

Interior Narratives

by

E.Davies

Innishlacken Couple.

Gerard Dillon is a well-celebrated Irish artist who was born in Belfast into a Roman Catholic family. In the summer of 1939, he was travelling with his friend Ernie Atkins around the Irish countryside. Connemara Island was one of the places which inspired him through his life, the place where G. Dillon painted some of his most famous works like 'The yellow Bungalow' and 'The Yellow Field.'

Being a city dweller, he discovered a land different from the city scenery; A life of country people, beautiful and peaceful nature that was so different from the city pace of life.

One such place was Connemara, which had taken his breath away. It was so different from what he was used to seeing as a city dweller. The discovery of the tranquil idyllic life with its mind-blowing landscapes beautified with stone walls and enormously huge boulders, white cottages and white sheep grazing gave Dillon a new idyllic world, the inspiration for new motives of his paintings. Many of the most striking works of Dillon were inspired when he stayed and painted in 1951 at Connemara Island.

Since Innishlacken is in the Connemara Islands where Dillon stayed, 'Innishlacken Couple' is one of those paintings. Dillon lived on Innishlacken, the island of lakes near Gorteen Bay port and Roundstone for a year in 1951. He was visited in spring by his close friends James McIntyre, George Campbell and Marge Campbell. About this time James McIntyre wrote in his book 'Three men on an Island' about this (The Irish Times, June 8, 2002).

The Painting, Innishlacken Couple, depicts a local couple, they are farmers or farm people. They are sitting near the fireplace after their long working day. The armchairs they are sitting in look custom made or handmade. It was a frequent practice in those days as life was difficult after the war and people could not afford much or spend money on commodities. It is highly likely the armchair covers were handmade, too. The oil lamp on the fireplace shows that electric light was not commonly used in the area at the time. The simple utensils also talk about the practice of homemade dinners, not ready-made

food, or takeaways which are widely used nowadays. A decorative plate on the mantelpiece is the only ornament in the room. Highly likely it was inherited or has some sentimental value to the family.

A man and a woman sit on either side of the fireplace. Their body language shows some tension between them. It can be suspected looking at the woman's posture with her arms crossed and held tight to her body, that a possible strangled relationship between Dillon's parents at the end of their life influenced the artist when he was painting the couple. There is also a sheepdog in the foreground of the picture. Dillon was afraid of dogs after he was bitten by his little dog on his face in his childhood. The modest decoration of the room shows the difficulties that people experienced at that time.

There is nothing superfluous about the furnishing in this room. The particularly important detail in the picture is a crucifix above the fireplace. It is saying that the couple are Roman Catholics, and it makes it easier to imagine their life, beliefs and traditions.

The colors of the painting echo of modern artists whose work influenced Dillon. During wartime, Dillon lived in Dublin. Dublin at the time was a neutral country and art flourished there. 'There was a breakthrough in public taste for those working in cubist and impressionistic styles' (Gerard Dillon, J. White, wolfhound press 1968). Dublin exhibitions introduced Braque, Picasso, Gleizes, Gris and other modern artists. The color influence of Picasso's period when he mostly painted acrobats, actors, athletes (Rose Period) can be noticed in Dillon's painting of the couple.

There was a profound influence of modern art on Dillon. In another painting of Dillon 'Self Contained Flat' (1955) the nude body on the bed was influenced by P. Gauguin's 'The spirit of the Dead Watches'. The influence of Picasso's colors can be seen in Dillon's 'Kitchen interior'. At that time G. Dillon 'succeeded in shedding much of his indebtedness to Picasso' (Gerard Dillon, J. White, wolfhound press 1968).

Gerard Dillon was a self-taught artist. 'All his early life Dillon was to feel contempt for the tradition of the master-pupil relationship and in fact, he had a horror of being seen to be influenced either by other artists or by fashions' (Gerard Dillon, J. White, wolfhound press 1968).

After he moved to live in London, he 'was stimulated by the Spanish school led by Tapies, the Tachists with Jackson Pollock, and Cezar, the French sculptor,

were first shown in London' (Gerard Dillon 1916-1971, Noreen Rice, A Retrospective Exhibition 2003).

Styles of a painting of old traditional master's technique bored him, he could not relate to the old period paintings. 'European history meant nothing to him and history he related to was Irish history' to the end of his life he discovered the advantage of the equipment, the techniques, and the assistance of masters' (Gerard Dillon, J. White, wolfhound press 1968).

Dillon first visited Connemara on his cycling trip with Ernie Atkins. In the remote Irish countryside, the beauty of Connemara took his breath away. Dillon visited Connemara frequently after this. In his Connemara paintings, Dillon captured the atmosphere of the time and simple life of the Connemara people, their surroundings, their beliefs. His paintings are full of love for his nativity, for his country