ It was through this process of representation that the male body became fully gendered, turned from a 'site of reproduction to a site of consumption'.²⁹ This new commercially oriented sexualization of the male body meant that men were increasingly occupying a traditionally feminine position.

Queer theory represents a rejection of the 'grand narratives' of modernism, belonging instead to a postmodern 'fetish of the margins'.³⁰ In post-modernism (or post-post-modernism as Wendy Steiner describes the current era) the meta-narratives of modernism have been undermined, and concepts of identity have become increasingly fractured and even self-contradictory. Borzello, writing in the 1980s, pointed out that 'the male artist – female model relationship is seen as the norm and other relationships either deviations (female artist-male model), too dull to consider (male artist-male model) or too threatening to the image of the artist as sexual hero (homosexual artist-male model).'³¹ This chapter will look at some of these approaches to the male nude, as depicted by women and men, straight and gay. Although not as numerous as female nudes in Irish art, they are interesting not only for their exceptionality, but for how they serve to illustrate the development of ideals of masculinity and, in some cases the changing attitudes to homosexuality in modern Ireland.

The Female Gaze

Central to any discussion of the male nude painted by women is the question of the possibility of the existence of the female gaze, and the conditions under which it operates, if it can be said to exist. Since antiquity the idea of the female gaze has been associated with danger and transgression. The threat is epitomized in the Greek mythological figure

²⁸ Bordo, 'Beauty (Re) discovers the Male Body' in *Beauty Matters*, ed. by Peggy Zeglin Brand (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2000), pp.112-154 (p.122).

²⁹ Ibid. Bordo here refers to the consumption of cosmetics and fashion products.

³⁰ Suzanna Danuta Walters, 'From here to queer; radical feminism, postmodernism, and the lesbian menace', in Morland and Willox, *Queer Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp.6-21.

³¹ Borzello, 1982, p.9.

of Medusa, whose gaze turned the onlooker to stone, and who could be beheaded only by Perseus looking at her reflection in his shield. Also, in the biblical story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot's wife is punished by being turned into a pillar of salt for refusing to obey the injunction against looking back at the burning city. These cautionary tales warn against female transgression of power through her gaze. In the Greek myth the danger is to the woman's victims, while in the biblical story the woman's gaze results in her own demise. Both cases, however, result in her ultimate destruction.

However, the damaging implications of the female gaze reach beyond the physical destruction of the transgressive woman. The real threat is to masculinity itself. As Garb explains, 'it is not only the woman's look that is potentially dangerous. In the man's beholding of the woman who looks lies a much deeper threat, for it is through the unveiling of the threat of castration, linked here, as in the case of the Medusa's head, 'to the sight of something', ...that masculinity is potentially at risk'.³² Women were prevented from painting the male body in the nineteenth century ostensibly because such an activity could compromise their chastity, but what was really threatened, Garb maintains, was the 'disruption of the phallic order'.³³ She is referring here to Freud's reading of Medusa as 'the supreme talisman of castration – associated in the child's mind with the discovery of maternal sexuality – and its denial'.³⁴

Garb's influential essay is concerned with nineteenth century painting, and at that time male nudes by female artists were exceptionally rare. Suzanne Valadon is credited with having painted the first known male nude by a woman, *Casting the Net* (fig.5.1), a work which has been described as a 'frankly sensual, and 'undisguisedly personal' work, depicting her young lover Andre Utter in three different poses.³⁵ Valadon was a self-taught artist, her craft mainly gleaned from her work as a model for several Impressionist painters, and she often painted the female nude. It is interesting to note, as Chadwick

³² Tamar Garb, 'The Forbidden Gaze: Women Artists and the Male Nude in Late Nineteenth Century France' in *The Body Imaged: The Human Form and Visual Culture Since the Renaissance*, ed. by K. Adler and Marcia Pointon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.33-42.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp.36-37.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Walters, 1978, p.316. See also Lois Oliver, 'Bodies of Work: Models as Artists', in *Dictionary of Artist's Models*, ed. by Jill Berk Jiminez, 2001, pp.20-25, p.23.

points out, that it was the quality of 'virility' in her work which marked her out for approbation by contemporary critics. 'Confronted with Valadon's powerful nudes', she writes, critics were unable to sever the nude from its status as a signifier for male creativity; instead they severed Valadon...from her femininity and allowed her to circulate as a pseudo-male, complete with "masculine power" and "virility".³⁶ Valadon was clearly exceptional as a woman artist competing equally with her male counterparts in nineteenth century Paris. However, despite her example male nudes by female artists remained almost unknown. Although the Impressionists were a revolutionary group of artists in many ways, women were still not fully included among their ranks. The female painters among them were quite restricted in terms of social behaviour and in their subject matter, and though they posed for their male counterparts, the men did not generally pose for them, except in the case of husbands or lovers, and even then, seldom nude.³⁷

There are several reasons why the male nude was considered an inappropriate subject for female artists. Sarah Kent suggests that female nudity was seen as a 'natural' state, because it accorded with women's prescribed position, close to nature. By inference men inhabited the world of culture, and to breach that distinction would be 'inherently indecent' for a woman artist.³⁸ Further, and more dangerously, the representation of the male nude might allow the assumption that the female artist exerts sexual power over her model in just the same way as that assumption works in images of the female nude made by a male artist.³⁹ The depiction of the penis is especially problematic because, aside from being part of the male anatomy, it is also the phallus, the symbol of male power, prowess and virility. It is therefore very susceptible to ridicule.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, there is a long established tradition in art of the representation of a male artist and a female model. The normalcy of this relationship has been re-iterated in art so continuously since the nineteenth century that it has become a

³⁶ Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), p.282.

³⁷ These exceptions include Gabriele Münter and Vasilii Kandinsky, Natalia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov, Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, Frida Kahlo and Diego Riviera, Dora Carrington and Lytton Strachey and Marie Laurencis and Apollinaire. See Lisa Tickner 'An Introduction: Cultural Politics and Sexual Hegemony', in *Women's images of men*, (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1980).

³⁸ Sarah Kent, (a) 'Looking Back' and (b) 'The Erotic Male Nude' in *Women's Images of Men* (London: Writers and Readers, 1985), p.58.

³⁹ Kent, 1985(a), pp.58-60.

cliché, and notwithstanding some ironic treatments of the theme, it is assumed to convey an essential truth.⁴⁰ In representational terms, the female artist who paints a male nude can be seen to be subverting the male gaze, of which she should, by right, be the object.⁴¹

Since the 1960s a number of women artists in the USA have turned to the subject of the male nude, and this process of subversion of the gaze is explored in Sylvia Sleigh's *Philip Golub Reclining*, 1971 (fig.5.2). This is an unusual work because it dares to transgress the sacrosanct subject of the artist and the model in the studio which became such a powerful myth of the creative male genius in modernism, such as were discussed above in chapter three. Sleigh's painting follows many of the tropes of that sub-genre. The young male is posed reclining, and his long hair, smooth body and languid expression give him an androgynous appeal. The artist, in contrast, is erect, active and in control. This deliberate use of the conventions of the reclining nude are utilized in order to reverse the usual and expected hierarchy of the male artist and the female model. If it seems slightly ridiculous in this context, perhaps the viewer is being asked to evaluate its ridiculousness in its original context too.

Sleigh sincerely embraced the idea of desire in the representation of the nude, it was objectification that she was anxious to avoid, and she wanted to show her subjects as 'dignified and intelligent people'.⁴² It was probably for this reason that she generally used friends and colleagues in her work rather than professional models. Doubtless this personal connection to her subjects enabled her to better represent them as fully embodied subjects rather than merely nudes. Elsewhere she has directly addressed the different roles that her various models played in her art. In *At the Turkish Bath*, 1973, (fig.5.3) her husband, the art critic Lawrence Alloway posed for the reclining figure. He is surrounded by John Perreault, Scott Burton and Carter Radcliff, all of whom were writers and critics from the art world. On either side of this group are two portraits of

⁴⁰ This study cites several examples of works that treat the subject ironically, from the parodies of Manet's *Olympia* cited in chapter three, to the works of Michael Cullen and John Byrne cited in chapter four.

⁴¹ Garb, 1972.

⁴² Joanna Fiduccia, 'Sylvia Sleigh', *Kaleidoscope*, 16, 2010, online magazine <<http://kaleidoscope-press.com/issue-contents/sylvia-sleighwords-by-joanna-fiduccia/>> [accessed 3 March 2012].

Sleigh's favourite model Paul Rosano. Joanna Fiduccia suggests that in this juxtaposition of the model and the critics, Sleigh 'carves a passage for the feminine erotic at the congested crossroads of the nude and the portrait, a place where she can revel in an inconspicuous fantasy'.⁴³

For some commentators, though, using the same conventions for the male nude as for the female nude simply does not work. Sarah Kent finds the comedic element in *Philip Golub* unconvincing and un-erotic, too much like mere role reversal. She maintains that 'reversing power relations between men and women within the artist/model encounter is a proposition fraught with complexity for both participants'.⁴⁴ Margaret Walters also warned against women artists taking 'a homosexual view' by merely replacing the woman with a man.⁴⁵ For others, Sleigh has proffered a valuable solution to the problematised nude and the artist has mined the art historical past, in this case Velazquez, to produce 'a Rokeby Venus for twentieth century gender politics'.⁴⁶

These disagreements are themselves instructive, and should demonstrate that the subjectivity of the viewer engaging with any work of art, but perhaps especially a nude, in order to decode its meanings and associations, is paramount. Sarah Kent posed the question, is the female gaze different to that of the male?⁴⁷ Considering these different female responses to Sleigh's work, this is probably an unanswerable question.

As Linda Nochlin has observed, women have never had a visual language in which to express erotic fantasy.⁴⁸ She pursued this point with comic intent when she offered her own image, *Man with Bananas*, (fig.5.4) to be considered alongside a nineteenth century French advertisement, *Achetez des Pommes* (fig.5.5). Citing Meyer Shapiro's 1968 article concerning the 'breast-apple metaphor' in Cézanne, Nochlin maintains that the advertising image is simply a 'low' version of Gauguin's *Woman with Mangoes* and she challenged the viewer to wonder why such a representation of women depicted with fruit echoing the shape of their breasts is considered 'natural', but seems disconcerting and demeaning

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Kent, 1985(b), pp.95-96.

⁴⁵ Margaret Walters, 'Introduction', *Women's Images of Men* (London: ICA, 1980), n.p.

⁴⁶ Fiduccia, 2010.

⁴⁷ Sarah Kent, 1985(a), p.77.

⁴⁸ Linda Nochlin, 'Eroticism and Female Imagery in 19th Century Art' in *Woman as Sex Object*, ed. by Linda Nochlin and Thomas Hess (New York: Newsweek: Art News Annual, 1972).

when applied to a male subject.⁴⁹ In a similar vein, Jasmina Jasinska, offers an image of a male reclining nude. In a photograph entitled *Legacy*, 2012, (fig.5.6) she depicts a young man, dressed only in white underpants and socks, reclining on a velvet sofa. Above him, on the wall, is a framed photograph of Marilyn Monroe, a reminder of an era when gendered sexuality was represented in more securely dichotomous terms. The inference is that while female identity has undergone a radical shift in understanding, traditional maleness has been marginalized. 'In the post-feminist world of female supremacy' Jasinska maintains, 'the male identity is an identity in crisis: it needs redefinition'. For the artist this portrait represents 'contemporary man, a man whose traditional roles have been eroded: who is lost and therefore vulnerable'.⁵⁰ By using the conventions of the female nude in disruptive ways, these images critique the very nature of the nude per se, regardless of the gender of either artist or model.

Another recent work that deals with the subversion of the male gaze is Andrew Folan's *Susannah and the Elders*, 2002 (fig.5.7) in which the artist deliberately disrupts the classic scene of male voyeurism by reversing the roles of the participants so that instead of two old men gazing at a young woman, we see a young woman looking at the two men. This process of reversal utterly alters the inherent eroticism of the original scene, so that it now seems unconvincing, at best humorous and at worst somewhat distasteful. In this image Folan demonstrates that the conventions of the female nude, so carefully codified and given authority through repetition, do not automatically transfer to the male nude. At the same time, it shows the degree of contrivance involved in the search for subject matter that allowed for the representation of the nude in the historical canon. *Susannah and the Elders* was a popular subject for artists seeking legitimization for their interest in the nude. Its biblical source ensured its respectability and inevitability. Folan's *Susannah* may question the authority of the male gaze, but it remains open to interpretation according to its norms, notwithstanding the obvious irony in the image. The female figure, though clothed, is seated facing away from the viewer and her clothes

⁴⁹ Meyer Shapiro, 'The Avant-Garde' in *Art News Annual*, 34 (New York: 1968), pp.34-53, cited in Nochlin, 1972, p.11.

⁵⁰ <www.jasminajasinska.viewbook.com> [accessed 26 September 2012].

cling seductively around her buttocks. This pose, coupled with the fact that she is looking at two naked men, could be seen to play into a male fantasy of female voyeurism.

The question arises as to whether images made by men can ever be read as feminist works. Some of the images previously discussed in this thesis, such as John Byrne's *Believers*, (fig.4.15) or Robert Ballagh's *Inside No.3*, (fig.3.22) purport to be sympathetic to feminism in the sense that one privileges a female spoken point of view and the other because of the artist's political affiliations.⁵¹

Some writers believe that feminism's aims are purely political in nature and refute the idea of any kind of universal female experience as a basis for shared beliefs. However, Michèle Barratt maintains that women's experience is a 'necessary condition' for feminist art and therefore men, 'while they may engage or sympathise', cannot make authentically feminist work.⁵²

By the 1980s the feminist movement had become fragmented and diverse and this was reflected in individual women's art practice. Many feminists advocated embracing the corporeal and the sexual in art.⁵³ Political and ideological developments combined with new technologies had 'challenged the fixed polarities of sexual difference which underpinned much early feminist art practice in the 1970s'.⁵⁴ Many women artists welcomed the new diversity of feminisms and were open to making work that resisted 'the tendency towards the essentialist and didactic voices of earlier feminist work'.⁵⁵ For some these conceptual changes meant an attempt to relocate the body as a sexual subject from a female point of view.

In 1980 an important exhibition was held at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London. Entitled *Women's Images of Men*, it drew sensationalist press headlines and much

⁵¹ Byrne gives the significant speech to the woman in the piece and Ballagh was influenced by his reading of John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*.

⁵² Michèle Barrett, 'Feminism and the Definition of Culture Politics' in *Feminism, Culture and Politics* ed. by Rosalind Brunt and Caroline Rowan (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1982), pp.37-58 (p.47). Here, Barrett is specifically arguing against the opposite view, that feminism is centred on politics and not shared experience, put forward by Rosalind Coward, 'Are Women's Novels Feminist Novels?', *Feminist Review*, 5 (1980).

⁵³ See Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).

⁵⁴ Rosemary Betterton, *An Intimate Distance*, (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), p.9.

⁵⁵ Cherry Smyth, *Bad Girls* (London: ICA, 1993), p.12.

adverse criticism. Included in the show were twenty nudes out of a total of ninety eight works. Due to the interest caused by the exhibition, a book of the same title was published five years later, in which feminist art historians interrogated some of the issues arising from the exhibition, which had remained pertinent during the five years since it was shown.⁵⁶

One of the points made by Lisa Tickner in the catalogue for *Women's Images of Men*, was that women's painting and photography of the male nude was more often an attempt to de-phallicize the body in a non-confrontational way, to re-sensualize it for their own pleasure. She sees most male nudes painted by women as 'naked' rather than 'nude' adopting Berger's use of the term 'naked' to mean honest portraits of loved men rather than evocations of the 'eternal masculine'.⁵⁷ For Rozsika Parker this approach personalizes the male nude and prevents it from functioning symbolically. 'Presented through women's eyes', she writes, 'man can no longer be Man'.⁵⁸

If the idea of women portraying men, clothed or nude, attracted so much attention in London in the 1980s, then the situation in Ireland was much more conservative and cautious. Consequently there were few works featuring male nudes made by Irish women artists.

One of the few is Pauline Cummins, *Inis t'Oirr /Aran Dance*, slide tape installation, (1985). In this piece sequential images show the activity of knitting, the patterning of the Aran sweater on a male torso, and ultimately the man's naked torso. In the process it 'moves from sensual pleasure to sexual arousal'.⁵⁹ However, the piece is not simply about indulging the pleasure of the female gaze, though it does that effectively. Through the use of traditional craft work Cummins references women's social and domestic role in Irish society, and particularly in the rural West. By way of contrast, as Fionna Barber explains, the male body is shown to be 'ruggedly masculine' a conceit which 'played a major role in the iconic status of the West in the formation of nationalist and post-

⁵⁶ Sarah Kent and Jacqueline Morreau (eds) *Women's Images of Men* (London: Writers and Readers, 1985).

⁵⁷ Lisa Tickner, 'An Introduction: Cultural Politics and Sexual Hegemony', *Women's Image of Men*, 1980, n.p. Berger, 1972.

⁵⁸ Parker, Introduction to *Women's Images of Men*, (originally in Parker, 'Women's Images of Men', in *Spare Rib*, October, 1980, n.p.

⁵⁹ Joan Fowler, 'Speaking of Gender...Expressionism, Feminism and Sexuality', in *A New Tradition: Irish Art of the Eighties* (Dublin: Douglas Hyde Gallery, 1990), pp.53-67.

nationalist ideologies.’⁶⁰ This complex work then, aims to investigate gender identities but also to situate them within the wider context of national identity in a way that seeks to ‘undermine master narratives of both nation and the body’.⁶¹

Images of the male nude by Irish women artists, though rare, can be seen to engage with issues surrounding patriarchy and sexuality in ways which reflect a deep seated sense of both place and history.

Francis Bacon’s Male Nudes

The question arises as to whether it is necessary to consider an artist’s sexuality in connection with his/her work. In the view of Christopher Reed, the fact that art history has ignored the sexuality of certain gay artists and historians of sexuality have striven to separate gay identity from specific kinds of images, is part of the marginalization of gay people in society.⁶² If we are to acknowledge the sexual tensions at work in depictions of the female nude, and in the relationship between the artist and the model in the studio, then it is dishonest and disingenuous not to acknowledge that a homosexual artist is also driven by his desires and that his sexual identity will inevitably affect his images of the male body. By this token the relationship between artist and model is just as relevant when both are men or women, as when one is male and the other female.

Francis Bacon’s homosexuality was first mentioned in print by Alloway in his introduction to the Guggenheim Gallery’s exhibition in 1963, during the artist’s lifetime.⁶³ After his death writers began to attach much more importance to this aspect of his life. Michael Peppiatt suggests that the relevance of his sexuality to his life and his artistic vision ‘cannot be overstated’.⁶⁴ Aside from Bacon’s ambitions as a painter, he says, his sexuality was the ‘most important element in his life’.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Fiona Barber, *Art in Ireland since 1910* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), pp.206-207.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Christopher Reed, *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁶³ Lawrence Alloway and Thomas M. Messer, *Francis Bacon* (New York: Guggenheim Gallery, 1963), pp.12-13.

⁶⁴ Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma* (London: Constable, revised edition, 2008), p.21. See also Daniel Farson, *The Gilded Gutter Life of Francis Bacon* (London: Century, 1993).

⁶⁵ Peppiatt, 2008, p.21.

During his lifetime Bacon strongly resisted attempts to read personal meanings into his paintings. He preferred his work to be seen in a 'biographical vacuum', so that the image would be enigmatic and 'indefinable'.⁶⁶ Indeed, he tried to usurp any attempt the viewer might make to establish narrative connections through his repeated use of the triptych format, which, as Sylvester has observed 'helps to avoid story-telling if the figures are painted on three different canvases'.⁶⁷ Also, by rigidly controlling what was written about him while he was alive, he managed to carefully construct a persona that was enigmatic too, so that people would be discouraged from reading his images as in any way auto-biographical. However, since his death, several writers have investigated his family and sexual history and the recent tendency has been to stress the importance of his personal life to the development of the work, and he has come to be seen as 'one of the greatest articulators of the human condition'.⁶⁸ Despite the fact that Bacon had 'little confidence in psychoanalytical practice', he was familiar with Freud's theories and in conversation he referred 'a great deal' to the power of the unconscious.⁶⁹ Harrison even suggests that his work can be read as self-portraiture, not in the sense of biographical revelation or anecdote but in the representation of very real feelings and emotions that originated in lived experience.⁷⁰

Part of that experience is his birth and early life in Ireland, even though Bacon is generally conceptualized in terms of post-war British art. He was born in Ireland in 1909 and spent his childhood there until 1914, returning with his family from 1919 to 1924 and again briefly in 1926-27. The fact that he felt no connection to the place 'beyond the accident of birth' does not negate the effect that living in Ireland at a time of political upheaval might have had on a young boy.⁷¹ During his time there he witnessed events connected to both the War of Independence, 1919-21 and the Civil War, 1922-23. The fact that those events impacted on him strongly is proven by his vivid memory of them many years later. Because of the unstable political situation in Ireland he was conscious

⁶⁶ Ibid p.11.

