Collaborating in Conflict

The Yeats Family and the Public Arts

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College
February 1–May 31, 2026

This exhibition explores how three generations of the talented, complicated Yeats family shaped each other, the arts, and public life in Ireland and beyond. Featuring an exceptional range of over two hundred works by John Yeats, his children William, Lily, Elizabeth, and Jack, and William's daughter Anne, the exhibition showcases the family's achievements in visual art, embroidery, printing and publishing, literature, and performance.

Family members worked in multiple art forms and collaborated regularly with one another. The personal and professional relationships among them were complex; mutual affection and support were mixed with tension and conflict. Like many artists, the Yeatses often struggled to make a living; their striking accomplishments were forged amid financial uncertainty. Individual family members have been exhibited, celebrated, and studied separately by scholars. Displaying their works together, however, generates illuminating new ways of appreciating the family's lasting artistic importance.

The exhibition opens with portraits of the Yeatses and representations of places that were important to them. It moves on to objects embodying the family's engagement with youth as a site of education, entertainment, and memory. Next, the exhibition examines how the family's artistic output involved intersections among personal lives, high art, craftwork, and redefinitions of the private home.

Subsequent sections turn to how the Yeatses responded to and influenced public life in Ireland through theater, printing, and publishing. The final portion explores how the family helped represent and fashion a newly independent Irish nation in a time of political change. It culminates with the Museum's recently acquired *Stations of the Cross* embroidered by Lily Yeats, displayed upstairs in the Monan Gallery.

Organized by the McMullen Museum in conjunction with the John J. Burns Library, *Collaborating in Conflict* has been curated by Marjorie Howes, Christian Dupont, and Diana Larsen. It is underwritten by Boston College with major support from the Patrons of the McMullen Museum, the John C. Donohue Estate, Robert '63 and Ann Marie Reardon P'91, and the Anna Frances Vegkeley Ryan Estate in memory of John Anthony Ryan Jr. '50. Additional support has been provided by William J. Lundregan III, Esq., '62, JD'67, P'93, '96, and Elaine Stein-Cummins in memory of Daniel Cummins '58.

Portraits of a Family: People

John Yeats and Susan Pollexfen were born into prosperous families and seemed well-matched. Susan expected John, who was a law student when they married, to support her in style. But he soon abandoned the law and spent the rest of his life pursuing a career as an artist, earning respect for his talent but little money to support his growing family.

Ironically, John's reckless choice of art over financial security may have encouraged his children to pursue their own artistic careers despite the economic struggles involved. William became a towering literary figure and won the Nobel Prize in Literature. Jack is now acknowledged as one of Ireland's most important painters. Lily was an expert embroiderer and ran a well-regarded business enterprise that sold handcrafted household objects. And Elizabeth was the head of an innovative printing and publishing workshop for decades.

In the next generation, William's daughter Anne became a stage designer and visual artist working in a range of media. She found her famous family name both a help and a burden. Anne sometimes struggled to be recognized as an artist in her own right but has had two major retrospective exhibitions since her death in 2001. Similarly, the achievements of Lily and Elizabeth have begun to be better appreciated in the last few decades. This exhibition seeks to further increase public awareness of everything the women in the Yeats family accomplished.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)

