

## **Made in Northern Ireland:**

### **A Brief Overview of Numerous Artists who made artworks during and after the war times in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.**

Gerard Dillon was born in Belfast in 1916; he dropped out of school when he was fourteen to make money as a painter and decorator. He worked in this profession for 7 years before deciding to attend the Belfast College of Art, however this only lasted for a couple of months. He then changed his mind and, through gaining his independence, decided to travel to London in 1934. During this time, he took on jobs when he could find them, continuing his career as a painter and decorator. Yet he never gave up on his aim to educate himself in the arts; every spare penny he had was spent on gallery visits and materials he could use to further his artistic practice. It was only in the late 1930s that Dillon decided to pursue a full-time artistic career; this also happened to coincide with his move to Ireland in 1939 where he created works alongside a fellow artist called George Campbell. Together they painted landscapes of and in the west of Ireland; the west was of great significance to Dillon as he took great inspiration from the local communities and landscapes this is clear in the painting of the Innishlacken Couple, Yellow Bungalow, Tory Island and A Wet Day, Ireland among many others.

Dillon primarily worked with oil on board or canvas but given his lack of funds he would work with any materials he could get his hands on. For example, his piece 'Girl on Beach' was made on hessian sack cloth, he even went as far as to incorporate sand in some of his paintings.

Dillon made many friends throughout his artistic career, one of these friends was Daniel O'Neill. O'Neill was born during the War of Independence; he had always shown an interest in painting; in fact, his first paintings were in watercolour at twelve years of age. O'Neill would spend his free time at the Belfast Reference Library studying the works of Italian renaissance painters, but due to the hardship caused by the war he was unable to pursue a career in art straight away. This meant that after graduating from school he trained as an electrician so he could work alongside his father.

Gerard Dillion was a beacon of hope for O'Neill. Their friendship led to Daniel O'Neill crossing the border to the south and becoming part of the influx of refugee artists. The number of artists and works produced resulted in a surge of exhibitions and encouraged the purchase of artworks from people who had first hand accounts of the war. There are mixed views of O'Neill's works; people view his early works as reflections from a man who had the misfortune of witnessing despair and suffering, while his later works are more romantic in nature due to the intense colour palette and expressive imagery. O'Neill, like the vast majority of artists of his time worked with oil paint on board or canvas.

The next artist Cherith McKinstry wasn't born in Northern Ireland however she was evacuated to Co. Tyrone with her school from her home in Worcestershire during the Second World War. Originally McKinstry began her studies in the arts as a sculptor in the Belfast School of Art, however she left before finishing her degree. When she returned to education in 1950, she decided to pursue painting. During this time she studied under Romeo Toogood along side her fellow artists and friends Basil Blackshaw and Terence. P. Flanagan. She was the recipient of the Council of Encouragement of Music and Arts (CEMA) travelling scholarship and after graduating in 1953 she used that scholarship to visit both Italy and France.

McKinstry was an abstract and still life painter, working with oil on board, canvas and paper. Her works reflect her concerns for humanity, the value of human life does so through her explorations into religious themes.

Basil Blackshaw, was as I mentioned before, a friend of Cherish McKinstry's, they met when they were both studying in the Belfast School of Art. Blackshaw was born in Glengormley in Co. Antrim in 1932 and after graduating from BSA in 1951 he travelled to Paris. This trip was funded after receiving the CEMA scholarship and allowed his additional study while abroad.

Blackshaw's work is well known for his loose application of paint, distinct colour palettes and his unusual viewpoints and proportions that are present in a great number of his works. The influence for his work is undoubtedly his rural upbringing. Having been raised in an agricultural community Blackshaw saw both his father and brother working with horses and dogs. In many of his works, these animals feature heavily, as do the rural landscapes scenes of

Ireland. He is also known for his portraiture works; among his many subjects are Michael Longley, a contemporary poet native to Northern Ireland, and Archbishop George Simms.

Blackshaw's early paintings featuring dogs and horses earned him praise and followings from many critics and collectors. Yet as a young artist he embraced experimentation in his own developing style, often changing his approach to the subject and the medium. His reluctance to stick to one signature style, infuriated many an art critic. Despite this though, Blackshaw's ever evolving styles made Blackshaw one of Northern Ireland's most prominent artists. Blackshaw continued to paint and experiment at his home/studio in County Antrim, until his death in May of 2016.

The last artist I want to bring to your attention is a more recent artist called David Crone. Crone was born in Belfast in 1937, and like McKinstry he started his artistic education and career in Sculpture. He also studied at the Belfast College of Art, graduating in the 1950s with a degree in Sculpture. However, his career saw a shift during the 1960s; he changed his chosen medium when he started experimenting with painting. Up until this shift, Crone had very little experience with paint. Through this emergence of his newly acquired skill, Crone developed his own signature style and has continued to create art with paint since. His landscapes both rural and urban move away from the tradition guidelines of expressionism and cubism; many of his works often convey the world as something ephemeral and obscure.

Crone also began a career as a lecturer in the Belfast College of Art in 1985; he was elected as a member of the RHA in 2005; and has had his works exhibited in the Northern Ireland's Arts Council, the Ulster Museum, Tom Caldwell Gallery, and the Kerlin Gallery in Dublin amongst other institutions.

The poet Michael Longley once commented on Crone's work, *'Nowadays much of the landscape (and townscape) painting in this country celebrates an Ireland that never really existed. It consoles too easily and stops us thinking. In his energetic engagement with the world, Crone defies such complacency. A thundery disquietude hangs over even his brightest creations. His watchful, edgy, ambiguous work suggests that everything – from wildflower to boulder, from graffiti to stone cross – is provisional. David Crone's wonderful paintings commemorate the interim.'*