⁶⁷ David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon*, revised edition, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), p.23.

⁶⁸ Matthew Gale and Chris Stephens, 'On the Margin of the Impossible', in *Francis Bacon* (London: Tate Gallery, 2008), pp.14-27 (p.27).

⁶⁹ Peppiatt, 2008, pp.367-8.

⁷⁰ Martin Harrison, 'Bacon's Paintings' in *Francis Bacon*, (London: Tate Gallery, 2008), pp.40-63.

⁷¹ Peppiatt, 2008, p.405.

that his family represented the 'enemy' and he was constantly being cautioned by his father not to talk to strangers and to keep watch for 'anyone roaming in the fields around the stables and the outbuildings'.⁷² He recounted one incident that happened while driving home with his maternal grandfather, when their car got stuck in the Bog of Allen and they found themselves surrounded by an IRA ambush, from which they had to flee and seek refuge in a nearby house.⁷³ This episode and the general tenor of the life the family lived as Anglo-Irish land-owners gave him an awareness of 'life as a perpetual hunt' between 'the stalker and his prey, the aggressor and his victim' which was to be fundamentally important to his art.⁷⁴ Bacon's troubled childhood in Ireland is central to the now popular psychoanalytical reading of his work. In Peppiatt's view his hatred for his father, the illness which marked him out as a weakling and led to his assertion that his family 'took no interest in him' and the early death of his brother all 'marked him for life'.⁷⁵ If it is true that, as Farson maintains, Bacon found it impossible ever to return to Ireland because he developed a severe asthma attack whenever he got on the plane to go there, then he clearly had a strong aversion to the place that probably developed during those formative years. Farson makes a connection between 'the desolation of his vision' and his Irish upbringing, despite Bacon's rejection of the idea that he had been influenced by his Irish childhood.⁷⁶

As a youth Bacon was also increasingly aware of his sexuality, and the fact that it was unacceptable to his family. In one story, related to Caroline Blackwood, he maintained that his father instructed the stable grooms to whip him for some misdemeanour, an experience which Peppiatt speculates may have initiated his interest in sadomasochism, an aspect of his life that, again, only became public knowledge after his death.⁷⁷ These early formative experiences were so affecting that Peppiatt maintains that 'there is a case for approaching Bacon's entire vision of the flesh in sadomasochistic terms'.⁷⁸

⁷² Ibid., p.17.

⁷³ Ibid., p.18.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.3 and p.13.

⁷⁶ Farson, 1993, p.16-17.

⁷⁷ Caroline Blackwood in *The New York Review of Books* (September, 1992), pp, 35-8, cited in Peppiatt, 2008, p.12.

⁷⁸ Peppiatt, 2008, p.234.

Bacon's own assertion that 'we are meat, we are potential carcasses', is also evidence of his atheistic belief that the human body is devoid of any kind of spirit that may live on after the death of the body.⁷⁹

In 1926, Bacon's father reportedly caught him trying on his mother's underwear and put him out of the house for good, aged only sixteen.⁸⁰ This is said to have engendered in him a sense of guilt, caused by 'his homosexuality and its catastrophic discovery within his own family'.⁸¹ Much later, in conversation with David Sylvester, Bacon said about his father, 'Well, I disliked him, but I was sexually attracted to him when I was young. When I first sensed it, I hardly knew it was sexual. It was only later, through the grooms and the people in the stables I had affairs with, that I realized that it was a sexual thing towards my father'.⁸² His feelings towards his sexuality are reflected in the fact that 'though open about his homosexuality, Bacon always insisted it was an affliction and rejected the term 'gay' for 'queer''.⁸³

Yet Bacon acknowledged that his inspiration came from the people he had known in his life when he said, 'it's through my life and knowing other people that a subject has really grown'.⁸⁴ Many of those he knew and socialized with were the habitués of Soho's clubs and bars, such as Henrietta Moreas, whom he painted several times, as discussed in the previous chapter. Sylvester has observed that 'Bacon's lack of erotic interest in naked females did nothing to prevent these paintings from being as passionate as those of the male bodies that obsessed him'.⁸⁵ However, it was his male lovers who were a continual source of inspiration from the time he began to paint the nude.

Bacon's first nude was *Study from the Human Body*, 1949 (fig.5.9) In this work he was clearly influenced by Degas's *After the Bath*, 1880s (fig.5.10) in the London's National

⁷⁹ Bacon, interviewed by Sylvester in 1966, interview 2. See Sylvester, 1987, p.46.

⁸⁰ Peppiatt, 2008, p.27.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp.120-121.

⁸² Bacon interviewed in 1971-3, interview 3. See Sylvester, 1987, p.72.

⁸³ Gale and Stephens, 2008, p.216. In the introduction to this chapter we have seen how this derogatory term was later appropriated to their own use by the gay community and made a term of defiance rather than abuse.

⁸⁴ Bacon, interviewed by Sylvester in 1971-3, interview 3. See Sylvester, 1987, p.68.

⁸⁵ David Sylvester, *Francis Bacon: The Human Body* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, Hayward Gallery, 1998), pp.35-36.

Gallery, a work about which he commented; 'At the very top of the spine...the spine almost comes out of the skin altogether. And this gives it such a grip and a twist that you're more conscious of the vulnerability of the rest of the body than if he had drawn the spine naturally up to the neck'.⁸⁶ After that first exploration of the subject, the human body became his principal subject. Because he seldom painted from life, his nudes were at first based mostly on Eadweard Muybridge's photographs from the 1880s, published as *The Human Figure in Motion* in 1907.⁸⁷ In looking at Muybridge's photographs Bacon was following generations of gay men whose only access to male nudes was to be found in these kinds of 'scientific' illustrations.⁸⁸ After 1963 he increasingly used photographs by John Deakin, especially in his paintings of Henrietta Moreas and George Dyer, his most important and consistent model from 1964 until Dyer's death in 1971.

Bacon had had serious relationships before Dyer. He had been in a relationship with Eric Hall for at least 15 years, though it was one based as much on patronage as sexual intimacy. His next significant relationship was with Peter Lacy, who was his lover on and off between 1952 and 1958, and who probably appears in some of the seven *Man in Blue* paintings of 1954. Stephens suggests that the sense of 'pathetic vulnerability and aloneness' in the paintings of Lacy should be interpreted in the context of the anxieties of the debates on homosexuality in Great Britain in the 1950s.⁸⁹ The official discourse on homosexuality was begun at that time with the establishment of The Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, known as the Wolfenden Committee, which first met in 1954 and published its report three years later.⁹⁰ There had also been several high profile cases involving homosexuals in the press. Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean had been unmasked as Soviet spies and had defected to the Soviet Union in 1951. The actor John Gielgud was arrested in a public lavatory and

⁸⁶ Bacon interviewed by Sylvester in 1966. See Sylvester, 1987, pp.46-7.

⁸⁷ Four copies of this book were in Bacon's studio. See Margarita Cappock, *Francis Bacon's Studio* (New York and London: Merrell, 2005), p.111. Another influential book, *Positioning in Radiography* by K.C.Clark was also used as sources for composition, suggested by the presence of torn out leaves in the studio, Cappock, 2005, p.103.

⁸⁸ Kenneth Silver, 'Master Bedrooms, Master Narratives: Home, Sexuality and Postwar art', in *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*, ed. by Christopher Reed (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), pp.206-221.

⁸⁹ Chris Stephens, 'Apprehension' in *Francis Bacon* (London: Tate Gallery, 2008), pp.120-135 (p.122).

⁹⁰ The Wolfenden Committee was so named after its chairman John Wolfenden, vice chancellor of Reading University.

convicted of importuning in 1953, and in 1954 Peter Wildeblood, Lord Montagu of Beaulieu and Michael Pitt-Rivers were arrested and tried on charges of 'homosexual offences' with two servicemen.⁹¹ At that time, under the 1885 legislation, the penalty for homosexual offences was two years imprisonment. In particular 1954 was remarkable in that 'no year before or afterwards were so many trials for homosexual offences reported in the press'.⁹²

Two Figures, 1953 (fig.5.11) is unmistakably an image depicting homosexual intercourse, though compositionally based on Muybridge's photographs of wrestlers, and inspired by Michelangelo's musculature. Bacon described how these influences were conflated in his imagination, when he said; 'Actually, Michelangelo and Muybridge are mixed up in my mind together, and so I could perhaps learn about positions from it would be very difficult for me to disentangle the influence of Muybridge and the influence of Michelangelo'.⁹³ Kenneth Silver acknowledges Bacon's direct debt to Muybridge's photograph, *Two Men Wrestling* (fig.5.12) in this painting. He maintains that, through the addition of the bed and bed-clothes, Bacon has 'domesticated' his source, and in the process has introduced a note of contradiction between this apparent domesticity and the illegality of the activity depicted. He therefore constructs 'a gay reading from a multitude of possibilities', in which Muybridge's scientific 'observation' becomes 'voyeurism', and the viewer becomes a witness to transgression.⁹⁴ Another observation of Bacon's use of this source was made by Ernst Van Alphen, who noted that the men in Muybridge's photographs were generally engaged in manly sports activities, while Bacon does not depict control, but turmoil and fragmentation instead. 'The body is no longer the space that secures the idea of self' he writes, 'it is the domain where the self is contested and ultimately lost'.⁹⁵

Bacon also had recourse to American magazines such as *Physique Pictorial*, *Adonis* and *Male Classics* which were available in Britain from the early 1950s and contributed to the

⁹¹ Simon Ofield, 'Wrestling with Francis Bacon', *Oxford Art Journal*, 24.1 (2001), 113-30. See also Rachel Tant, in Francis Bacon (London: Tate Gallery, 2008), p.260.

⁹² Patrick Higgins, *The Heterosexual Dictatorship: Male Sexuality in Post-War Britain* (London: 1996), p.214.

⁹³ Bacon interviewed by Sylvester in 1974. See Sylvester, 1987, p.114.

⁹⁴ Silver, 1996, p.206-221.

⁹⁵ Ernst Van Alphen, *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992).

debates surrounding the emerging gay scene, and to the formation of images of gay men. There were also a few British magazines, such as *MAN-ifique* and *Vigour*, which, in addition to publishing images of wrestlers and body-builders, also carried personal advertisements which disseminated encoded information regarding sites of possible sexual encounter.⁹⁶ Aimed at a middle-class readership these magazines perpetuated the notion of the desirability of homosexual encounters with working-class men. Ofield maintains that it would be 'difficult to overestimate the importance of class difference in the disposition of sexual encounters between men during the first fifty years of [the twentieth] century. Bacon used these magazines alongside more mainstream art images in his approach to the nude. 'I look all the time at photographs in magazines of footballers and boxers...especially boxers', he remarked.⁹⁷

His own erotic experiences were blended into this mixture of high and low sources. He remarked to Sylvester; 'I very often think of peoples' bodies that I've known, I think of the contours of those bodies that have particularly affected me, but then they're grafted very often onto Muybridge's bodies'.⁹⁸ In *Two Figures*, despite the partial obliteration of the facial features, Stephens suggests that 'the figures are recognisably Bacon himself and his lover Peter Lacy'.⁹⁹ He argues that the faces were deliberately blurred for the purposes of anonymity and not merely as part of the painterly obliteration that would become a trademark of Bacon's painting technique. The picture has been described as 'a conflation of autobiography and photography', and perhaps for that reason it was exhibited only to a close circle of friends and privately sold, and it was not subsequently in public until the *Francis Bacon* exhibition in the Tate Gallery in 2008.¹⁰⁰

Another related painting, is *Two Figures in the Grass*, 1954, (fig.5.13) and although it is even more deliberately obfuscated, there was a complaint of indecency when it was exhibited at Bacon's retrospective exhibition at the ICA in 1955, though the charge was dismissed by police.¹⁰¹ Bacon returned to the theme of wrestlers again in the 1960s

⁹⁶ Simon Ofield, 'Comparative Strangers', in *Francis Bacon* (London: Tate Gallery, 2008), pp.64-73. See also Ofield, 2001, pp.113-30.

⁹⁷ Bacon interviewed by Sylvester in 1974, Interview 4. See Sylvester, 1987, p.116.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Stephens, 2008, p.124.

¹⁰⁰ Sylvester, 2000, cited in Tant, 'Archive', in *Francis Bacon* (London: Tate Gallery 2008), p.72.

¹⁰¹ Tant, 2008, p.260.

'when problems of censorship had dissipated' somewhat.¹⁰² Even a decade later though, the theme of homosexuality and surveillance depicted in *Two Figures Lying on a Bed with Attendants*, 1968 suggests that there was still a climate of fear and secrecy surrounding homosexuality in Britain, despite the legislation de-criminalizing homosexuality in 1967.¹⁰³

George Dyer became Bacon's lover in the Autumn of 1963 and henceforth his most frequent model. Dyer was a petty criminal from London's East End, with a strong physique hiding a vulnerable personality. He had no education, and was socially hampered by a speech impediment as the result of a cleft palate, which left him vulnerable to bullying by Bacon.¹⁰⁴ Dyer was Bacon's preferred physical type. Indeed, Ofield has suggested that 'an archetype that almost perfectly fitted Dyer existed in Bacon's paintings well before they met' because Bacon was strongly attracted to working-class men, perfectly fitting the stereotypes portrayed in the physical fitness magazines that he read.¹⁰⁵ Bacon painted Dyer many times during their relationship, which lasted until the latter's tragic death in 1971, and he continued to paint him posthumously. It was as if Dyer presented Bacon with 'a vehicle with which to articulate the absurdities, indignation and pathos of human existence'.¹⁰⁶ His first painting of Dyer was *Three Figures in a Room*, 1964 (fig.5.14) in which Dyer is shown seated on a lavatory in the left hand panel of the triptych, emphasising his vulnerability. Ever since he had painted *Two Figures* Bacon clearly regarded the male back as expressive of vulnerability and Dyer is probably the sitter, shown again from the back, in *Three Studies of the Male Back*, 1970, (fig.5.15) In this triptych the same man is depicted three times seated in a barber's chair in front of a mirror. According to Stephens, mirrors, which occur frequently in Bacon's work, signify vulnerability, mortality and surveillance.¹⁰⁷ The relationship between Bacon and Dyer was an unequal one in which Dyer, though physically strong, had little power. Peppiatt speculates that Dyer derived his identity from

¹⁰² Ibid., p.166.

¹⁰³ Stephens, 2008.

¹⁰⁴ Peppiatt, 2008, p.259.

¹⁰⁵ Ofield, 2001, p.125.

¹⁰⁶ Chris Stephens, 'Portrait' in *Francis Bacon* (London: Tate Gallery, 2008), pp.181-185 (p.182).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.185.

the images Bacon created of him, that they gave him a 'raison d'être' and a 'stature' that he would not have otherwise been able to attain.¹⁰⁸ Bacon's portraits of him are affectionate but they are also, as Stephens observes, 'replete with a frank acknowledgement of a man faintly ridiculous and teetering on the edge'.¹⁰⁹ It has also been described as 'a kind of prophecy' that the earliest and last triptychs depicting Dyer, *Three Figures in a Room*, and *Triptych, May-June 1973*, 1973, (fig.5.16) show him seated on a lavatory in the left hand panel, in the actual manner which he is said to have died.¹¹⁰ Dyer committed suicide in the Hôtel des Saints Pères, Paris on the eve of Bacon's 1971 exhibition in the Grand Palais. The French authorities reported misadventure and that he overdosed on sleeping pills, vomited in the sink and died seated on the toilet. Only Robert Melville of the *New Statesman* reported the death as suicide.¹¹¹ Dyer appears in paintings by Bacon throughout the 1970s, some of which were painted 'in a conscious wish to exorcise the pain of Dyer's death' according to Sylvester.¹¹² Bacon was said to be haunted by guilt on account of the fact that Dyer had used his medication with which to kill himself.¹¹³ After his death Dyer occupied Bacon's thoughts and imagination more obsessively than he had ever done while he was alive'.¹¹⁴ 'Not an hour goes by when I don't think of George', he said in 1972.¹¹⁵ It may not be fair to think of Dyer as Bacon's 'victim' but it seems that Bacon was more successful when he only had to deal with Dyer imaginatively and aesthetically, rather than in terms of a relationship in which Dyer had emotional needs that the artist could not satisfy. He said himself that 'one of the terrible things about so-called love, certainly for an artist, I think, is the destruction'.¹¹⁶ Sylvester identifies the period of the triptychs memorialising George Dyer, from 1970-1976 as a 'peak' in Bacon's career.¹¹⁷ However, at the same time, he painted a series of self-portraits in which his own deepening despair is evident.

¹⁰⁸ Peppiatt, 2008, p.262.

¹⁰⁹ Stephens, 2008, p.184.

¹¹⁰ Sylvester, 1998, p.29.

¹¹¹ Farson, 1993.

¹¹² Sylvester, 1998, p.29.

¹¹³ Stephens, 2008, p.216 and note 17, p.278.

¹¹⁴ Peppiatt, 2008, p.298.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.303.

¹¹⁶ Bacon interviewed by Sylvester in 1971-2, Interview 3. See Sylvester, 1987, p.76.

¹¹⁷ Sylvester, 1998, p.29.

Van Alphen suggests that the central theme of Bacon's work, as well as its ultimate affect on the viewer, is loss of self. He argues that the paintings function as a critique of 'the construction of the self in Western art' through the 'representation of the gendered body', and he outlines the strategies through which the artist achieves this.¹¹⁸ Central to the process is Bacon's rejection of narrative so that images are seen as snapshots of human activity that cannot be seen to confer meaning on the subject. Similarly, he distorts perception, so that it no longer appears as a function of the eye/I but as a conflation of all five senses. As Van Alphen puts it, 'sight is no longer to be conflated with the 'mind's eye', but rather with the 'body's spasm'.¹¹⁹ In this way the body is not the subject of perception in Bacon's paintings, but is rather 'the *locus* of the events, the scene of action'.¹²⁰ The lack of delineation between the self and the 'other' is also crucial to Van Alphen's reading of Bacon. 'While others see the subject's body as object and as whole, the subject has only inner experiences or fragmented outer views of his or her body', he writes.¹²¹ Bacon's subjects seem trapped in moments of extreme sensation and are often indistinguishable from each other.¹²²

In his interpretation of Bacon's work, Van Alphen relies on Barthes definition of the *doxa*, as the stereotype that results from the construction of the subject by the 'other'. Barthes argued that escape from this *doxa* was difficult because alternative texts or representations remain locked into the same frames of reference, and he suggested that to escape objectification the body should remain in constant flux. This would enable the subject 'to assert its resistance against, even if through the use of, the *doxa*'. It is by usurping the conventions of the nude (traditionally the female nude) that, Van Alphen suggests, Bacon succeeded in undermining the gendered representation of the male body. Thus Bacon's paintings can be read as an effort to destabilize representations of the body and the self, and his use of distortion as resistance against stereotypical representation of

¹¹⁸ Van Alphen, 1992, p.15.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p.81.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p.47.

¹²¹ Ibid., p.114.

¹²² Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes sur Roland Barthes* (Paris: Ed du Seuil, 1975) cited in Van Alphen, 1992, p.165.

the male body as defined by traditional Western masculinity. Bacon's paintings reveal the constructedness of masculinity and by doing so they resist its stereotypical discourses. For this reason Van Alphen sees the images as less tragic and horrific than other writers tend to view them. He maintains that 'Bacon's view of the self is, ultimately, uplifting, because 'his refusal to allow his figures to be defined by the 'other' results, paradoxically, in a loss of self that re-subjectifies the body'.¹²³ Bacon's strategies of deformation and distortion allow for the possibility of re-formation of the body without gendered assumptions, and in this way his work is open to a 'queer' interpretation.