A Silence, 1944

Oil on canvas

The O'Brien Collection

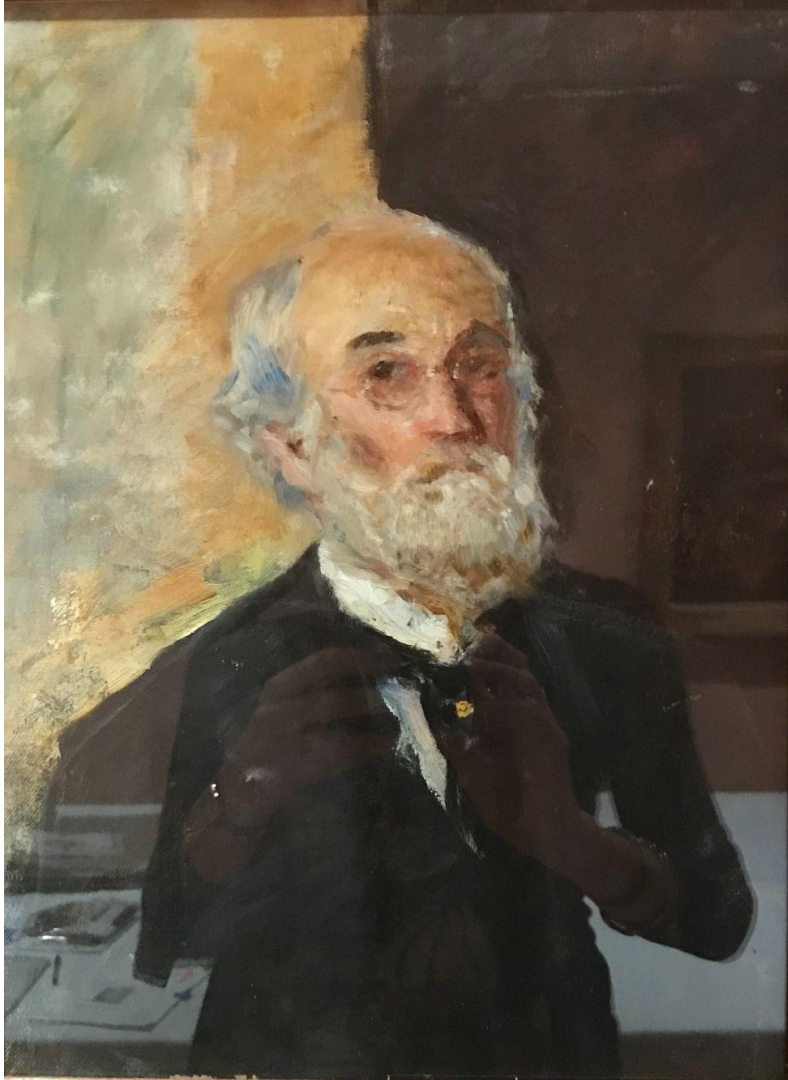
In this family portrait, several Yeats family members and a close family friend sit together, lost in contemplation. But this group exists only in the artist's memory and imagination. It includes Jack, his wife, Cottie, when she was younger, and three people whose losses Jack mourned, usually thought to be his mother, his sister Elizabeth, and the playwright J. M. Synge, who passed away in 1900, 1940, and 1909, respectively.

The figures' somber clothing and body language, along with the surrounding walls and ceiling that seem to verge on becoming pure light, all convey the work's elegiac mood and suggest the many silences that structure relationships with loved ones: those of death, estrangement, or introspection. This makes *A Silence* one of Yeats's most powerful meditations on family, memory, and loss.

John Butler Yeats (1839–1922)
Self-Portrait, 1916
Oil on board
Private collection, on long-term loan to The Niland Collection

John thought a portrait should reflect the sitter's essential character rather than his or her mere external appearance. This self-portrait from 1916, nine years after John had relocated to New York City, offers a frank assessment of the artist at age seventy-seven. Bespectacled and with a rather scruffy beard, John renders his setting in a similarly harried fashion. Swathes of yellow and whitish gray divide the work from darker brown tones to the right; the formality of his suit and tie contrasts the unpretentious tone of the composition.

Although he came to be widely respected for his sketching and painting, John's impracticality, perfectionism, and lack of self-confidence crippled his artistic career.



