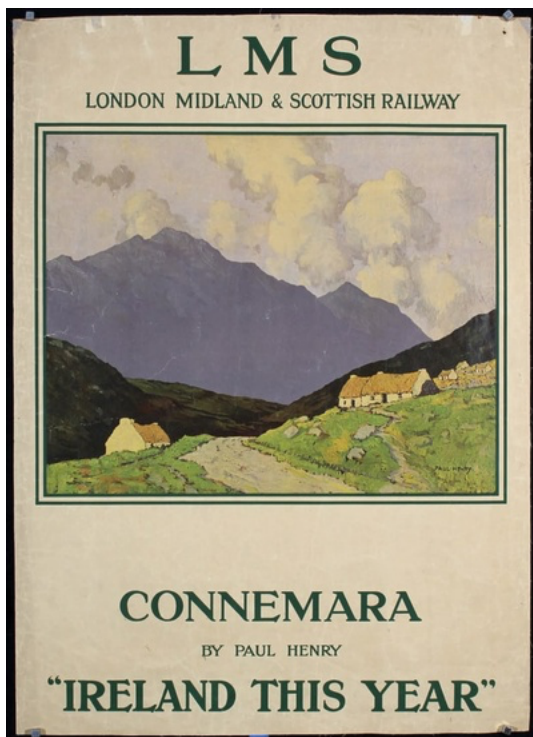


ART APPRECIATION GROUP – Report by Tony Seward

In August we moved on from Scottish artists to attempt an overview of their near neighbours across the Irish Sea. We found they had much in common, so much so that in one case, that of Sir John Lavery, he could easily be classified as both Scottish and Irish: he was a 'Glasgow Boy' but also identified with the struggle for Irish independence, a portrait of his wife Hazel personifying Ireland on the new state's banknotes.

Like the Scots, many Irish painters spent time in Paris absorbing the latest developments in French art, and in the artists' colonies that flourished at Grez-sur-Loing near Paris and Pont Aven in Brittany. Some, like Lavery and William Orpen, became internationally successful society portrait painters. It is noticeable that a disproportionate number of them came from the North of Ireland, the wealthiest part of the island, with its thriving shipbuilding and textile industries, or from prosperous Anglo-Irish families in the rural South and West. With limited access to travel and training, it was rare for budding artists to emerge from the Irish Catholic community...

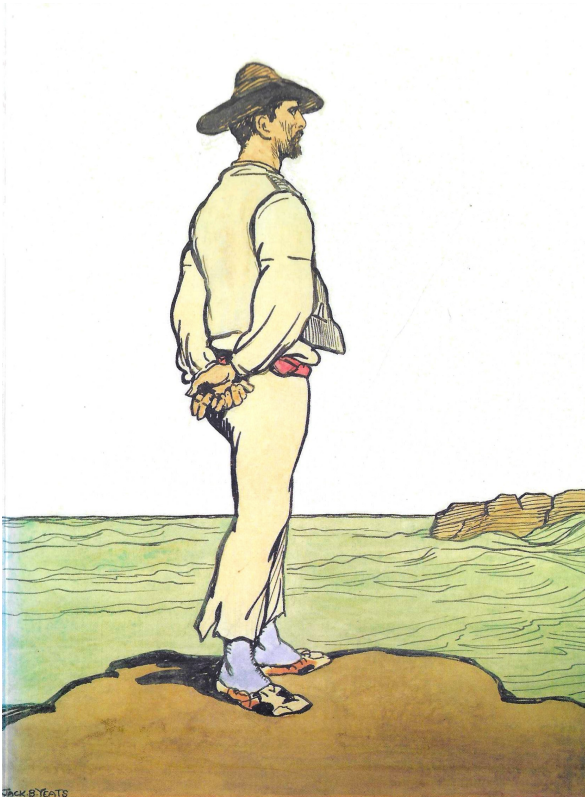
These and other factors make for a rather fragmented overall picture of 'Irish' art. There were no identifiable groups like the Glasgow Boys or Scottish Colourists, so as a way in we focused on two leading artists, Paul Henry and Jack B. Yeats. Henry was from Belfast, studied in Paris and fell in love with Achill Island in Co. Mayo. Most of his work thereafter centred on the far West of Ireland, which became for writers and artists seeking to establish a national identity the quintessence of Irishness, Gaelic-speaking, relatively untouched by English influence, its stoical people struggling to survive in a harsh though beautiful landscape. Henry embodied all this in his classic images of rural Ireland.



Paul Henry, Connemara (LMS poster c.1925)

Jack Yeats, the brother of the poet WB, was from Sligo where his mother's family were prosperous merchants. Like so many Anglo-Irish artists and writers, he identified strongly with Irish nationalism. He never went to France and ploughed his own furrow, largely uninfluenced by international trends.

His style constantly developed and changed, and it is this originality and variety which earned him the primacy he enjoys as the leading Irish artist of the 20th century.



Jack B Yeats, An Island Man, 1906 (frontispiece to The Aran Islands by JM Synge)

Lastly, we had a quick look at the life of Hugh Lane, another scion of an Anglo-Irish family (nephew of Lady Gregory), who settled in London and prospered as an art dealer. He did more than anyone to foster public interest in the latest trends, by founding the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art in Dublin, and donating his fabulous collection of Impressionist paintings to it.

The topic for September's meeting will be Welsh Art.