Patrick Hennessy and the Sublimation of Desire

When Patrick Hennessy's *Man-made Man and Rose*, 1965, (fig.5.17) was exhibited at the 1971 Rosc exhibition, Brian O'Doherty described it as 'the only frank description of the nude (male)' though he considered the *trompe l'oeil* technique to be so 'distancing' that the image could be seen to be 'legitimized by etiquette'. For O'Doherty this was further proof that Irish artists could or would not deal directly with the subject matter of the nude.¹²⁴ The point has been reiterated since and the repeated use of classical nude statuary in Hennessy's work has come to be seen as a visual trope for the avoidance of the living body. However, according to Kevin Rutledge, this was 'his way of painting the classical image in a manner acceptable to an Irish public still struggling to come to terms with the anti-establishment mood of the sixties and seventies'.¹²⁵

However Hennessy is one of very few Irish artists whose oeuvre is at least partly characterised by the nude, in his case the male nude, to which he took a variety of approaches. Otherwise he is chiefly known as a painter of flowers, though he also painted landscapes, horses, interiors and portraits. In *Man-made Man and Rose*, he juxtaposes two of his favourite subjects, the male nude and the rose. The treatment of the figure might initially suggest a measure of avoidance in painting from a statue rather than a live figure, and the combination of the motifs might also seem like a kind of sanitizing

¹²³ Van Alphen, 1992, p.190.

¹²⁴ O'Doherty, 1971, p.22.

¹²⁵ Kevin A. Rutledge, 'Man-made Man and Rose', *Whyte's sale catalogue* (October 9, 2001), lot no. 103, n.p.

of the nude. Looked at in another way, it can be seen to represent a sublimation of desire, and the fact that Hennessy could not approach the nude directly can be related to his homosexuality.

In *Man-made Man and Rose* the classical male nude is based on the 16th century *Jason and the Golden Fleece* in London's Victoria and Albert museum. (fig.5.18) Jason was an unusual subject in Renaissance art but he was sometimes depicted on marriage *cassone* panels, and the V&A's statue was originally in the garden of the palazzo Strozzi Ridolfi in Florence. Typically depicted as a rather effeminized youth, Jason therefore has associations with both gardens and romantic love. In flower symbolism, the red rose has long been known and universally recognised as the symbol of passionate romantic love. The inscription 'The Man-Made Man' was taken from an American poster advertising surgical components such as stents, used in heart operations. This could be read as a reference to a broken heart, in need of mending. The iconography, then, seems to be a straightforward celebration of romantic, possibly unrequited, love. However, the virile projection of the red rose also allows for a reading which places the emphasis on sexual rather than romantic love. The effect of the *trompe l'oeil* technique is to create a visual *double entendre*. Through his skill the artist confuses the viewer, so that the torn corner of the 'poster' and the half seen letter seem real. Being full of pretence, it masks the truth of what is actually represented. Looked at in this way the image begins to read as an account of 'the love that dare not speak its name'.¹²⁶ And so any distancing that has taken place, any sublimation of desire, is born of a legitimate reluctance to acknowledge a form of sexuality that, at the time the painting was made, remained illegal in Ireland. Some of Hennessy's other subjects, especially his flower paintings, are, in contrast, very decorative and wholly uncontentious. These were painted almost exclusively as a commercial concern, a lucrative enterprise which gave him the freedom to travel widely and to maintain a comfortable lifestyle. From the 1950s onwards Hennessy and his partner, the painter Harry Robertson Craig, spent the winters in Tangier, where the attitude to homosexuality was more relaxed.¹²⁷ In general, North Africa made little difference to his subject matter as he resolutely avoided the traditional subjects associated

¹²⁶ This well known phrase, a euphemism for homosexuality, is the final line of Lord Alfred Douglas's poem *Two Loves*, 1894.

¹²⁷ Bacon also spent time in Tangier during these years.

with the local populace in traditional dress, but it was there that he could give full expression to a more frankly eroticised male nude.¹²⁸

In *In the Hammam*, (fig.5.19) painted in the mid 1960s, there is clearly no avoidance of the nude figure or of the overtly sexual nature of the encounter depicted in an Arab bathhouse. The glance from the man in the background to the man in the foreground is clearly one of appraisal and invitation. It is a scene filled with the tension of erotic possibility. Also, despite the timelessness of the neutral space, the very contemporary hairstyle of the foreground youth, removes from the image any allusion to classicism. Hennessy exhibited regularly in Ireland, both at the Hendricks Gallery and at the RHA but this painting was neither exhibited nor sold during the artist's lifetime.¹²⁹ His male nudes were not exhibited publicly but sold to private collectors in whose collections they have for the most part remained, appearing on the market occasionally before they disappear back into private collections. Only two, *Exiles* and *Boy and Seagull*, are in public collections.¹³⁰ *In the Hammam* hung in the bathroom of the house he shared with Craig, and so was only seen by members of their intimate circle of friends. Hennessy would have had a justifiable fear of public reaction to such a frankly sexual image at the time it was painted.

There is, in Hennessy's oeuvre, another group of male nudes that depicts a single male figure by the sea shore. One of these, entitled *Exiles*, 1943 (fig.5.20) seems laden with ambiguous meaning, and even to exhibit 'surrealist undertones'.¹³¹ S.B. Kennedy also identifies an air of 'mystery and intrigue' in Hennessy's work that is different from other academic painters, and 'at times often Surrealist', a quality which, he suggests, 'requires an act of participation by the spectator'.¹³² *Exiles* has usually been interpreted as Hennessy's personal response to the alienating experience of emigration, which he felt as

¹²⁸ I am grateful to Kevin A. Rutledge whose insights into the life and work of Patrick Hennessy have informed this discussion of the artist.

¹²⁹ Hennessy exhibited yearly at the RHA from 1941-1971 except for three years, and was made ARHA in 1948, and RHA in 1949.

¹³⁰ *Exiles* is in the collection of The Dublin City Gallery, the Hugh Lane, and *Boy and Seagull* is in IMMA's collection.

¹³¹ Margarita Cappock, *Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane* (London; New York: Merrell, 2006).

¹³² S.B. Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism*, (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University, Belfast, 1991), pp.63-4.

a young boy when his mother took the family back to her native Scotland after the death of his father in 1916. It has also been interpreted as a depiction of the desolation of the Second World War, then raging throughout Europe and beyond. Hennessy had left Scotland before the war, but his poor state of health would have debarred him from service in the forces. Craig, however, did serve with the Special Forces, where he was employed in painting camouflage and faking identification papers for British spies. This was a period of prolonged separation for two men who would otherwise spend their entire lives together. Hennessy and Craig met at Art School in Dundee, and although their relationship was at first sexual, by the time they were living together in Ireland after the war, it was based on friendship.¹³³

A similar semi-nude male figure appears, though in a less value-laden context, in the undated *Adieu* (fig.5.21). Both the title and the presence of a ship on the horizon encourage a reading of a scene of parting. However, the addition of the dog and the warmer colour palette make this a more benign image of comfortable solitude compared to the stark loneliness and alienation of *Exiles*. A third painting of this type, in which a lone figure stands contemplating the horizon, is *Boy and Seagull*, c.1954 (fig.5.22) in which a nude boy stands on a pier reaching out into the sea. Apart from a lone seagull, there is only sea and sky around him, and a pervasive stillness that suggests something beyond loneliness, the very precariousness of human existence. This recurring solitary figure reflects something of Hennessy's own character and personality. He has been described as being extremely shy and reserved except in the company of intimate friends, and his sexuality must have added to his sense of being an outsider in Ireland in the 1950s. He also had a split national identity, having been born in Ireland and raised in Scotland, returning as an adult to a country with which he was not entirely familiar. Craig wrote, after Hennessy's death, that he was 'proud of his Irish nationality'.¹³⁴ But another comment about his Irishness suggests that his various identities may have been somewhat conflicted and contradictory. The catalogue essay for one of his many exhibitions at the Guildhall Galleries in Chicago notes that 'Hennessy is nothing if not completely Irish in having the capacity of existing on several different levels

¹³³ I am grateful to Kevin A. Rutledge for this information.

¹³⁴ Harry Robertson Craig, *Tribute to Patrick Hennessy* (Cork: Cork Arts Society, 1981).

simultaneously'. There is, in his work, the writer suggests, 'a completely modern sense of disquiet that he is too well-mannered a painter to wish to underline'.¹³⁵ Though brief and somewhat evasive, these comments seem to hint at complexities in his character that might have led to some degree of inner conflict.

Another group of Hennessy's more idyllic works, such as *Boy and Dog*, 1979 (fig.5.23) and *Boy on Beach*, undated, (fig.5.24) are more in the spirit of those paintings of bathing boys by Henry Scott Tuke (1859-1929) which became central to Tuke's work after 1885 when he lived and worked at Falmouth in Cornwall. Although completely nude, unlike most of the boys in Hennessy's works, Tuke's figures are never explicitly sexual. Only rarely can the genitals be seen and even in complex multi-figural groups the figures never touch. Like Hennessy, Tuke often depicted the figure from the back, as in *July Sun*, 1913 (fig.5.25) Michael Hatt describes the process of looking, for the collector of Tuke's images, as a form of 'vicarious sexual engagement with the body', that is not intended to provoke desire, like pornography, but is nevertheless a 'viable erotic experience in itself'.¹³⁶ Tuke's paintings possess a kind of polite, distanced, reserved sexuality, in which 'the model's body is a hinge between licit and illicit, between homosocial and homosexual'.¹³⁷ Walters reiterates this view, maintaining that Tuke's 'nostalgia for youth merges into an explicit, though carefully disguised, homosexuality'.¹³⁸ Though not apparently sexually involved with his models himself, Tuke's friends and patrons consisted of a circle of 'Uranian sophisticates', from whom he often had to protect his models.¹³⁹ Timothy d'Arch Smith describes the philosophies of the Uranian poets, who belonged to the circle of Wilde, and whose successors maintained a movement of sorts until the 1930s. They were devoted to the ideal of the love between an older middle-class man and a working-class boy, which sometimes translated into sexual relationships but as

¹³⁵ Patrick Hennessy *RHA* (Chicago: Guildhall Galleries, undated), n.p.

¹³⁶ Michael Hatt, 'A Great Sight': Henry Scott Tuke and his Models, in *Model and Supermodel: The Artist's Model in British Art and Culture*, ed. by Jane Desmarais, Martin Postle and William Vaughan (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), p.89.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.95.

¹³⁸ Walters, 1978, p.240.

¹³⁹ Hatt, p.94. See also David Wainwright and Catherine Dinn, *Henry Scott Tuke 1858-1929: Under Canvas* (London: Sarema Press, 1989).

often remained an ideal, expressed only in verse.¹⁴⁰ Tuke's artistic reputation did not survive him but he was rediscovered in the 1970s by openly gay artists and collectors and became a cult in gay artistic circles.¹⁴¹

Male bathing scenes are rare in Irish art. One example is Basil Blackshaw's *Men, Sea and Moon*, 1952 (fig.5.26) which has been compared to Cézanne's *Bathers*, c.1880 (fig.5.27) in terms of both its colour palette and the obvious similarity in pose between the figures with raised arms in both paintings.¹⁴² Stewart maintains that while borrowing stylistically from Cézanne, the focus of the painting lies in 'the psychological tension generated through the ambiguous interplay of the two figures', and specifically the idea that the two men might be lovers.¹⁴³ Unlike Cézanne's male bathers, who are depicted in the landscape and so belong to an Arcadian tradition in art, Blackshaw's figures are rendered contemporary by the style of dress and appearance of the background figure. In this way it is more similar in tone to Hennessy's *In the Hammam*, described above. As Germaine Greer puts it 'the ostensible subject of images of naked boys on beaches was healthy, innocent, open-air exercise, but most of the male artists who were still painting it in the mid twentieth century had their own homoerotic agenda'.¹⁴⁴

In a seminal essay of 1962, Theodore Reff interpreted Cézanne's *Bather with Outstretched Arms*, 1877 (fig.5.28) as a clue to the artist's psychosexual identity.¹⁴⁵ Reff cites the 'extraordinary' pose and the sense of the alienation of the figure in the landscape as proof that the key to the interpretation of the image lies 'within the artist's personality' rather than in any aesthetic or formal scheme that he was seeking to put into action in his painting. He suggests that the figure of the bather amounts to nothing less than 'a projection of Cezanne himself, an image of his own solitary condition', and that

¹⁴⁰ Timothy D'Arch Smith, *Love in Ernest: Some Notes on the Lives and Writings of English 'Uranian' Poets from 1889 to 1930* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970).

¹⁴¹ Wainwright and Dinn, 1989.

¹⁴² James Christen Stewart, *When Time Began to Rant and Rage* (Liverpool: Walker Art Gallery, 1999), p.218.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Germaine Greer, *The Boy* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003), p.144.

¹⁴⁵ Cézanne completed 23 paintings and drawings of male bathes between 1875 and 1885. See Reff, 'Cezanne's *Bather with Outstretched Arms*', *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 59 (March, 1962), 173-90, notes 12 and 13 (p.188) for details.

the awkwardness of the figure is a manifestation of 'the antagonism of sensuality and restraint' in the life of the artist.¹⁴⁶ Reff's psychoanalytical approach to Cézanne's series of male bathers is not universally accepted. Mahon, for instance, sees nothing more than nostalgia for his Provençal youth and a kind of 'veiled eroticism' in Cézanne's image.¹⁴⁷ However, Tamar Garb observes that Cézanne was 'haunted by sexual and psychic impulses...linked to the relentless policing of sexual difference which characterized nineteenth-century French society'.¹⁴⁸ The 'policing of sexual difference' was probably just as acute an issue for Hennessy in 1950s Ireland as it would have been for Cézanne in late nineteenth century France. If the sense of wistfulness and nostalgia in Hennessy's work stems from his character and temperament, then, more specifically, his solitary male nude can be read as representing his conflicted sense of self in relation to the world around him.

In cases such as Hennessy's, where there is relatively little biographical information available, the image itself must offer clues to its interpretation. We have seen that there is sufficient that is disquieting in some of Hennessy's paintings to allow for a psycho-sexual reading of his work. In particular, an analysis of *In the Studio*, (fig.5.29) bears out this point. In this painting a Staffordshire figurine of an extravagantly attired man is depicted on a mantelpiece, to the left, with a glass jar of flowers on the right hand side. Between these two closely observed and delineated objects we see the back view of a nude male model reflected in the over-mantel mirror. Because of the very unusual and contrived viewpoint for the figure, he appears to be of a scale with the porcelain figurine, as if he is standing on a similar mantelpiece projecting backwards, just the other side of the picture plane. One of the daisies from the jar of flowers appears to brush against his upper left thigh, drawing the viewer's attention directly to his buttocks. As Garb has observed, the back view conceals the genitals but also proffers 'a part of the male anatomy which is

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p.180.

¹⁴⁷ Mahon, 2007, p.77. Aruna D'Souza, *Cézanne's Bathers, Biography and the Erotics of Paint* (University Park, Penn: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008) and Borel, 1990, both emphasise the eroticism of the medium of paint in Cézanne's bathing images, and point to the similarities in the male and female figures.

¹⁴⁸ Tamar Garb, *Bodies of Modernity: Figure and flesh in fin-de-siècle France* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), p.197.

penetrable and therefore symbolically feminine'.¹⁴⁹ In this painting a series of oppositions seem to be quite deliberately set up. There is the obvious contrast between the sumptuously dressed figurine and the nude man, linked together compositionally by the light source which falls on both from the left hand side. Their poses differ too, the confident forward stride of the rather dandified figurine, in opposition to the slightly crouched pose of the model who, though not frontally exposed, appears from the back to be cradling his genitals, in an attitude of vulnerability. The nude's pose is very similar to that of the single nude figure in Hennessy's other works discussed above, and almost identical to the one in *Boy and Seagull*. This probably indicates a photographic source for the figure. Although Hennessy did sometimes work from the live model, he was also a passionate amateur photographer, and he amassed a huge collection of photographs which can easily be identified as sources for the paintings. Here is the same slight figure, the left leg bent at the knee, the head slightly inclined forwards and the arms by the sides with the hands in front of the body. The highly decorative glazed figurine also contrasts with the informal arrangement of daisies and asters, which appear to be placed haphazardly in an old jar. If, as already considered, that figure symbolically represents the artist himself, perhaps we see him here caught between the refinement and culture of the figurine and the wildness of nature, his own nature, represented by these flowers. Alternatively it may be interpreted that as subject matter the nude has to be relegated to an inferior position, because the still life is a more viable and profitable option for him as an artist. Although the theme of the artist's studio is an established convention in Western art, as discussed above in chapter four, the nude as represented here seems strangely out of place. Furthermore, it seems highly unlikely that the bizarre compositional elements in this painting are accidental. Rather they seem, to borrow Reff's phrase, to illustrate 'the antagonism of sensuality and restraint' in the artist's personality.¹⁵⁰

The faint absurdity of *In the Studio* and to a lesser extent *Man-made Man and Rose* render them 'camp' in Susan Sontag's definition of that term. She defines camp as a

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p.50. She makes this point specifically in relation to Caillebotte's *Man at his Bath*, 1884.

¹⁵⁰ Reff, 1962.

'sensibility' akin to 'taste', which is characterized by a 'love of artifice and exaggeration'. She describes it as both a 'private code' and a 'badge of identity'.¹⁵¹ This is not to suggest that Hennessy necessarily indulged himself with insider jokes in these paintings, though he was a witty and erudite man who was known to indulge himself with cryptic titles for his work. As one commentator wrote; 'those who know Hennessy, and knowing him is an experience, marvel at the seriousness of the work compared of the great humour of the man himself'.¹⁵² However, regardless of whether the humour was intentional or not, there is, in these particular images, the aspect of an 'art that proposes itself seriously, but cannot be taken altogether seriously because it is "too much"'.¹⁵³ Sontag maintains that pure or naïve camp is found in seriousness that fails, rather than in conscious 'camping-it-up'. It is produced in a spirit of extravagance, and is the result of going over the top.

Certain of the objects depicted in the paintings also have their camp value, from the full blown extravagance of the red rose to the Staffordshire figurine. The origins of camp lie in the eighteenth century (from which era this latter object originates) and in the person of the Dandy (which it depicts). Camp can be seen as dandyism for today's age of mass culture.¹⁵⁴ Finally, the use of classicism, and its apparent debunking through the subversion of the *trompe l'oeil* technique, also make these images conform to a camp reading.

Irishness and Homosexuality as Conflicting Identities

Homosexuality was seen as a 'foreign' vice, in Ireland during most of the period under discussion in this work.¹⁵⁵ Much of the understanding of homosexuality, such as it was in early twentieth century Ireland, was related to the public's knowledge of the case of Oscar Wilde. In Britain, where he was tried and convicted for homosexual offences, Oscar Wilde helped to create a public image for the homosexual 'labelling processes',

¹⁵¹ Susan Sontag, 'Notes on Camp', *Partisan Review*, 31 (Fall, 1964), 515-311964, p.515.

¹⁵² *Patrick Hennessy RHA* (Chicago: Guildhall Galleries, undated).