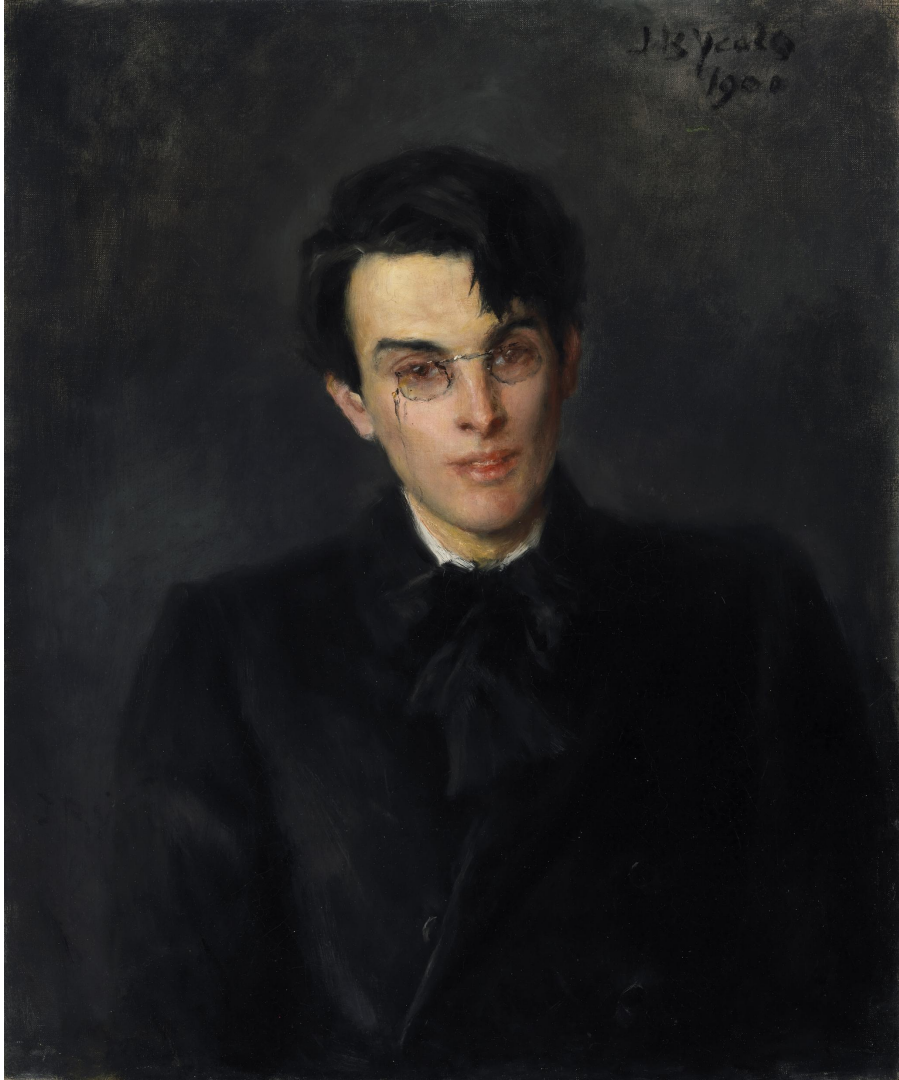
John Butler Yeats (1839–1922)
Portrait of the Artist's Wife, Susan Mary Pollexfen (1841–1900), c. 1875
Oil on canvas
National Gallery of Ireland; Presented, Friends of the National Collections of Ireland, 1949, NGI.1179

John's conviction that the best portraits were produced when the relationship between the sitter and the painter was one of affection made creating portraits of family members a natural choice. By the time he painted this portrait of his wife, Susan was coping with young children, economic uncertainty, and depression. John painted her in partial profile, staring into the distance, preoccupied with something the viewer cannot see. The portrait also suggests John's continuing and sincere attachment to her, emphasizing the delicate beauty of her features and depicting her wearing clothes that are probably her Sunday best.

John Butler Yeats (1839–1922)
Portrait of William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), Poet, 1900
Oil on canvas
National Gallery of Ireland; Presented, Mr. C. Sullivan, in memory of Mr. J. Quinn, 1926, NGI.872

John was especially attached to his firstborn and took a greater interest in William's education than in that of his other children. The relationship between them was close, intense, and sometimes antagonistic. In an oft-cited incident, during an argument, John pushed a young William against a framed picture on the wall so hard that the glass broke.

He first sketched William as a small baby napping under a blanket; this portrait of William as a young man, with his keen gaze, spectacles, and parted lips, emphasizes his intelligence, poetic aspirations, and brooding intensity.



John Butler Yeats (1839–1922)
Portrait of Susan Mary (Lily) Yeats (1866–1949), Embroiderer and Designer, 1901
Oil on canvas
National Gallery of Ireland; Presented, Friends of the National Collections of Ireland, 1949, NGI.1180

John's portrait of Lily, his favorite daughter, depicts her as a vibrant young woman dressed in luminous white clothing engaging the viewer directly, illustrating his sense of her essential nature as loving, tolerant, and tranquil. It also demonstrates his skill in rendering the varied textures and colors of fabric. The "sight-size" technique he used for portrait painting involved positioning the sitter and the canvas next to each other, standing back to view them both from a distance, then moving forward to paint. This practice allowed him to reproduce the effect of clothing details seen from farther away.

Friends and acquaintances often dropped by his studio, and contemporary descriptions of John at work recalled him striding back and forth to and from the easel, all the while having animated conversations with his guests.

John Butler Yeats (1839–1922)
Elizabeth Corbet Yeats, c. 1899
Oil on canvas
National Gallery of Ireland; Presented, Friends of the National Gallery of Ireland (Patrons of Irish Art Funds), 2017, NGI.2017.45

John praised Elizabeth's powerful intellect and regularly took her side when she and William got into conflicts arising from his participation in her publishing venture. But John, William, and Lily thought Elizabeth was a difficult, even unstable person, as evidenced in their correspondence with each other.