¹⁵³ Sontag, 1964, p.523.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Ferriter, 2009, p.63. Eibhear Walshe, , 'The First Gay Irishman? Ireland and the Wilde Trials', *Éire/Ireland*, 40.3/4 (Fall/Winter, 2005), 38-57, suggests that it was specifically identified as French, pp.41-5.

thus contributing to 'a new community of knowledge, if not of life and feeling, amongst many men with homosexual leanings'.¹⁵⁶ This process helped to forge homosexual identity in opposition to 'normal' sexuality, in Britain. In Ireland, however, 'because of the stigma attached to homosexuality, there seemed little appetite for remembering Oscar Wilde as an Irishman and as a gay man'.¹⁵⁷ Instead, as Eibhear Walsh explains, Wilde was 'nationalized' and embraced as an Irish rebel.¹⁵⁸ This alternative identity was created through the Irish press reports of his trial, which glossed over his homosexuality, and concentrated instead on his defiance of British injustice, his speech from the dock, and his subsequent letter from gaol, all recognisable and respected strategies of Irish republicanism.¹⁵⁹ Once this alternative view had been established, 'Wilde came to be seen by subsequent Irish authors as a disruptive figure of anti-colonial resistance and this reconstruction mitigated his aberrant homosexuality for those writers and indeed for their society'.¹⁶⁰ In the context of a public discourse concerned principally with national identity, 'Wilde as sexual "other" was made safe within another discourse of oppositional types, Celtic versus British'.¹⁶¹

Eibhear Walshe maintains that 'a distrust of the "unmanly homosexual" resulted in a complete obliteration of the homoerotic from within nationalist discourse' because the tenuous nature of national identity 'necessitated a denial of difference with its incipient threat of dissidence'.¹⁶² Indeed, as Ferriter has, perhaps wryly observed, 'there has never been a homosexual Republican'.¹⁶³ According to Brian Lewis, the diaries of Roger Casement were for years believed to be forgeries not out of sincere conviction but because to 'the leading lights of Irish nationalism' (i.e. Redmond, Collins, John Devoy and de Valera) 'a public avowal of a queer Casement was out of the question'.¹⁶⁴ He

¹⁵⁶ Weeks, 1996, p.49.

¹⁵⁷ Ferriter, 2009, p.62.

¹⁵⁸ Walshe, 2005, p.51.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, pp.42-55.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. Walshe is referring here to references to Wilde in the works of Joyce, Yeats, Shaw and Behan. Walshe, 2005, p.50.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ferriter, 2009, p.476.

¹⁶⁴ Brian Lewis, 'The Queer Life and Afterlife of Roger Casement', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 14.4 (October, 2005), 363-382 (p.376).

goes on to explain that because it was impossible for official Ireland to accept that an Irishman 'could possibly be a patriot and gay', it was easier for supporters of the Irish Free State to 'fall back on denial and to denounce the diaries as vicious British forgeries'.¹⁶⁵ In the context of the on-going debate on the authenticity of the Casement diaries, Monk Gibbon, writing in the *Irish Times* in 1956, was 'perhaps the first in Ireland publicly to raise the possibility that patriotism and homosexuality might be compatible'.¹⁶⁶ In 2002 William J. McCormack of Goldsmiths College, London instigated the Giles Report on the Casement Diaries, and Audrey Best conducted forensic tests and handwriting analysis, and concluded beyond reasonable doubt that the diaries were genuine. As a result of these findings McCormack was accused of being 'anti-Irish and anti-Roman Catholic', by a report in the pages of *An Phoblacht*.¹⁶⁷

In some ways little has changed, and many Irish people still have difficulty in accepting homosexuality as an identity that can co-exist with Irishness. Declan Kiberd, writing about the desirability of 're-claiming' Wilde as an Irishman writes;

'Just as Wilde's Irishness poses some problems for those who considered that he had been conclusively assimilated to English dramatic tradition, so now his gayness is offering a challenge to some who would otherwise be happy – after all these years – to reclaim him for Ireland. For these essentialist souls you can be gay or you can be Irish, but you cannot be both at the same time...there would be little point in recovering Wilde's Irish elements if this were to be done at the cost of denying his sexual identities'.¹⁶⁸

For Francis Bacon and Patrick Hennessy the question of having a sexuality in conflict with their nationality was dealt with very differently. Because Bacon was known to have rejected any sense of Irishness he did not have to deal with it directly. However, a case has been made here that his formative experiences of his unhappy family life in Ireland

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p.377.

¹⁶⁷ Jack Moylett, writing in *An Phoblacht*, 26/09/2002, cited in Lewis, p.381.

¹⁶⁸ Declan Kiberd, review of C. George Sandulescu (ed.) *Rediscovering Oscar Wilde* (London, 1944) in *Irish Studies Review*, no.14, Spring 1996, p.56.

and his emerging sexuality strongly affected his work in terms of both subject matter and style.

Hennessy, it appears, lived a double life in Ireland, discreetly hiding his sexuality from all but a close circle of friends.¹⁶⁹ His Irishness did seem to matter to him, perhaps because of the relatives on his father's side who remained in Cork, and with whom he spent a good deal of time. However, he also spent increasingly long periods outside Ireland, in Tangiers in the 1950s and '60s and later in Portugal, eventually returning to Ireland only for exhibitions. Even then, he did not attend openings and never pandered to the art establishment. Although commercially successful, Hennessy attracted little critical praise, mainly because of his conservative type of realism which was then considered old-fashioned. However, some of the comments written about him seem incredibly naïve. O'Doherty's reference to the 'distancing' of the male nude because of prudery is simply inaccurate in Hennessy's case, while Dorothy Walker's comments in the same Rosc catalogue seem to a contemporary reader to be shockingly lacking in awareness. 'His virtuosity', she wrote, 'is of the order of the popular concert pianist Liberace'. Her assertion that 'he resolutely follows his own bent' was hardly meant disparagingly but would hardly be seen as appropriate today.¹⁷⁰ There is a point to be made here about the nature of public discourse, and the linguistic controls that formulate norms 'by which the speakable is differentiated from the unspeakable', as discussed in chapter two, above, dealing with censorship.¹⁷¹

Billy Quinn and Gay Activist Art

Billy Quinn's self-portrait, *Billy*, 1991 (fig.5.30) is part of a series of thirty works made while he was living in New York in the early 1990s as a response to the crisis of the AIDS epidemic. AIDS first began to come to public attention in 1981 in America, the first Irish cases being reported in 1983. By 1992 it was said to have become the dominant issue in avant garde art in America. During that period gay activist art became

¹⁶⁹ Hennessy's personal papers, lodged in the National Archive in London, with instructions that they are not to be opened until 50 years after his death, in 2030, are rumoured to be revelatory about his sexual life.

¹⁷⁰ Dorothy Walker, 'Patrick Hennessy', in *The Irish Imagination 1959-71* (Dublin: Municipal Gallery of Art, 1971), p.66.

¹⁷¹ Butler, 1989.

much more confrontational about its concerns, and more direct in its imagery. As Reed put it, 'Suggestions of a homosexual 'sensibility' tuned to Aesthetic sensitivity, camp whimsy, or subtle codes were supplanted by images of homosexuals as forceful political advocates'.¹⁷²

Despite the lavish decoration in some of the portraits, Quinn's art is mainly concerned with combining art practice and political activism in campaigning for the rights of sexual minorities. His work is focussed on 'the idea of being honest and completely open about one's sexuality' in a way that would not have been possible in Ireland for most of the artists discussed in this chapter.¹⁷³

AIDS activist art should be seen in the context of the censorship debates in the U.S.A. The situation regarding the public funding of gay artists and attempts to censor their work was discussed in chapter two in the context of a wider discussion about international attitudes to censorship. However, there was another debate within the gay community regarding the appropriate ways in which to depict people with the AIDS virus. Photographer Nicholas Nixon's photographs of people dying in obvious pain and stress which were exhibited at MoMA in 1988 sparked a bitter debate in the gay community about the appropriate way to depict those with the virus.¹⁷⁴ This was articulated by art historian Simon Watney who wrote, 'the image of someone with AIDS is...inescapably caught up in a dense field of conflict in which all too often the sadistic over-simplification of racists, misogynists, and homophobes are countered by equally over-simplified idealizations'.¹⁷⁵

Collectively entitled *A Plague of Angels*, each one of Quinn's panels represents a single figure or a couple as a modern-day 'saint'. Quinn discovered when he began the series that religious iconography seemed appropriate for subjects that he wanted to elevate from a derisory position in society to an heroic and mythic status. Having left Ireland at a young age and without any regret to study art in England Quinn was surprised at how

¹⁷² Christopher Reed, *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.208.

¹⁷³ Amy Hufnagel, 'Billy Quinn', 1992
<<http://photography.cdmhost/cdm/singleitem/collection/p4023/coll6/id.1362/rec/4>> [accessed 17 July 2012].

¹⁷⁴ Reed, 2011, pp.208-214.

¹⁷⁵ Simon Watney, "Lifelike": Imagining the Bodies of People with AIDS in *The Masculine Masquerade: Masculinity and Representation*, ed. by Perchuk and Posner (Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT List Visual Arts Centre, 1995), pp.63-68 (p.64).

'Catholic' the images became. Each person is shown with an attribute as is common in religious imagery, and the backgrounds are decorated with 22k gold and silver in the manner of medieval icons. They are also made on a very large scale with life-sized figures. He refers to this technique as 'paintography', being a combination of painting and photography.

Above all he wanted to show people who were living with AIDS rather than dying from it. For this reason he included text in the images and most of the phrases deal with the banalities of everyday living. The banner under his self-portrait reads 'AIDS pushed me...it pushed all of us...in the realization of our own mortality', while the text accompanying another image *Gene and Kev*, 1991 (fig.5.31) reads 'since coming to New York I've lost three hundred and twenty one friends'. These were the randomly recorded words of his sitters. It is a clear measure of the change that has occurred in Irish society that the Irish Museum of Modern Art could acquire Quinn's self-portrait for its collection in the 1990s.

Richard Hamilton's Illustrations for Joyce's Ulysses

We have seen that male bathing scenes are unusual in art and where they do occur they are usually depicted outdoors, as in the examples discussed above. Scenes representing bathing in domestic interiors were generally reserved for female subjects. Typical amongst these are the works of Edgar Degas and Pierre Bonnard. However, during the nineteenth century there were some notable exceptions, such as Caillebotte's *Man at his Bath* (fig.5.28) and *Man Drying his Leg*, both 1884.¹⁷⁶ They are unusual because the men represented in them are de-heroicized, and because there is no other male activity depicted, such as wrestling, which would signify socially acceptable maleness. These, as Garb has observed, are men placed in a traditionally female environment.¹⁷⁷ The depiction of a man in a bath is unexpected because it is read as passive. Even Caillebotte's unusual image shows the man standing beside the bath rather than reclining in it. According to Nochlin, bathing and its representation stems from an enlightenment

¹⁷⁶ Garb, 1998. She also mentions David's *Á Marat*, but although similar in composition to a domestic bathing scene, its biographical subject matter justifies its representational context.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

idea of control of the body and 'must be viewed as part of a more generalized politics and policy of 'putting the body in its place'.¹⁷⁸ Further, bathing places such as the Haman have particular connotations of the 'exotic' which has been linked to 'foreign' types of sexuality.

In the late 1940s Richard Hamilton began working on a project to illustrate Joyce's *Ulysses* but he put it aside in 1950 only returning to it again in the 1980s, when he made seven etchings and a digital print. His intention was to create one image for each of the novel's eighteen chapters, and a frontispiece. Each episode in the novel was to be illustrated in a different style to mirror the linguistic complexities of the text. *He Foresaw his Pale Body*, 1990 (fig.5.33) is the image which corresponds to chapter five, the 'Lotus Eaters', and is based on the words, 'He foresaw his pale body reclined in it at full, naked, in a womb of warmth, oiled by scented melting soap, softly laved'.¹⁷⁹ As Coppel has noted, 'Bloom gazing at his body also fulfils Joyce's technique of narcissism and the symbol of the Eucharist (This is my body)'.¹⁸⁰ Hamilton made an initial ink sketch in 1948. In it Bloom is depicted in side view, naked in the bath surrounded by studies of feet, faces and penises. The artist went on to use this sketch as a basis for a different work, an aquatint etching entitled *A languid floating flower*, 1983 (fig.5.34). In a second pencil and watercolour sketch from the same year he depicted the figure in the bath from a viewpoint above the head looking towards the feet, with the body foreshortened. The pose is reminiscent of Mantegna's *Lamentation Over the Dead Christ*, c.1480, and it was retained in the final version.¹⁸¹ The change of pose was necessitated by the text. Hamilton explained that 'the key word 'foresaw' demands an interior perspective, foreshortened as though seen from an inner eye'.¹⁸² This viewpoint gives the sense of subjectivity that Hamilton sought because it conveys the viewpoint of the bathing subject, and for that reason Nochlin has likened it to Frida Kahlo's *What the Water Gave Me*,

¹⁷⁸ Linda Nochlin, *Bathers, Bodies, Beauty: The Visceral Eye* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2006), p.30.

¹⁷⁹ James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Penguin; The Bodley Head, 1960), p.88.

¹⁸⁰ Hamilton, Richard and Stephen Coppel, *Richard Hamilton: Imaging Joyce's Ulysses* (London: British Council, 2001), p.14.

¹⁸¹ Elizabeth Manchester, 'He Foresaw his Pale Body', 2007, www.tate.org.uk [accessed 12 September 2012].

¹⁸² Etienne Lullin, *Richard Hamilton: Prints and Multiples, 1939-2002* (New Haven: Kunstmuseum Winterthur and Yale Centre for British Art, 2003), p.218, cited by Manchester, 2007, <www.tate.org.uk> [accessed 12 September 2012].

1938 (fig.5.35). Nochlin identifies the emblem of the bathtub in both of these images as 'a site of self-knowledge'.¹⁸³ However, by hovering, as it were, over the subject's head, the viewer is allowed to see the man's body in its entirety.

Hamilton returned to the project in 1981 in advance of the Joyce centenary the following year, but it remained incomplete at the time of his death.

Colin Middleton and the Androgynous Christ

The crucifixion of Christ emerged as the central image in Christian art in the late middle ages, though 'as late as 1054 the Roman church officially opposed Byzantine images of the suffering Christ on the grounds that these diminished his divinity'.¹⁸⁴ This argument was finally resolved by the placing of the emphasis on the redemptive meaning of suffering, and by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there emerged the image of Christ the man, suffering with and for mankind. This image functioned as a more personal, direct and unmediated devotional experience. Christ's nakedness became a symbol of his humanity and his sacrifice for mankind, and favourite subjects in art included the flagellation, mockery, stripping, crucifixion, and pieta, all of which represented an almost naked, or, very rarely, naked, Christ figure. Alyce Mahon recognises the story of Christ's passion as 'one of brutal violence, agony, and final ecstasy, in which taboos (notably murder) are broken and sacred redemption is achieved through the profane acts of others'. The balancing of such images of extreme violence with devotional propriety results in 'the controlled eroticism of devotional imagery'.¹⁸⁵

As far as representation of the naked body is concerned, Christianity can be seen to have 'retreated from the phallic pride and assertiveness of the ancient world', but the figure of Marsyas, the satyr who challenged Apollo, was, nevertheless, frequently adapted for the figure of Christ.¹⁸⁶ Probably the most common vehicle for the sexualized male nude in

¹⁸³ Nochlin, 2006, p.114. She sees this revelatory quality in Kahlo and especially in Pierre Bonnard's obsessive picturing of his wife Marthe bathing.

¹⁸⁴ Walters, 1978, p.73.

¹⁸⁵ Mahon, 2007, p.286. She is referring specifically to Bill Viola's *The Passions*, 2000-2003, but her point can be applied generally to images of the crucifixion.

¹⁸⁶ Walters, 1978 p.56.

Christian art is the figure of St. Sebastian, in depictions of whom, 'only too often, a loving appreciation of his golden Apollonian beauty outweighs his religious meaning'.¹⁸⁷ Vasari wrote that a St. Sebastian by Fra Bartolommeo had to be moved because women coming to confession complained that it aroused in them lascivious thoughts.¹⁸⁸ Sebastian 'also provides an outlet for usually suppressed homosexual fantasies'.¹⁸⁹ The figures of David and John the Baptist also provided ample opportunity for sensual portrayals of the flesh in religious narratives.

The crucifixion is a relatively rare subject in modern art, though, as the definitive image of human suffering in Western art, artists sometimes have recourse to it in times of great strife. As Walters has observed, 'in their attempts to cope with the horrors of war in this century, artists have occasionally turned back to Christian imagery, particularly to the tortured Christ of the late middle ages'. She cites Picasso's variations on Grunewald's Crucifixion as an example, but she asserts that 'these contemporary Christs offer no consolation; they pose questions and hold no answers'.¹⁹⁰ Perhaps this is partly due to the empty use of symbols in an age of disbelief.

However, as Gesa Thiessen has observed, Colin Middleton (1910-1983) treated the subject of the crucifixion in a particularly 'unconventional manner', which suggests the artist held a sophisticated theological viewpoint.¹⁹¹ In *Christ Androgyne*, 1943 (fig.5.36) Middleton represents the crucified Christ as an androgynous figure.¹⁹² Except in very exceptional circumstances, androgyny does not exist as a physical condition and therefore cannot be thought of as a characteristic of a person. Instead, it relates to a person's appearance, and how the viewer perceives that appearance in terms of their own desire. It is, essentially, an idea, which exists in the relation between 'psyche and image', and can be symptomatic of 'a repressed desire'.¹⁹³ The androgynous looking figure contains

¹⁸⁷ Ibid p.81.

¹⁸⁸ Rudolf Wittkower, *Born Under Saturn* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963), p.179.

¹⁸⁹ Walters, 1978, p.82.

¹⁹⁰ Walters, 1978, p.267.

¹⁹¹ Gesa Thiessen, 'The Theological and Spiritual in the Life of Colin Middleton', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 350: 88 (Summer, 1999), 199-206 (p.199).

¹⁹² The word androgyne has Greek roots, from *andro*, meaning male and *gyne*, meaning female.

¹⁹³ Francette Pacteau, 'The Impossible Referent: Representations of the Androgyne' in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. by Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (New York: Methuen, 1986), pp.62-84, (p.62).

the promise of the possibility of a dual sexual identity, which, in its ultimate effect, is similar to non-sexual identity or non-identity. In other words, the erosion of sexual identity, and all of its complications, brings men and women closer to a gender-less state in which the one-ness of all humanity can at least be imagined.

We must assume from the title of the work, that Middleton's Christ is actually, physically androgynous. The term Androgyne is sometimes used interchangeably with the term Hermaphrodite, both meaning to possess the sexual characteristics of both sexes.¹⁹⁴

However, the differences, which seem negligible in language, take on a deeper significance in visual representation, and the explicitness of the treatment of the figure makes an important difference to its interpretation. In Middleton's painting a single breast is revealed, while the genitals are covered by a loincloth, leaving the possible possession of a penis shrouded in mystery. The figure of Christ, traditionally and recognizably male, is feminized. Middleton emphasizes the femaleness of the figure, not to suggest an alternative female Christ, but to arguably to rebuke the notion of an exclusively male one. As Pacteau explains 'the androgyne's 'position' represents a denial, or a transgression, of the rigid gender divide, and as such implies a threat to our given identity and to the system of social rules which define us. In this image it is a welcome threat.'¹⁹⁵ Covering the genitals of the Christ figure was a well established convention in Crucifixion images, seldom deviated from. By combining the covered loins with the naked breasts Middleton de-phallicizes the idea of a male Christ that had become encoded in gendered views of humanity in the established Christian churches.

Thiessen suggests that this radical treatment of a very traditional subject is evidence of a Panentheistic streak in Middleton's thinking. Panentheism 'affirms that all is in God, and God is present in all creation – while God remains at the same time absolute, or totally other' as opposed to the more widely known Pantheism, which states that God and

¹⁹⁴ A.J.L. Busst, 'The Image of the Androgyne in the 19th century, in *Romantic Mythologies*, ed. by Ian Fletcher (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), pp.1-96. Busst's definition of both is 'a person who unites certain of the essential characteristics of both sexes, and who, consequently, may be considered as both a man and a woman or as neither a man nor a woman, as bisexual or asexual'. He maintains that any differences between the two are arbitrary and contradictory.

¹⁹⁵ Pacteau, 1986, p.63.

nature are identical concepts.¹⁹⁶ The difference may seem marginal, semantic even, but the crucial difference between the two is that Panentheism is acceptable within Christian theology, because it acknowledges a supreme creator, while Pantheism is not.

Panentheism gained ground in those Christian denominations which sought to adapt to scientific discovery and in particular the theory of evolution in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and would have been part of the discourse among Protestant dissenters. Middleton came from a Church of England and Church of Ireland family background, and taught art at the Quaker-run Friends School in Lisburn from 1961 to 1970. In matters religious he was an individualist and a humanist, with strongly held 'anti-hierarchical and anti-institutional views'.¹⁹⁷ The fact that he retained some Christian belief from his up-bringing, is evident from his use of language to make sacred those secular things which mattered most to him. He referred to 'holy places' that he loved and to his 'four evangelists' of art.¹⁹⁸ However, as a social radical he imagined the person of Christ as a 'genius', a 'revolutionary', and 'extraordinary'.¹⁹⁹

Androgynous men and gods have been a feature of many religions. In the nineteenth century the Occultists saw Adam as an androgyne, from whom all men and women had separated, and ideas about the androgyny of Christ surface in Gnosticism.²⁰⁰ In the early and middle part of the nineteenth century the hermaphrodite was seen as 'a metaphor for ideal sexual union and for the reunion of the soul with god'.²⁰¹ This thinking drew on the Gnostic tradition that 'considered Christ an androgyne, the marrying of Logos and Christianity, and also on the Marian myth of the 'sanctification of women'.²⁰² These religious ideas in turn impacted on the social sciences. Auguste Comte, in his *Système de politique positive ou traité de sociologie, Instituant la Religion de l'Humanité*, 1851-4,

¹⁹⁶ Thiessen, 1999, p.204. The term Panentheism was first coined in 1828 by the German philosopher Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781-1832) to mean 'all in god'.

¹⁹⁷ Thiessen, 1999, p.202.

¹⁹⁸ Middleton interviewed by Michael Longley in *Colin Middleton*, ed. by Carlo Eastwood (Belfast: Eastwood Gallery, 2000), p.15-16. The places he called 'sacred' Cavehill, where he was born, the Mourne mountains, the Antrim Coast and Donegal. His 'evangelists' were Piero della Francesca, Vermeer, Cézanne, and Mondrian.

¹⁹⁹ The poet Michael Longley interviewed by Thiessen, 1999, p.202.

²⁰⁰ Busst, 1967.

²⁰¹ Chris Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley: Dandy of the Grotesque* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.58.

²⁰² Ibid.

envisioned 'the future androgyny of woman' as a means to identifying the common humanity in all people and, in so doing, to overcome division and discrimination.²⁰³ His positivist approach attempted to create a synthesis of the female characteristics of love, feeling, and matter, with male intelligence and spirit.

Liam Kelly describes Middleton as an 'arch-modernist', with a developed social conscience, and a 'distaste for human suffering'.²⁰⁴ Thiessen proposes that it was his anguish for the plight of people, men, women and children in the Nazi concentration camps that inspired his *Christ Androgyne*. This may be the case, as reports of Nazi atrocities had begun to appear in the British press as early as 1942.²⁰⁵ He was also clearly sensible to wartime sufferings at home, including the bombings of the Belfast blitz, on the nights of the 15th April and the 4th May, 1941, which killed nine hundred, and one hundred and fifty people, respectively, representing the greatest single loss of life in the blitz outside of London. His feelings of empathy for the sufferings of his fellow human beings meant that he 'imaged the presence of god in all humans', and, significantly, this included women.²⁰⁶ Moreover, the artist was dealing with his own personal grief after the tragic death of his first wife Maye McLean, who died in 1939 just four years after their marriage. As Walters has observed, there was, in Christian art 'no female equivalent to Apollo or Christ', by which she meant that never had the nude female figure been the bearer of spiritual meanings of godliness and salvation.²⁰⁷ Middleton set out to create one. As Thiessen says, 'his depiction of Christ clearly implies that God cannot be thought of in purely male terms. Rather, it conveys ...that Christ never made a principle of his maleness'.²⁰⁸ In this image, Middleton anticipates aspects of feminist theology decades before they were articulated.

²⁰³ Auguste Comte, cited in Busst, 1967, p.30.

²⁰⁴ Liam Kelly, 'Essay' in *Colin Middleton*, ed. by Carlo Eastwood (Belfast: Eastwood Gallery, 2000), p.11.

²⁰⁵ In November 1942, an article in the *London News Chronicle* first used the word Holocaust to describe what was happening to Europe's Jews. An important article by Ben Hecht also appeared in *Reader's Digest* in the same year. <jewishvirtuallibrary.org> [accessed 2 July 2012].

²⁰⁶ Thiessen, 1999, p.205.

²⁰⁷ Walters, 1978, p.13.

²⁰⁸ Thiessen, 1999, p.203.

In his 1984 essay *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, Leo Steinberg maintained that the emphasis placed on the genitals in depictions of the infant Jesus throughout two and a half centuries of Western art had its basis in the theology of *ostentatio genitalium*. The overt display of the Christ child's sexual organs was given as evidence of Christ's full 'humanation'.²⁰⁹ He argued that Christ's circumcision symbolised the correction of corrupted flesh, and symbolically prefigured the passion, having the common symbol of spilt blood.²¹⁰ While images of the adult Christ show him fully clothed, in death he is again revealed in his nakedness, because by his sacrifice he has redeemed the sin of Adam and hence there is no longer any shame attached to his human physicality. Steinberg puts forward a convincing argument, based on the visual evidence in a wide variety of images dating from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries. However, his analysis has since been critiqued by female theologians, principally by Caroline Walker Bynum, on account of his view of Christ as not only fully human but fully male in both gender and sexuality. Citing medieval textual evidence, she suggests instead that Christ's flesh was sometimes 'seen as female, as lactating and giving birth', in the medieval period.²¹¹ Bynum Walker refers to the writings of Catherine of Siena who wrote of Christ as 'mother', and Hildegard of Bingen who wrote that 'man represents the divinity of the son of God and woman his humanity'.²¹²

Another feminist theologian, Ritamary Bradley identifies the earliest use of the language of God as mother in the Eastern Church in the second century in the writings of Clement of Alexandria, who wrote 'and God himself is love, and out of love he is become feminine. In his ineffable essence he is Father, in his compassion to us he became Mother. The Father by love became feminine...'.²¹³ Similar metaphors were commonly expressed in the Western Church, for example in the writings of St. Ambrose. He wrote;

²⁰⁹ Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and Modern Oblivion* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996) Steinberg offers the term 'humanation' in place of 'incarnation, to mean Christ's absolute humanity, i.e. that Christ is at once, all man and all God.

²¹⁰ Ibid, p.48.

²¹¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, 'The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages: A Reply to Leo Steinberg', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 39:3 (1987), 399-439, p.403.

²¹² Hildegard of Bingen, *liber divinorum operum*, bk.1, ch.IV, par 100, cited in Walker Bynum, 1986, p.420.

²¹³ Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, pp.220-223, cited in Ritamary Bradley, 'The Motherhood Theme in Julian of Norwich', *14th Century English Mystics Newsletter*, 2.4 (1976), 25-30 (p.26).

'you prevailed...by use of breasts and womb...the breasts are the two testaments. They are the breasts of the son who nourishes us on spiritual milk. The Father's womb is the spiritual womb of an inner sanctuary'.²¹⁴ Bynum Walker argues that Christ's humanation is evident in all of his bodily organs and that medieval thinkers had a more fluid interpretation of Christian bodily symbols. It seems, she writes, that 'medieval writers and occasionally even artists represented God's body with both feminine and masculine characteristics – something modern thinkers rarely attempt and only with considerable awkwardness and embarrassment'.²¹⁵ The most radical aspect of her analysis is the attention she gives to the theme of 'reversal' in Christ's teaching, when he said 'the first shall be last and the last shall be first' and 'the meek shall inherit the earth'. This she interprets as a promise to women, traditionally seen as inferior in strength and rationality; that they would be made superior by God. It is a view that fits comfortably into Middleton's liberal religion and progressive politics.

Apart from his innate understanding of Christian theology, Middleton was familiar with the works of Carl Gustave Jung, who had written widely on the power of symbols and the female archetype.²¹⁶ 'What gives my work continuity', he said, 'is the constancy of the female archetype, no matter how many the disguises- the mother figure, the mother and child, the reclining figure, the single tree against the hill'.²¹⁷ Jung described the archetype as a kind of idea that derives from the collective unconscious and is revealed in myth and fairytale. The female archetype is related to the human mother, and from thence to all women in motherly roles, and eventually to the Great-Mother of religion, a concept that embraces the goddess as well as the witch.²¹⁸ Thus the female archetype has both benevolent and malevolent associations. Symbols of the female archetype can occur in anything 'arousing feelings of devotion or awe', including natural objects such as the sea, trees, the moon, caves and certain animals; man-made objects such as hollow objects or

²¹⁴ St. Ambrose, 'The Patriarchs' in *Seven Exegetical Works: Fathers of the Church*, trans. Michael P. McHugh (Washington: 1972), pp.268-9.

²¹⁵ Walker Bynum, 1984, p.434.

²¹⁶ Thiessen, 1999, p.200.

²¹⁷ Middleton, interviewed by Michael Longley, in *Colin Middleton* (Belfast: Eastwood Gallery, 2000), p.17.

²¹⁸ Carl Jung, *Four Archetypes* (New York; London: Routledge, 2001), p.14

vessels, and even institutions such as the church.²¹⁹ Middleton believed that the system of rationality begun in the Renaissance had seriously undermined the female archetype and he felt it had to be reinvented in Western culture. Clearly, it was a concept he identified with nature rather than culture. His definition is pseudo-religious in tone, demonstrating how these ideas co-mingled with his religious thinking. He said, 'the archetype is basically a symbol. It is a link between what is articulate and what is inarticulate, a link between what is known and what is unknown. The only place these meet is in the authentic symbol. A symbol, therefore, is a communicating vessel'.²²⁰ Although John Hewitt has observed of Middleton's work that 'there are occasions when...the symbols have been inserted rather than grown', and a point could be made that, without the supporting structure of a committed group of artists pursuing a joint programme, Surrealism was a difficult path to follow for an Irish artist.²²¹ However, this long discussion of just one of Middleton's works demonstrates that in *Christ Androgyne*, the use of the symbol is both erudite and groundbreaking.

Jung also wrote about the androgyne as an archetype of the collective unconscious, by which he meant that the human psyche is essentially neither male nor female, but androgynous. This idea is related to the psychoanalytical view concerning confusion in infancy related to the child's identification of his/her own sexual identity as different from one of its parents. The resultant trauma leads to an unresolved desire for re-unification with the rejected sex. This idea has long influenced artists.

William Blake saw the androgyne as a symbol of equality, of harmony between the sexes, 'a perfected bisexual humanity', and many artists in the nineteenth century, especially the Symbolists, Decadents and Pre-Raphaelites, were very engaged with the idea of androgyny, seeing it as the 'perfect, and truly creative human type'.²²² Artists differed in how they interpreted the sexuality of the androgyne. Edward Burne-Jones used the symbol as 'less a being in whom the sexes are combined than a creature without any sexuality at all'.²²³ However, Gustave Moreau (1826-1898) declared that 'man is growing

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Middleton interviewed by Michael Longley, in Eastwood, (ed.) *Colin Middleton*, 2000, p.18.

²²¹ John Hewitt, 'Under Forty: Some Ulster Artists', in *Now in Ulster*, ed. by Arthur and George Campbell (Belfast: W and G Baird, 1944).

²²² Walters, 1978, pp.240-4.

²²³ Snodgrass, 1995.

more refined, more feminine, more divine', and he sometimes had to clarify for his patrons the sex of the figures represented in his paintings.²²⁴ For Moreau the poet was 'essentially feminine in his appearance and sensibility', and the poet Baudelaire concurred with this view, believing that 'the poet must be androgynous'.²²⁵ Walters asserts that Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898) was the only artist to treat the 'decadent stereotypes – the monstrous women and the delicate hermaphrodite boys' with 'real erotic energy, with a sparkling, self-aware wit'.²²⁶ So too, though, did Harry Clarke, especially in his graphic art, which after 1925 became ever more highly imaginative and eroticized.

If Middleton was, as suggested above, utilizing the symbol of the androgyne in a positive sense, as 'a longing for a harmonized world, free from jarring dualities', then Clarke exemplified its alternative meaning, as a 'sterile self-enclosed monster that became 'not a symbol of communion, perfection and virtue but of selfishness, corruption and sin'.²²⁷ The androgyne, which had many positive associations in the early nineteenth century, became increasingly negative as the century progressed.²²⁸

Clarke's *St. Placidus St. Vitus and Hermaphrodite*, c.1927, (fig.5.37) depicts an extraordinary image of two saints and a hermaphrodite posed within a female vulva. According to Nicola Gordon Bowe it was made at a time when pressures of work and mounting commissions were weighing heavily on Clarke and it was something of a 'psychological release from the endless saints he had to depict in designs commissioned during his life'.²²⁹ The figure of the hermaphrodite is treated far more freakishly than in Middleton's crucifixion, displaying exaggerated sexual characteristics of both female and male, an aspect of his work that relates to Beardsley's depiction of the hermaphrodite. The figure has several breasts, and originally also had a large erect penis, but, as Bowe informs us, this has since been inked over. The three principal figures are surrounded by an array of diminutive mutant figures resembling disembodied sexual organs which have

²²⁴ *Le Decadent* review (1885), cited in Mathieu, *Gustave Moreau* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1977), p.164.

²²⁵ Charles Baudelaire, cited in Mathieu, 1977, p.165.

²²⁶ Walters, 1978, p.245.

²²⁷ Snodgrass, 1995, p.61, p.58.

²²⁸ For a lengthy description of the changes in association for the hermaphrodite in the nineteenth century see Busst, 1967.

²²⁹ Nicola Gordon Bowe, *Harry Clarke; His Graphic Art* (Mountrath: The Dolmen Press, 1983), p.91.

eerily sprung to independent life. Brigid Peppin relates Clarke's work to that of Moreau and Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898).²³⁰ Of all of the Victorian artists, and despite his short life, Beardsley was the one who most defined the age of decadence. He deliberately sought to shock the respectable Victorian bourgeoisie, and he succeeded in this, with his images of eroticism and sexual deviance. His illustrations for Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, including the drawing originally intended as the frontispiece, (fig.5.38) included 'more erotic details than had ever been seen before in a book openly published and distributed in England'.²³¹ In the title-page, he positioned the figure in a manner akin to crucifixion, which was seen as a 'grotesque parody of the traditional icon of Christ's passion'.²³² Also, instead of the traditional grieving figure at the foot of the cross, he was seen to have drawn a 'leering winged figure of indeterminate sex at prayer at the foot of the priapus'.²³³ Beardsley was the subject of much derision in the press but he enjoyed such attention, seeing it as proof of his ability to shock. His design was ultimately rejected by the publishers, as he knew it would be, and a less explicit version was submitted instead. Clarke's work, on the other hand, was never intended for publication, and so he had full rein to indulge his erotic imagination freely and with impunity.

The hermaphrodite was one of Beardsley's favourite figures and in his work it became, in Snodgrass's view, an 'emblem of solipsistic, unfulfilled desire particularly homosexuality, onanism and that *vice suprême*, cerebral lechery, all of which characterized to Victorians decadent disillusionment and withdrawal from practical life'.²³⁴ He goes on to explain that, as the nineteenth century progressed the hermaphrodite increasingly became a symbol of sexual inversion, and lost its associations with the natural generative power of nature that had been an inherent element of worship of the god Priapus, from which the symbol originated. As such it began to function as a

²³⁰ Brigid Peppin, *Fantasy Book Illustration 1860-1920* (London: Studio Vista, 1975).

²³¹ Letter from A.L.S. McFall to R.A. Walker, Princeton University Libraries, cited in Snodgrass, 1995, p.55.

²³² Karl Beckson, 'The Artist as Transcendental Phallus: Aubrey Beardsley and the Ritual of Defence' in *Reconsidering Aubrey Beardsley*, ed. by Robert Langerfeld, UMI Research P, (Ann Arbor, Mich: 1989), p.214, cited in Snodgrass, 1995, pp.57-8.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Snodgrass, 1995, p.60.

parody of the earlier androgyne and came to represent, instead of 're-unification without sexuality' the pure eroticism of the decadents.²³⁵

Conclusion

In this chapter new thinking on gender identity has been used in an attempt to interpret key works in Irish art, some of which have been the focus of much scholarly attention, such as those by Francis Bacon and others which have, to a greater or lesser extent, eluded comment, such as those of Patrick Hennessy. Part of the reason for this dearth of academic interest, it has been suggested, was that the works obliquely addressed homosexual themes that were not considered appropriate for public discussion. Because there were relatively few Irish artists specializing in the male nude, this study does not suggest that there are similarities between them that position them together in any kind of grouping. For that reason this chapter was structured slightly differently, and the main body of the text was comprised of lengthy discussions of three artists in particular, Bacon, Hennessy and Middleton, with comparisons of and to several others. Though not all of these were gay artists, each of them dealt in a very individualistic way with the themes of sexuality in their work. These strategies were largely dependent on whether they lived in Ireland or abroad, and the manner in which their works were exhibited and sold. In this way the strategies of avoidance were crucial, especially for gay artists whose depictions of sexual activity could have brought them in breach of the law at the time their works were made. A change in social attitudes to sexuality means that today works such as Billy Quinn's direct and confrontational self-portrait can be housed in a national collection.

²³⁵ Ibid.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This thesis has approached a topic about which very little has been written in the history of Irish Art. Its aim has been to illustrate the ways in which Irish artists have sought to express various forms of identity through representation of the nude body. Its approach has been to tackle themes and issues that best illustrate these examples rather than to seek to compile a definitive survey. That would exceed the scope of this exercise and would not clarify the field any more successfully. In the absence of a continuous academic tradition of the nude in Irish art, it is impossible to treat the subject as a purely native one, with a linear development, challenged by deviations from the genre's norms, as was the case in France in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For the most part, Irish artists who painted the nude were those who had a greater awareness of developments in other countries and an admiration for the work of past masters. This is as true of contemporary artist Robert Ballagh as it was for Louis le Brocquy in the first half of the twentieth century. For that reason this work has, of necessity, investigated issues around influence and has sought out comparisons from other countries and from periods outside of the definitive time-frame under consideration here. Even within the narrower field of Irish art examples of the nude that do not at first appear conceptually related have been linked together in an attempt to trace trajectories of thought, however elusive or tenuous. While this risks disjointedness in the narrative, it would be disingenuous to claim a more cohesive state for the nude in Irish art. Perhaps 'disjointedness' is the most appropriate description of this genre in an Irish context.

Also, the thesis has been conceived of mainly in terms of its subject matter, the nude. Clearly, within that genre, there have been many different approaches and the works that are included here are representative of a wide range of different media, from oil painting to performance pieces. No particular distinction has been made between them on this basis, and while attention has been given to the aesthetic and stylistic aspects of individual works, the overall focus has remained fixed on the genre of the nude and how this has been used to convey ideas about Irish identity, be it artistic, social, political or sexual.

Further, the distinction, created by Clark and Berger, between the nude and the naked body, requires some attention here. There has been no explicit attempt in the text to refute the widely accepted dichotomy implied by these terms, but there has been an implicit critique of them in the way that the terms 'nude' and 'naked' have been treated here as interchangeable. It seems extraordinary that studies of the nude remain so indebted to a discourse that was carried on between two writers from 1956 to 1971 when discourses on the body and sexuality, on gendered looking and on the economic structure of society have altered so dramatically in the intervening years.

The problem arises from the ideological basis of these two theories, which breaks down on a broadly right/left basis. Clark's argument, though scholarly, was founded on the belief that erudition produces the distinction of taste through a privileged system of education open to only a select few, while Berger's was based on the Marxist analysis of the conditions of production and consumption of art in Western capitalism. Both have inherent weaknesses. Clark's views can be seen as exclusive and elitist, and his apparent assumption that knowledge and meaning are fixed and unchanging is very open to criticism today.

On the other hand, Berger does not take sufficient account of the pleasure principle in representations of the nude and his insistence on the importance of economics results in an underestimation of the viewer's ability to read images autonomously, regardless of what response is being demanded of them. Both these writers underestimate the purely aesthetic function of art and the fact that viewers will respond individualistically to images which they find pleasing or, indeed, disturbing. This is particularly the case with images of the body, to which the viewer, as an embodied subject, naturally has a deeply instinctive response.

A further problem arises through the widespread academic acceptance of this dichotomous way of viewing the nude, because it seems to offer an overly neat categorization of works that are traditional as opposed to those that are transgressive. However, some very traditional works can be seen to be latently transgressive in the way they address certain themes. Patrick Hennessy's covert images of homosexuality, which was illegal at the time the paintings were made, is a case in point. Similarly, Francis Bacon's reclining nudes of Henrietta Moreas though brutal in the application of paint, in

other ways conform to the conventions of the reclining nude. Such works might be classed as 'nude' and 'naked' respectively, as defined by Clark and Berger, yet they each can be seen to break the bounds of these too-precisely opposed terminologies. In an age when identity is no longer considered fixed and immutable it is perhaps time to re-evaluate those terms and define them differently.

Another question arising from the Clark/Berger debate is that both to some extent sideline the erotic function of art. This is due to a sense of decorum in Clark which sometimes borders on the ridiculous and a leftist morality in Berger which insists on its right to approve certain carefully selected images from the canon for the viewer's gaze. Again, both approaches deny the obvious sensuality of many images. A foregrounding of the problematics of the sexuality inherent in the reclining nude occurred in the art of the nineteenth century but since the invention of the genre in the sixteenth century eroticism had been a function, often the primary function, of the female nude. This is evident from what we have seen of various artists practice and from the patterns of patronage and consumption we have seen in this discussion, from Khalil Bey, to women such as Caroline Murat and Queen Victoria. This fact is also attested to by the fact that most twentieth century Irish nudes included here are in private ownership and very few are in public collections. Furthermore, many artists enjoy painting the nude but do so for their own pleasure and advancement only. As Una Sealy has remarked, nudes are notoriously difficult to sell.¹ John Turpin reiterated this point in his suggestion that the reason why nudes don't sell is that buyers are reluctant to hang them in their drawing rooms, the bedroom being the only space appropriate for the hanging of a nude.² All of these attitudes point to a continuing association of representations of the body with sexuality. Recently, however, there has been a change in academic approaches to the sexuality of the nude and it is no longer subject to avoidance or prescription, as it was heretofore. This study has relied heavily on these new discourses and seeks to position itself in this context.

¹ Una Sealy in conversation with the author, 28/06/2011.

² John Turpin in conversation with the author, 29/06/2011.

This study has set out to explain the many and various reasons behind the relative dearth of the nude in Irish art. A very crucial one was the lack of a developed academic system of art education based on drawing from the live model. We have seen that academic art institutions were established in Ireland much later than in Continental Europe, and even then the quality of training was not of the same standard, and the lack of availability of models remained an issue well into the twentieth century.³ Irish artists had to travel abroad in order to complete their education if they intended to pursue figural painting. However, in this regard it is worth remembering that in general those Irish artists who went to France and Belgium to study and work from 1850-1920 by and large allied themselves with conservative schools rather than the avant-garde. Even Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone who, in their explorations of Cubism went to Andre l'Hote and Albert Gleizes, in the process steered well clear of the more radical approaches to Cubism in contemporaneous French art. As Dunne has observed, 'by the time Jellett and Hone came to Gleizes his work had entered a phase that intersected only obliquely with Cubism, adopting aspects of it in an art of lyrical abstraction'.⁴

The existence of art training establishments without the proper means to educate figural painters may seem anomalous, but in fact it is related to the lack of demand for history painting in Ireland. A few painters, such as James Barry in the eighteenth century and Daniel Maclise in the nineteenth century, established careers as history painters but they did so entirely outside of Ireland, and with varying degrees of success. Conversely, the rich academic tradition in France was directly related to the long tradition of and demand for history painting there.

Following the brief flowering of working from the live model in the DMSA under William Orpen, the classical approach to the figure went into decline in Irish painting. This was partly due to ideas concerning what was appropriate to the newly emergent state in terms of subject-matter. The paintings of Keating and MacGonigal and their followers did include figures but very few nudes and their genre depictions of Irish figure types did not require the knowledge of anatomy and musculature that characterized classical figural

³ The fact that most of the models in the RHA life school today are not Irish nationals might suggest that this is still not seen as a desirable profession in the minds of Irish people, though of course there may be many reasons for this apart from moral disapproval.

⁴ Aidan Dunne, *Irish Art: The European Dimension*, an exhibition to celebrate Ireland's presidency of the E.E.C., (Dublin: RHA Gallery, 1990), p.11.

training. Among Orpen's followers, only Patrick Touhy and Mainie Jellett found inspiration in the nude for its own sake. The early death of the former and the move to abstraction of the latter meant that the academic nude was never fully developed by either of them.

Another reason for the absence of the nude from the Irish canon was directly or indirectly related to the draconian censorship legislation that was introduced in 1929. Irish censorship was formulated in the context of the European pro-natalist debate that held sway in the inter-war period and so it was targeted at the written word and the dissemination of information through the press rather than visual art. As a result there was relatively little official interference in the form of censorship of art works and the most celebrated case of art censorship in the history of the state came about because of the literary associations of Harry Clarke's *Geneva Window*. However, censorship legislation set the tone for a culture of sexual repression and this extended to images depicting nudity or sex. Individuals sometimes took it upon themselves to mount pickets in objection to the exhibition of explicit works or even on occasion to resort to defacing images that they considered inappropriate. Because these are isolated incidents and only come to be known about if reported in the press, they are difficult to quantify and such instances will always remain somewhat anecdotal. However, having compared the situations in several other countries, it does not seem that Ireland has been characterized by a greater intolerance of images of the nude over the course of the twentieth century. In fact, in recent times there have been more controversies and confrontations in the USA than anywhere else.⁵ It seems probable that in times of great social or political upheaval, images will have a greater power to shock and provoke extreme reactions. Such was the case with Manet's *Olympia* in 1860s Paris, le Brocquy's *A Family* in 1950s Ireland and with Serrano's *Immersion (Piss Christ)* in 1990s America. In other cases personal sensibilities and psychologies are responsible for an individual's reaction to a particular

⁵ It should be noted that this study only takes account of situations in countries with a similar cultural ethos to Ireland's in Western Europe, the U.S.A. and Australia.

work, and these are universal. Perhaps the nearest Ireland has come to a 'culture war' was the case of Clarke's *Geneva Window* in 1929.⁶

A point must be made here concerning the supposed prudery of the Irish as a national trait. In the course of this study it has been shown how social attitudes categorized as 'prudery' change over time in line with public discourses on various issues concerned with sexuality and its representation. From a contemporary perspective it is difficult to identify with objections to Clarke's window or le Brocquy's *A Family* which was subjected to vilification in the national press. However, it is interesting in this context that there were no concerns at all about the representation of a young nude in Tuohy's *A Model* or that nobody thought it strange that a Catholic priest purchased Ballagh's *Rachel Marilyn*. It is ironic that nothing was said about nude images of children while the worst of clerical child abuse was going on in Ireland, whereas today we have become so sensitive to child protection issues that some artists would not risk painting their own children naked.⁷

There is a certain irony in the fact that, as public opinion grows more tolerant of nudity in popular culture such as advertising and pop music videos, the gallery remains a space that is carefully policed, if not by the authorities of the law then through the processes of self censorship, as evinced by the example of the *Pop Life* exhibition in the London's Tate Modern and in similar cases in Ireland. This raises the question of where the limits of tolerance lie in relation to images of the nude that are categorized as high art. The sensitivity to high art nudity or indeed nudity in the theatre may be due to the fact that art is thought to be officially sanctioned and promoted as publicly beneficial, and is therefore subject to greater scrutiny than images in other media. Arguments about the proper use of public funding also crucially feed into this debate. However, the gallery is arguably the appropriate space for the exhibition of contentious and transgressive works because it is there that they can be viewed in an environment that encourages understanding and careful reading of the multiple meanings inherent in such works.

⁶ The 'Culture Wars' was the term given to the struggles between avant garde artists and the conservative right in America in the 1990s.

⁷ Una Sealy remarked that she would have liked to paint a nude of her daughter but would consider it inadvisable in today's climate. Una Sealy in conversation with the author, 28/06/2011.

Perhaps the most important circumstance affecting the dearth of the nude in modern Ireland was the political situation in the first half of the twentieth century. The period of the extended twentieth century under discussion here encompassed several major national upheavals including the Home Rule movement, the 1916 Rising, the War of Independence and the Civil war, as well as the First and Second World Wars in which many Irish men fought and the nation was peripherally involved. Such conditions are not conducive to the development of the arts and these events had a negative effect on every aspect of Irish cultural life. In 1922, following independence, Thomas Bodkin wrote to the Minister for Education, Senator Michael Hayes, outlining his proposals for the arts. The minister replied that while he was in complete agreement on the necessity for nurturing the arts, the proposals would have to await the 'proper time'.⁸ That time was slow to arrive. Writing in 1949, Bodkin maintained that the Irish had 'not merely failed to go forward' with regard to the arts but instead had 'regressed...to a condition of apathy about them in which it had become justifiable to say that no other country of Western Europe cared less, or gave less, for the cultivation of the arts'.⁹ And this attitude did not just reflect the opinion of officialdom. As Brian Kennedy has observed, in this period in Irish history, the arts were 'a luxury the country could not afford' and there was no wealthy educated middle class to patronize artists or commission works. This function could no longer be performed by the Anglo-Irish who became 'politically marginalized in the new state'.¹⁰ This was crucially detrimental to the development of the nude because it has been shown that it was precisely this wealthy middle class who had contributed to its re-emergence in Britain in the 1860s.¹¹ That situation was never replicated in Ireland.

The substantive argument that this study advances is that representation of the nude in Irish art can be seen to reveal specific and important issues concerning identity. The first way in which this topic was approached was in the consideration of the idea of artistic identity. This was especially relevant to the work of self-taught artists like le Brocquy

⁸ Letter from Senator Michael Hayes to Bodkin, cited in Thomas Bodkin, *The Arts in Ireland* (Dublin: Stationary Office, 1949), p.8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.9.

¹⁰ Brian Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities: The State and the Arts in Independent Ireland* (Dublin: Arts Council, 1990).

¹¹ Smith, 1996, p.75.

and Ballagh, who had little option but to look to the great masters of European art in order to learn the techniques and to discover the stylistic language in which to couch their commentaries on the social and political realities of their time. Lacking a sufficient local tradition in which to ground their art they looked to sources in European, mainly French art.¹² It has been demonstrated that their use of sources is much more complex than at first apparent, with le Brocquy, in particular, identifying his art with a thread of influence that reached all the way back to the invention of the reclining female nude in the sixteenth century and even further back into antiquity by inference. At the same time he was shown to be culturally embedded in his own period, both in his artistic sensibilities and in political terms. le Brocquy's use of sources as an act of *homage* was contrasted with the politically-inspired appropriation of Farrell and Ballagh with its more literary approach and its use of a typically post-modern irony. However, the act of appropriation was also seen to contain within it the possibility for meanings to be lost in translation. The works of le Brocquy, Farrell and Ballagh included here ranged over a period of twenty five years in which there was a great deal of change in Ireland and yet that entire period can be seen as one in which Irish culture was characterized by 'the problematic relationship between tradition and modernity'.¹³ Their various uses of works of art from key historical moments that represent great social change highlights the critical discourse that was on-going at that point in Irish history. As Kearney has noted, 'modernism is essentially a critical movement in the philosophical sense of questioning the very notion of *origins*. And as such it challenges the *ideology of identity* which revivalism presupposes'.¹⁴

The thesis also interrogated the changing aspects of social identity and in particular the recent apparent repudiation of the charge of puritanism as an inherent quality of the Irish people. If the Irish were prudish by nature, as O'Doherty and others have suggested, this seems to no longer to be the case. This is evinced by the growing trend towards public nudity whether in the artistic context of the life room and the photography of Spencer

¹² At various times in his career Ballagh has copied from a wide range of artists but the specific examples discussed in chapter three with his early borrowings from French art.

¹³ Richard Kearney, *Transitions: Narratives in Modern Irish Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p.10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.12.

Tunick, or in any of the myriad forms of charity fund-raising activities or self empowerment initiatives also considered here. However, the desire to embrace public nudity is not an exclusively Irish phenomenon. Steiner has suggested that the alienating effects of inhabiting an increasingly virtual world have resulted in a hunger for the real, which translates itself into an interest in all forms of realism, from the written memoir and reality T.V. to a return to the most basic form of figuration in art, the nude. She identified a resurgence in life classes and an renewed interest in nude modelling in the U.S.A. in the 1990s, as a by-product of these feelings of contemporary alienation.

In a specifically Irish context much has been written about social change by Inglis whose theories have been utilized in the analysis of the social conditions underlying this study. He writes that in the 1990s in Ireland, much later than in other Western countries 'desire and fantasy were liberated from the cells of sin. Being turned on by sex had not only become acceptable, it was deemed good and healthy. Instead of sex being denied and silenced, it is openly embraced. There is a demand to accept diversity in sexual identities, orientations and pleasures from homosexuality to eroticism.'¹⁵

That must be seen as a positive development in that it allows for the open representation of sexuality in art including sexual identities that were previously considered unacceptable. However, Inglis continues 'everything may not be rosy in the sexual garden of Ireland. It may be that, far from being liberating, the pursuit of sex and the demands of being sexually active and attractive constrain and repress us just as much, if not more, than before? Maybe being sexy does not mean the end of repression, but the instigation of a much more subtle, more penetrating and lasting form of self-discipline, exploitation and social control?'¹⁶

A similar point is made by some feminist writers who are concerned that discourses couched in terms of health, fitness and empowerment actually place more pressure than ever on women to conform to particular unattainable ideals of feminine beauty. Their argument, that these ideals are promoted by the beauty and cosmetics industry which also absorbs a huge proportion of the expenditure of working women, amounts to a claim of a

¹⁵ Tom Inglis, 'From Sexual Repression to Liberation?', in *Encounters with Modern Ireland: A Sociological Chronicle*, ed. by Peillon and Slater, 1995-6, pp.99-104.

¹⁶ Ibid.

backlash against the economic gains of feminism in the second half of the twentieth century.¹⁷ But what do these social theories have to do with the representation of the body in art? Before the inception of modern art in the nineteenth century, the nude figure was traditionally associated with a complex range of religious and allegorical meanings. From the middle of the nineteenth century the nude was freed from these associated meanings and came to be seen as a neutral site for the frank depiction of the body and as an independent genre.¹⁸ The acceptance of this new 'valueless' body epitomised the radical nature of Manet's departures from the traditional painting of the nude at that time. In her book on the male nude Walters observed that 'running through much high-mindedness about the body is a pervasive fear, not just of the animal in man, but of man as no more than an animal'.¹⁹ This comment was intended as a critique of the fear of the valueless body in modernism. But looked at in reverse, this argument can amount to the assertion that man, or more probably woman, is only a body and nothing more. In some forms of contemporary art it appears as though the consumerist culture outlined by Inglis, where human experience is seen to be based entirely on personal experience and gratification, has influenced the representation of the nude to the extent that it, too, is solely concerned with outward appearance and beauty. In this way the nude is in danger of being aesthetically influenced by advertising or even pornography whose conventions have already been mainstreamed into the fashion and beauty industries. Inglis wonders if the Irish have thrown away the spiritual aspects of humanity in the process of modernisation.²⁰ However, the question of attaching meaning to the representation of the human body is the great paradox of twentieth century art. Two of the chief protagonists of the nude in the twentieth century, Freud and Bacon, both spent their entire careers attempting to convey an understanding of the body that did not rely solely on outward appearance but nevertheless did not attempt to imbue the figure with meaning beyond its physical presence. However, post-modernism is less rigid on this

¹⁷ See especially Wolf, 1991, and Walter, 2010.

¹⁸ These nineteenth century developments can be seen to have their origins in the eighteenth century but the middle of the nineteenth century has already been established as the starting point for modernity as understood in the context of this study.

¹⁹ Walters, 1978, p.230.

²⁰ Tom Inglis, 'Foucault, Bourdieu and the Field of Irish Sexuality', *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 7 (1997), 5-28.

score and more recent works by Mary Duffy, Billy Quinn and Amanda Coogan do seem to offer an opportunity to re-institute value to the body that are subject-derived and therefore free from the value judgements of pre-modern art. It is noteworthy that it is the most challenging and transgressive works that offer this possibility.

Finally, a word about the interconnectedness of Irish art. A major motivating factor for the writing of this study has been the invisibility of much Irish art in international art historical texts. For the student of Irish art it is a frustration that such texts rarely reference Irish works.

But perhaps this is as much a fault of the Irish themselves as it is of the international field of art history, because of the insistence on difference as a measure of Irishness. For example le Brocquy is usually considered a quintessentially Irish artist, particularly in his later development of the body as 'presence' rather than a corporeal reality and in his evocation of the ancient Celtic cult of the head. However, in his early career he was thought of simply in terms of British art, a distinction with which he had no quarrel. Most accounts of le Brocquy's influences concentrate on French sources and pay little attention to the formative influences of British artists such as MacBryde and Colquhoun and the Polish Jew, Adler. And le Brocquy's transformation into a 'quintessentially Irish' artist had less to do with stylistic development and more to do with his 'nationalization', as an artist, to quote Walshe's term for the subsuming of Oscar Wilde into an Irish identity cited in chapter five, above. But as le Brocquy demonstrated, acceptance of a wider view of identity does not damage uniqueness, it strengthens it. By opening himself fully to other influences in his early career, he was able to develop confidence as an artist to develop his own unique aesthetic.

This study began by looking at le Brocquy's reverent re-working of an original by Manet, mediated through more contemporary influences. Following his example it has consistently taken issues and developments in other countries into account in order not to view Irish in isolation but as a deeply indebted and interconnected process.

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Source: Eastwood, *Colin Middleton*, (Belfast: 2000), ill.p.38

Fig.5.37 Harry Clarke, *St.Placidus St.Vitus and Hermaphrodite*, c.1927, pen and ink on Bristol bard, 35.5 x 29cm, collection David Clarke

Source: Bowe, *Harry Clarke: His Graphic Work* (Mountrath: 1983), ill. p.144

Fig.5.34 Aubrey Beardsley, *Title-Page Design for 'Salome'*, 1893, Black ink and graphite on white wove paper, 22.6 x 17.2cm, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

Source: www.harvardartmuseums.org/art/297897



Fig.1.1 Spencer Tunick, *Installation*
Cork, 2008



Fig.1.2 Spencer Tunick, *Installation*
Dublin, 2008



Fig.1.3 Spencer Tunick
Installation, Dublin 2008



Fig.1.4 Daniel Maclise
The Origin of the Harp, 1842



Fig.1.5 Andrew Folan
Autopsy, 2010



Fig.1.6 Michael Farrell
Madonna Irlanda or *The Very First Real
Irish Political Picture*, 1977

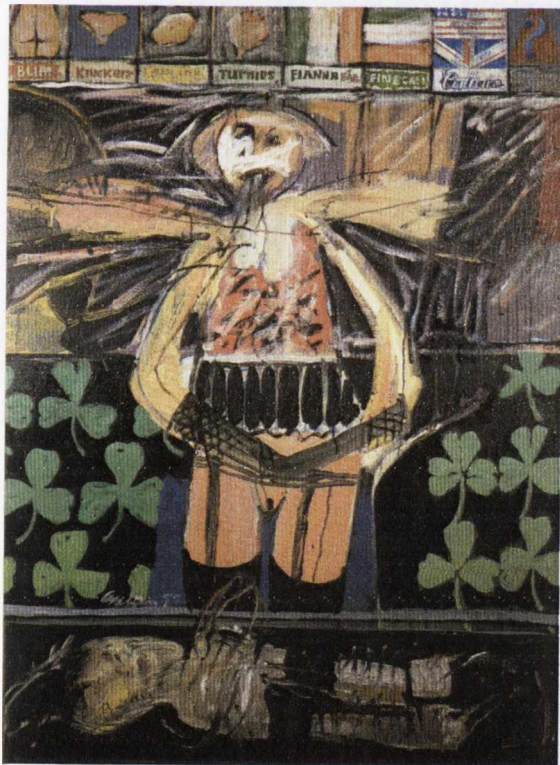


Fig.1.7 Patrick Graham
My Darkish Rosaleen, 1982



Fig. 2.1 Harry Clarke, *The Geneva Widow*, 1930



Fig.2.2 *Geneva Window*, (detail), panel 3



Fig.2.3 *Geneva Window*, (detail), panel 8



Fig.2.4 Georges Rouault
Christ and the Soldier, 1930



Fig.2.5 John Farleigh
Her Search for God, 1932



Fig.2.6 Conor Casby, *Biffo on the Bog*, 2009



Fig.2.7 Brett Murray, *The Spear*, 2010



Fig.2.8 Maggie Sutherland, *Emperor Haute Couture*, 2011



Fig.2.9 Diego Velázquez, *The Rokeby Venus*, c.1647-5



Fig.2.10 Louis le Brocqy, *Bathers*, 1951

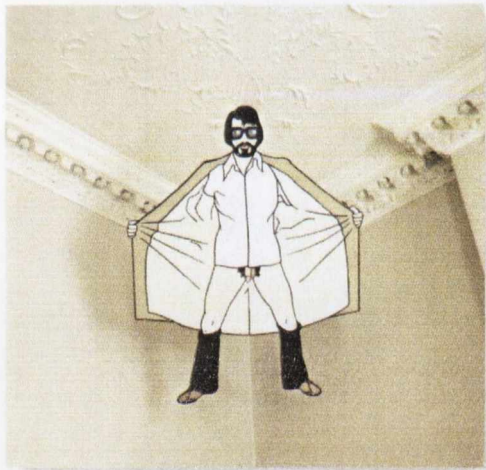


Fig.2.11 Robert Ballagh, *Flasher Kite*, 1975



Fig.2.12 David Lilburn, *Towards from the Forceps to the Chain of Office*, 1984



Fig.2.13 Paul Gauguin, *Two Tahitian Women*, 1899



Fig.2.14 Andreas Serrano *Immersion (Piss Christ)*, 1987

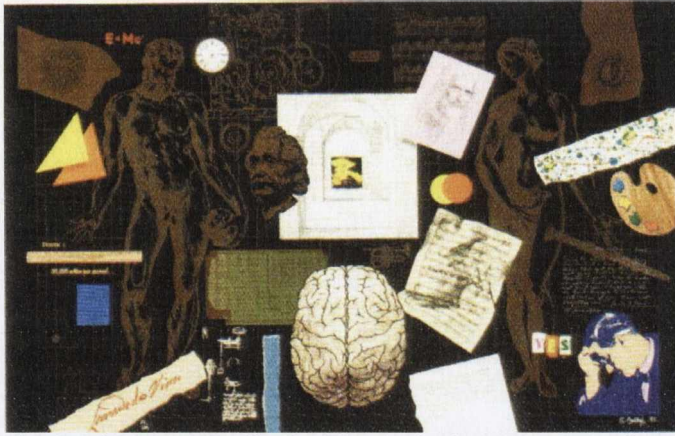


Fig.2.15 Robert Ballagh, *The Ambidextrous Paradigm*, 1986



Fig.2.16 Patrick Tuohy
The Model, 1914



Fig.2.17 Patrick Tuohy
Self Portrait, c.1927

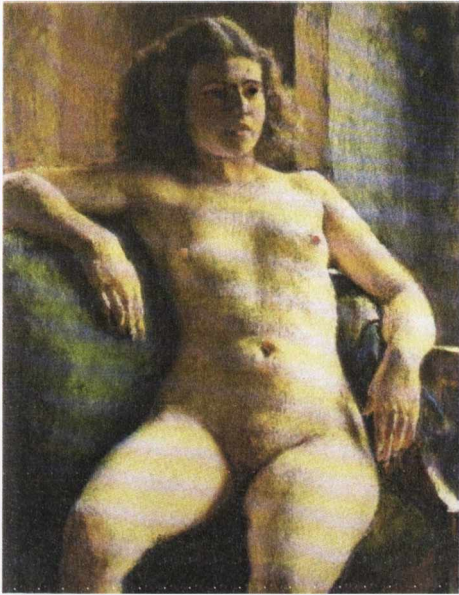


Fig.2.18 Roderic O'Conor
The Young Girl, c.1917-1919



Fig.2.19 Robert Ballagh,
Rachel, Marilyn, 1973-5



Fig.2.20 Louise Bourgeois
Father and Son, 2004-6



Fig.3.1 Louis le Brocquy, *A Family*, 1951

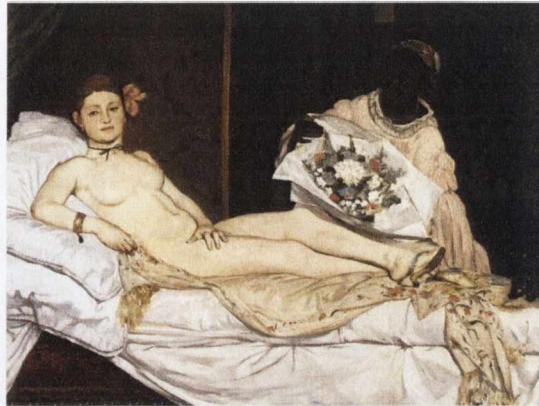


Fig.3.2 Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863



Fig.3.3 Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937



Fig.3.4 Louis le Brocquy, *Child with Doll*, 1949

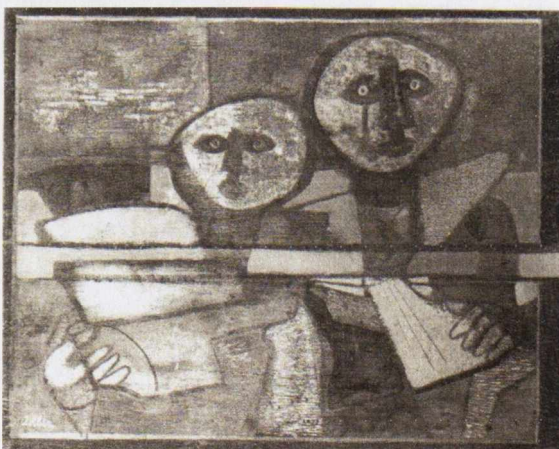


Fig.3.5 Jankel Adler, *Two Orphans*, 1942



Fig.3.6 Jankel Adler,
Homage à Gabo, 1946



Fig.3.7 Titian,
Venus of Urbino, c.1534



Fig.3.8 Louis le Brocquy
Odalisque I; Looking at Manet, Olympia
2005



Fig.3.9 Louis le Brocquy
Odalisque II; Looking at Manet, Olympia
2005



Fig.3.10 Louis le Brocquy
Odalisque III; Looking at Manet, Olympia
2005



Fig.3.11 Louis le Brocquy
Odalisque IV; Looking at Manet, Olympia
2005



Fig.3.12 Manet, *The Woman with a Cat*
1883

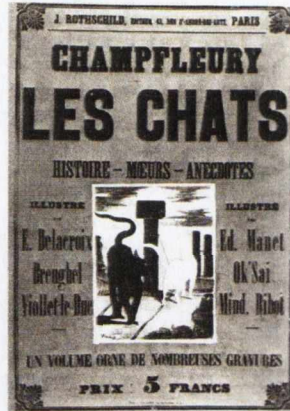


Fig.3.13 Manet, *The Cat's
Rendezvous*, 1883

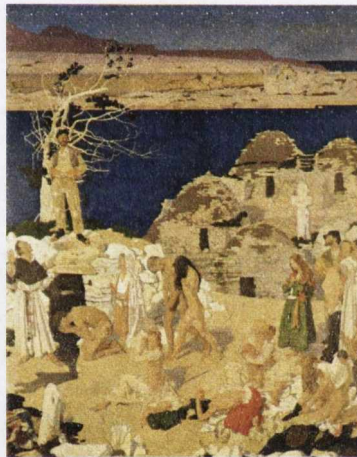


Fig.3.14 William Orpen
The Holy Well, 1916



Fig.3.15 François Boucher, *Blonde
Odalisque*, 1752

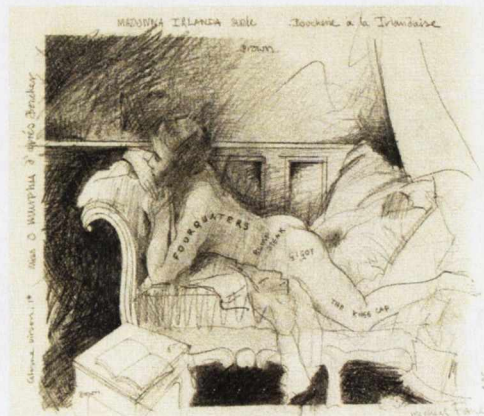


Fig.3.16 Michael Farrell
Miss O'Murphy d'apres Boucher, 1976

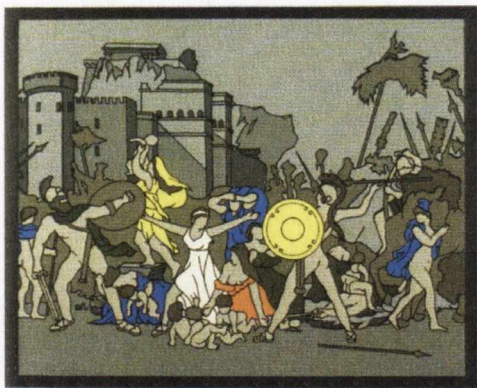


Fig.3.17 Robert Ballagh
The Rape of the Sabines after David
1970



Fig.3.18 Jacques-Louis David
The Intervention of the Sabine Women, 1799



Fig.3.19 Robert Ballagh
Liberty Leading the Barricades after Delacroix, 1970



Fig.3.20 Eugène Delacroix
Liberty Leading the Barricades
1830



Fig.3.21 Robert Ballagh
My Studio, 1969, 1976



Fig.3.22 Robert Ballagh
Inside No.3, 1979



Fig.3.23 Robert Ballagh
The Turkish Bath after Ingres, 1970



Fig.3.24 Jean-Dominique Ingres
The Turkish Bath, 1862

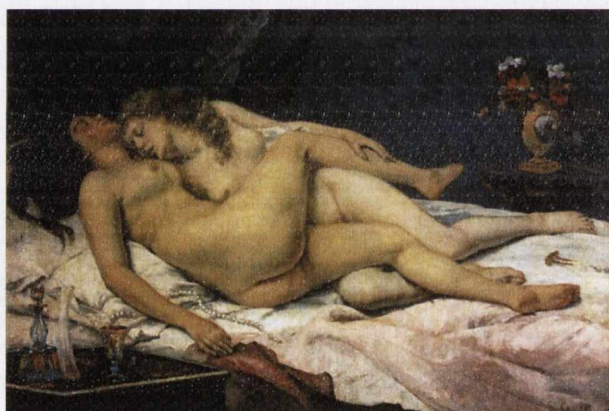


Fig.3.25 Gustave Courbet, *Les Dormeuses*,
1866



Fig.3.26 Gerard Dillon, *Self-contained Flat*
c.1955

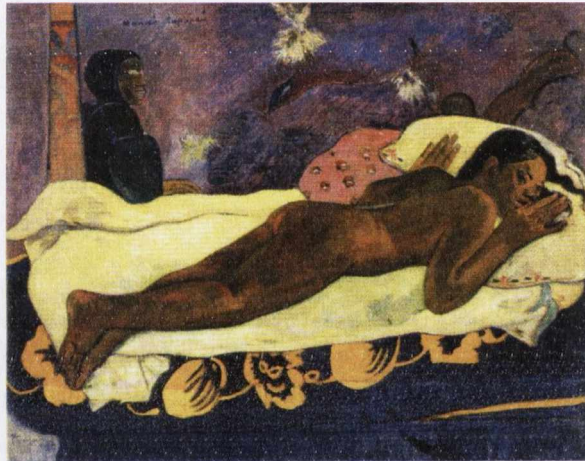


Fig.3.27 Paul Gauguin, *Manao Tupapao*, 1892

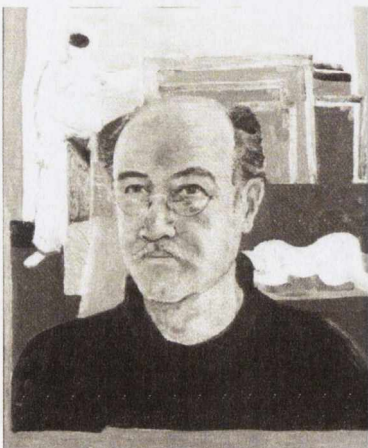


Fig.3.28 Gerard Dillon
Self Portrait with Pierrot and Nude, c.1971



Fig.4.1 *The Cnidian Venus*
after Praxiteles, c.350 B.C.



Fig.4.2 Jean-Léon Gérôme
Phryne Before the Aeropagus, c.1861



Fig.4.3 Gian Battista Tiepolo
Appelles Painting the Portrait of Campaspe,
c.1726



Fig.4.4 Francois André Vincent
Zeuxis Choosing his Models, 1789



Fig.4.5 Jean-Léon Gérôme
Pygmalion and Galatea, c.1890



Fig.4.6 Franz von Stuck
Pygmalion and Galatea, 1926



Fig.4.7 Paul Delvaux
Pygmalion and Galatea, 1939



Fig.4.8 William Orpen
The Studio (The Model), 1910



Fig.4.9 William Orpen
Portrait of the Artist, c.1907



Fig.4.10 William Orpen
The Model, 1911

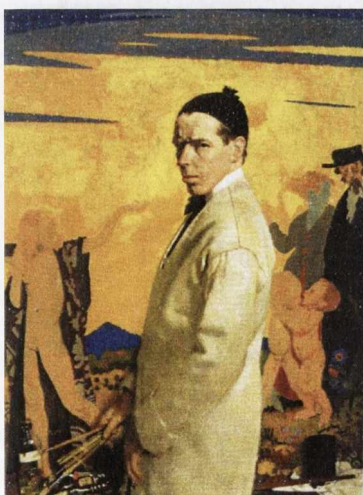


Fig.4.11 William Orpen
Self Portrait with Sowing New Seed, 1913

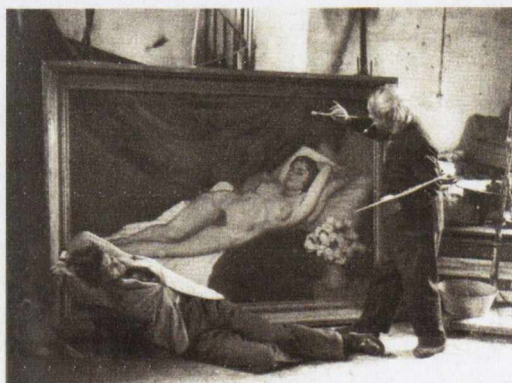


Fig.4.12 George Bressaï, *Picasso mimes artiste-peintre*, 1944



Fig.4.13 Michael Cullen
I'm Popeye the Painterman, 1992

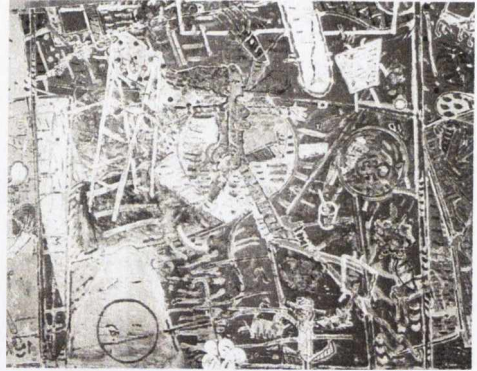


Fig.4.14 Michael Cullen
The Painter and his Nemesis, 1993



Fig.4.15 John Byrne
Believers, 2005



Fig.4.16 Dame Laura Knight
Self Portrait with Model, 1913



Fig.4.17 Walter Sickert
The Studio, the Painting of a Nude
c.1906-07

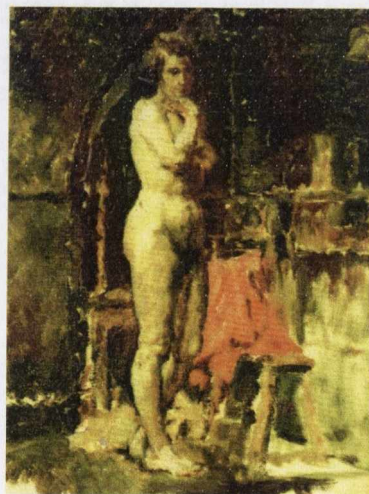


Fig.4.18 Mainie Jellett
Nude Model c.1917-19

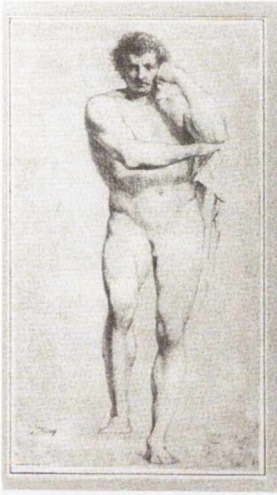


Fig.4.19 James Barry
Male Nude in the attitude of Hercules
c.1777-80



Fig.4.20 *The Farnese Hercules*
3rd century AD

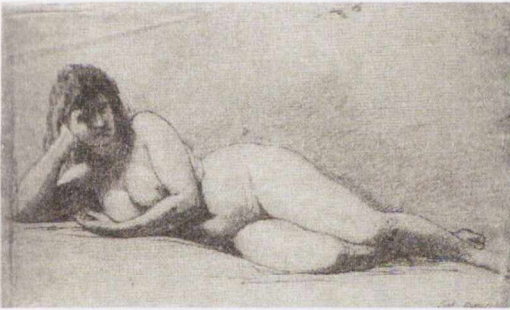


Fig.4.21 James Barry
Female Nude Reclining, undated



Fig.4.22 William Mulready
Male Nude, c.1806-07



Fig.4.23 Maurice MacGonigal
A Dublin Studio, c.1935



Fig.4.24 Kathleen Metcalfe Mackie
Standing Female Nude, 1924

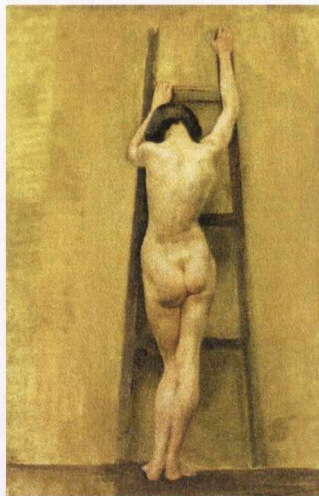


Fig.4.25 Kathleen Metcalfe Mackie
Standing Female Figure, 1924



Fig.4.26 Mainie Jellett
Three Female Figures, c.1921



Fig.4.27 James Hanley
Emma, 2009-10



Fig.4.28 James Hanley
Des, 2009-10



Fig.4.29 Mick O'Dea, *Reclining Nude*, 2010



Fig.4.30 Charles Jervas
Lady Mary Wortley Montagu
c.1718-20



Fig.4.31 Charles Jervas
Elizabeth, Countess of Bridgewater
c.1710-20



Fig.4.32 Jean-Léon Gérôme
Esclave a Vendre, 1873



Fig.4.33 Ernest Normand
The White Slave, 1894



Fig.4.34 St.George Hare, *The Victory of Faith*, 1890



Fig.4.35 William Orpen
Lady with a Parrot, 1903



Fig.4.36 Edouard Manet
Portrait of Laure, 1862-3



Fig.4.37 Thomas Eakins
Portrait of a Black Woman
1867-69

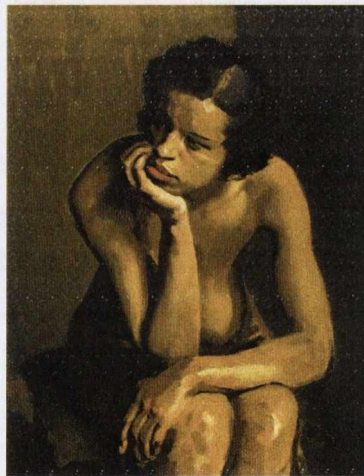


Fig.4.38 William Leech
The Refugee
undated

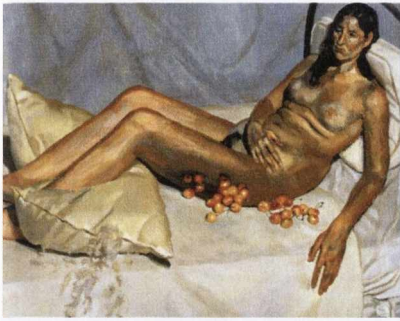


Fig.4.39 Lucian Freud
Irishwoman on a Bed, 2003-4

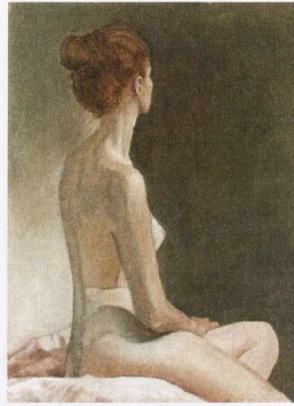


Fig.4.40 P.J. Lynch
Sophie, undated



Fig.4.41 William Powell Frith
The Sleeping Model 1853



Fig.4.42 Sarah Purser
Seated Nude with her Head Thrown Back
1923



Fig.4.43 Sarah Purser
Semi-nude with a Cigarette
c.1923



Fig.4.44 Harry Kernoff
Female Nude, undated

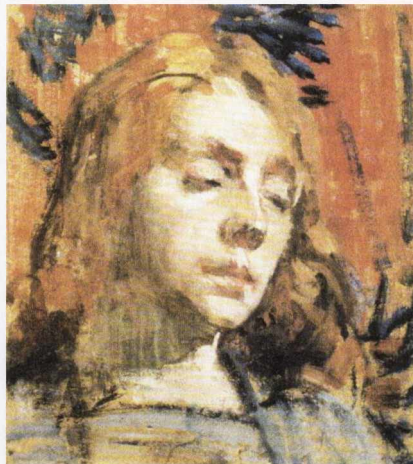


Fig.4.45 Sarah Purser
The Sad Girl, 1923



Fig.4.46 Sarah Purser
Kathleen, 1935



Fig.4.47 Lewis Carroll
Alice Liddell as a Beggar, c.1859



Fig.4.48 Marcel Duchamp
Nude Descending a Staircase, 1912



Fig.4.49 Gustave Courbet
Jo/La Belle Irlandaise, 1866



Fig.4.50 Gustave Courbet
Le Sommeil, 1866



Fig.4.51 Gustave Courbet
Origine du Monde, 1866



Fig.4.52 William Orpen
The English Nude, 1900



Fig.4.53 William Orpen
A Woman (Nude Study), 1906



Fig.4.54 William Orpen
Early Morning, 1922



Fig.4.55 John Deakin
Henrietta Moreas, c.1963

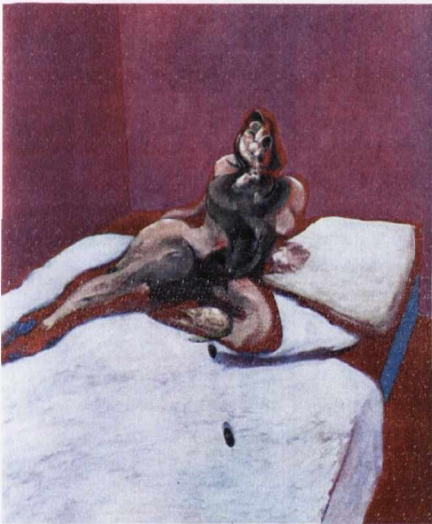


Fig.4.56 Francis Bacon
*Portrait of Henrietta Moreas
on a Blue Couch*, 1965



Fig.4.57 Francis Bacon
*Lying Figure with a Hypodermic
Syringe, No.2*, 1963



Fig.4.58 Peter Paul Rubens
Het Pelsken, 1630s



Fig.4.59 Lucian Freud
Benefits Supervisor Sleeping, 1995

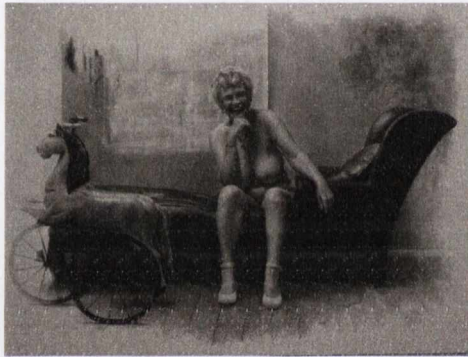


Fig.4.60 Daniel Mark Duffy
Mischief, 2011



Fig.4.61 Daniel Mark Duffy
Nell McCafferty, 2008



Fig.4.62 Daniel Mark Duffy
Helen, 2009



Fig.4.63 Una Sealy
Critic and Horse, 2011



Fig.4.64
A Hunter Getting Dressed after Bathing, c.1654-56



Fig.4.65 Jack Crabtree
Self-Portrait, 1998



Fig.4.66 Dorothy Cross
Overlap, 1991



Fig.4.67 Graham Gingles
Self-Portrait, 1998



Fig.4.68 Robert Ballagh
Upstairs No.3, 1982

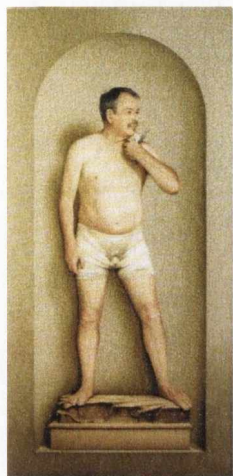


Fig.4.69 Robert Ballagh
Self Portrait in the Italian Style, 2006



Fig.4.70 Lucian Freud
Nude Self Portrait



Fig.4.71 Elizabeth Cope
Nude Self Portrait, undated



Fig.4.72 Amanda Coogan
After Mazoni, 2000



Fig.4.73 Mary Duffy
Cutting the Ties that Bind, 1987



Fig.4.74 Mary Duffy
Stories of a Body, 1988



Fig.4.75 Mat Fraser
Tali-domida Vale Tudo, 2005



Fig.4.76 Pauline Cummins
Celebration: The Beginning of Labour, 1984



Fig.4.77 Rita Duffy, *Self Portraits I, II, III, IV*, 1988



Fig.4.78 Pauline Cummins and Sandra Vida
The Autonomous Eye, 1992, released 1995

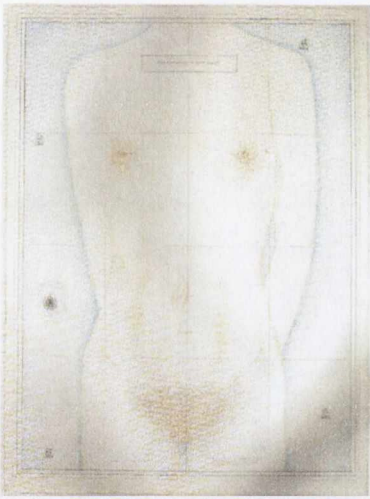


Fig.4.79 Kathy Prendergast
Enclosed World in Open Spaces, 1983

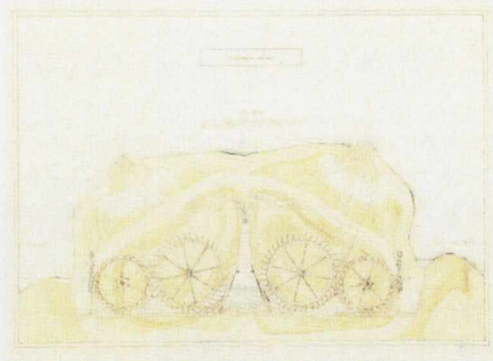


Fig.4.80 Kathy Prendergast
To Control a Landscape – Irrigation, 1983

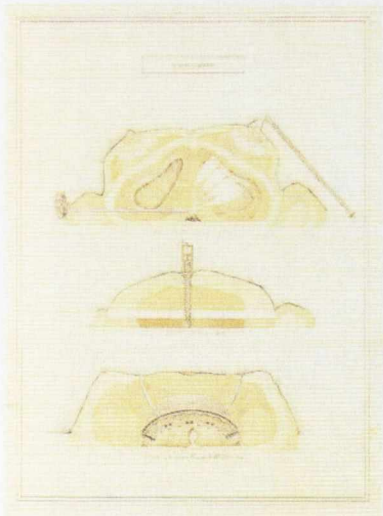


Fig.4.81 Kathy Prendergast
To Alter a Landscape, 1983

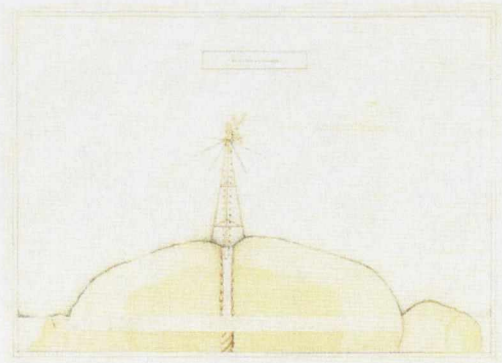


Fig.4.82 Kathy Prendergast
To Control a Landscape – Oasis, 1983



Fig.4.83 Amanda Coogan
Madonna in Blue, 2001



Fig.4.84 Amanda Coogan
The Milltown Madonna, 2001

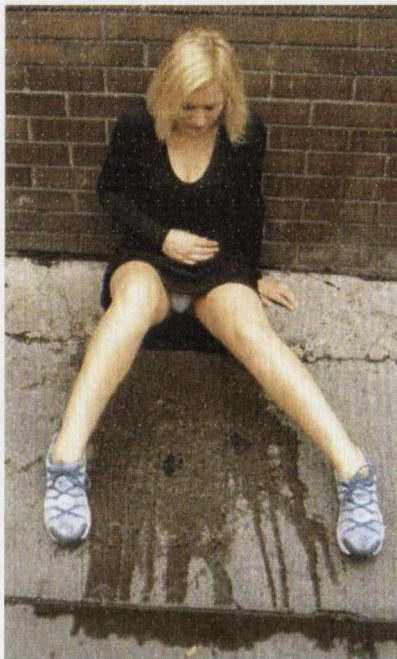


Fig.4.85 Amanda Coogan
The Fountain, 2001



Fig.5.1 Suzanne Valadon, *Casting the Net*, 1914



Fig.5.2 Sylvia Sleigh, *Philip Golub Reclining* 1973

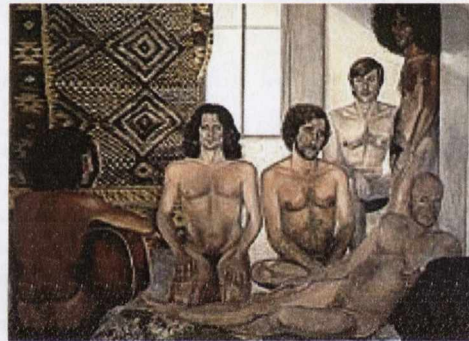


Fig.5.3 Sylvia Sleigh, *At the Turkish Bath*, 1976



Fig.5.4 Linda Nochlin
Man with Bananas, 1972



Fig.5.5 *Achelez des Pommes*
19th century advertisement



Fig.5.6 Jasmina Jasinska
Legacy, 2012



Fig.5.7 Andrew Folan
Susannah and the Elders, 2002

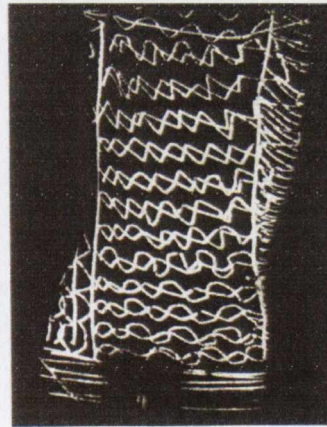
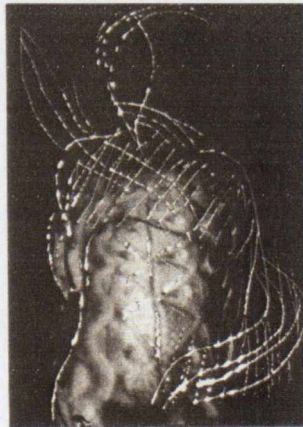
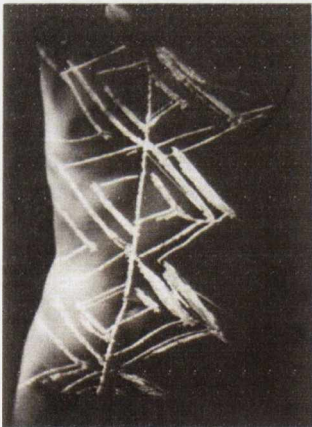


Fig.5.8 Pauline Cummins, *Inis t'Oirr*, 1985



Fig.5.9 Francis Bacon
Study From the Human Body, 1949



Fig.5.10 Edgar Degas
After the Bath, 1880s



Fig.5.11 Francis Bacon
Two Figures, 1953



Fig.5.12 Eadweard Muybridge
Two Men Wrestling, undated



Fig.5.13 Francis Bacon
Untitled (Two Figures in the Grass), c.1952



Fig.5.14 Francis Bacon, *Three Figures in a Room*, 1964

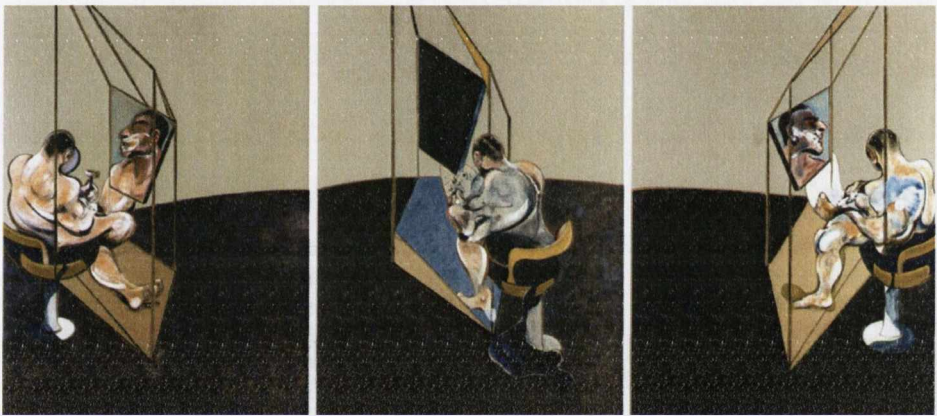


Fig.5.15 Francis Bacon, *Three Studies of the Male Back*, 1970



Fig.5.16 Francis Bacon, *Triptych, May-June 1973*, 1973



Fig.5.17 Patrick Hennessy
Man-Made Man and Rose, c.1965

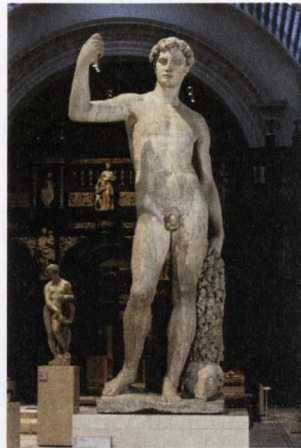


Fig.5.18 *Jason and the Golden Fleece*, 16th century



Fig.5.19 Patrick Hennessy
In the Hammam, c.1960s



Fig.5.20 Patrick Hennessy
Exiles, 1943



Fig.5.21 Patrick Hennessy
Adieu, undated

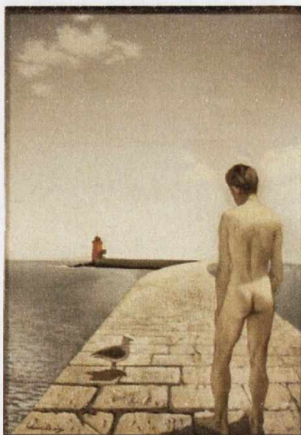


Fig.5.22 Patrick Hennessy
Boy and Seagull, c.1954



Fig.5.23 Patrick Hennessy
Boy and Dog, 1979



Fig.5.24 Patrick Hennessy
Boy on Beach, undated

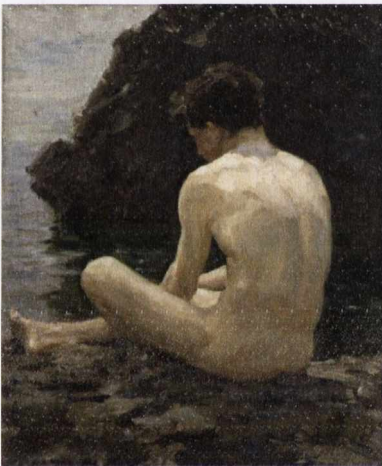


Fig.5.25 Henry Scott Tuke
July Sun, 1913



Fig.5.26 Basil Blackshaw
Men, Sea and Moon, 1952



Fig.5.27 Paul Cézanne
Bathers, c.1880



Fig.2.28 Paul Cézanne
Bather with Outstretched Arms
c.1877



Fig.5.29 Patrick Hennessy
In the Studio, undated

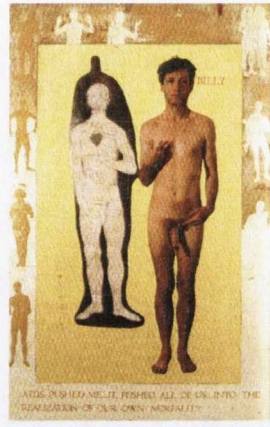


Fig.5.30 Billy Quinn
Billy, 1991

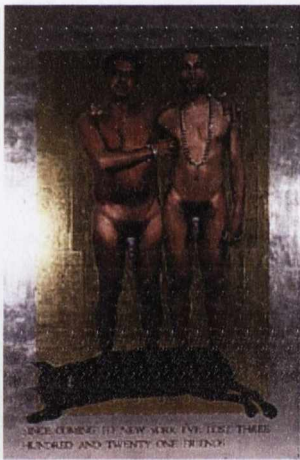


Fig.5.31 Billy Quinn
Gene and Kev, 1991



Fig.5.32 Gustave Caillebotte
Man at his Bath, 1884

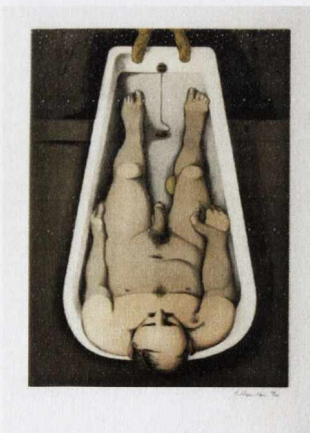


Fig.5.33 Richard Hamilton
He Foresaw his Pale Body, 1990

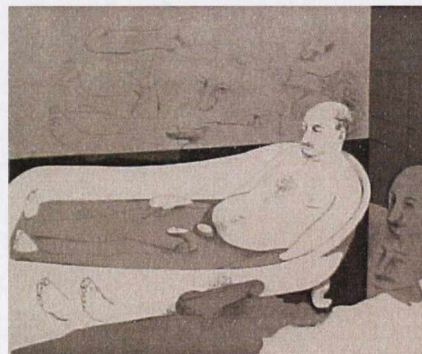


Fig.5.34 Richard Hamilton
A Languid Floating Flower, 1983



Fig.5.35 Frida Kahlo
*What I Saw in the Water, or
What the Water Gave Me*, 1938

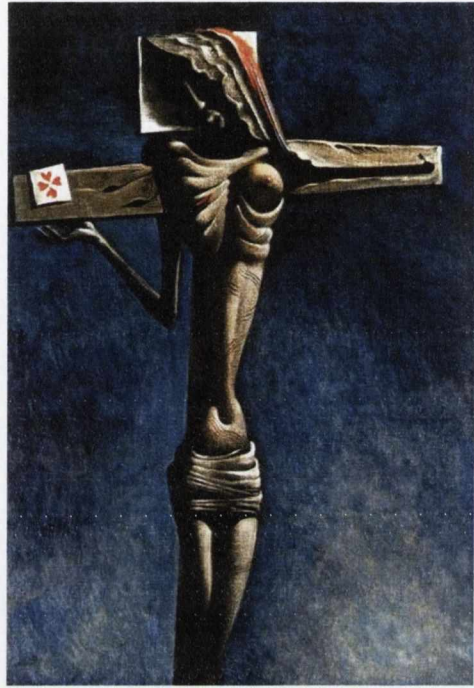


Fig.5.36 Colin Middleton
Christ Androgyne,
1943



Fig.5.37 Harry Clarke
St. Placidus St. Vitus and Hermaprodite
c.1927

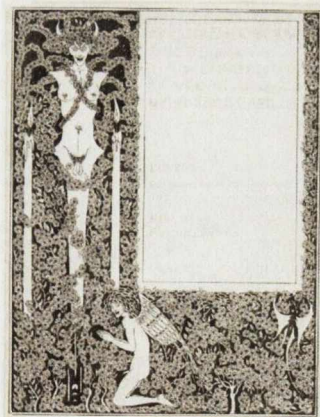


Fig.5.38 Aubrey Beardsley
Design for title-page of Salome
1893

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