In contrast to his portrait of Lily, John painted Elizabeth in pensive profile to suggest her more enigmatic and turbulent character. Recent scholarship has questioned this negative characterization of Elizabeth by establishing that, outside the family, she was outgoing, well-liked, and a skilled teacher. This painting, like John's nearby portrait of Lily, highlights the artist's capacity to capture how nuances of color, texture, and lighting appear in textiles.

John Butler Yeats (1839–1922)
Portrait of Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957), 1890
Oil on canvas
National Gallery of Ireland; Presented, 1972, NGI.4040

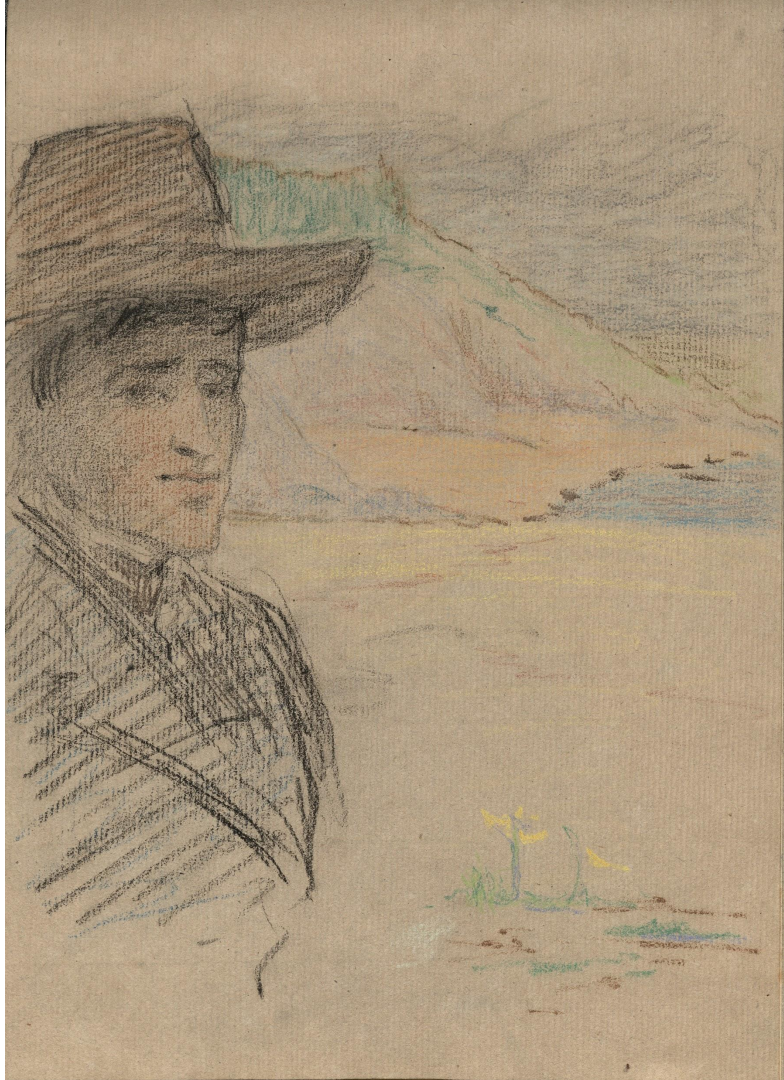
By most accounts, Jack had an easy-going disposition. He was the baby of the family by three years, and when he was eight or nine Susan left him with her parents in Sligo, possibly to help reduce her family's expenses. He stayed there for seven years, a circumstance that insulated him from some of the economic struggles and family dramas that his siblings experienced. His time with his grandparents also gave him a deep affection for Sligo and the West of Ireland.

John's influence over Jack also appears to have been strong; as an adult Jack said repeatedly that he had become a painter because he was the son of a painter. In contrast to John's portrait of William, whose dark clothing and background were juxtaposed with the subject's pale face, his portrait of Jack displays a set of lighter tones that suggests harmony among the sitter's face, clothing, and background.

Mary Cottenham Yeats (1867–1947)
Portrait Sketch of Jack Butler Yeats with Landscape Background, c. 1896–1910
Pastel on tinted paper in bound sketchbook
National Gallery of Ireland, Centre for the Study of Irish Art, Yeats Archive, Y1/JY/1/1/5/17

Jack met his wife Cottie (Mary Cottenham) at art school, and she herself was a skilled artist. The couple remained childless but were devoted to each other, and Cottie often accompanied Jack on his travels. Jack traveled to, sketched, and incorporated into his work other places as well, but Sligo, and the West of Ireland more generally, held special significance for him.

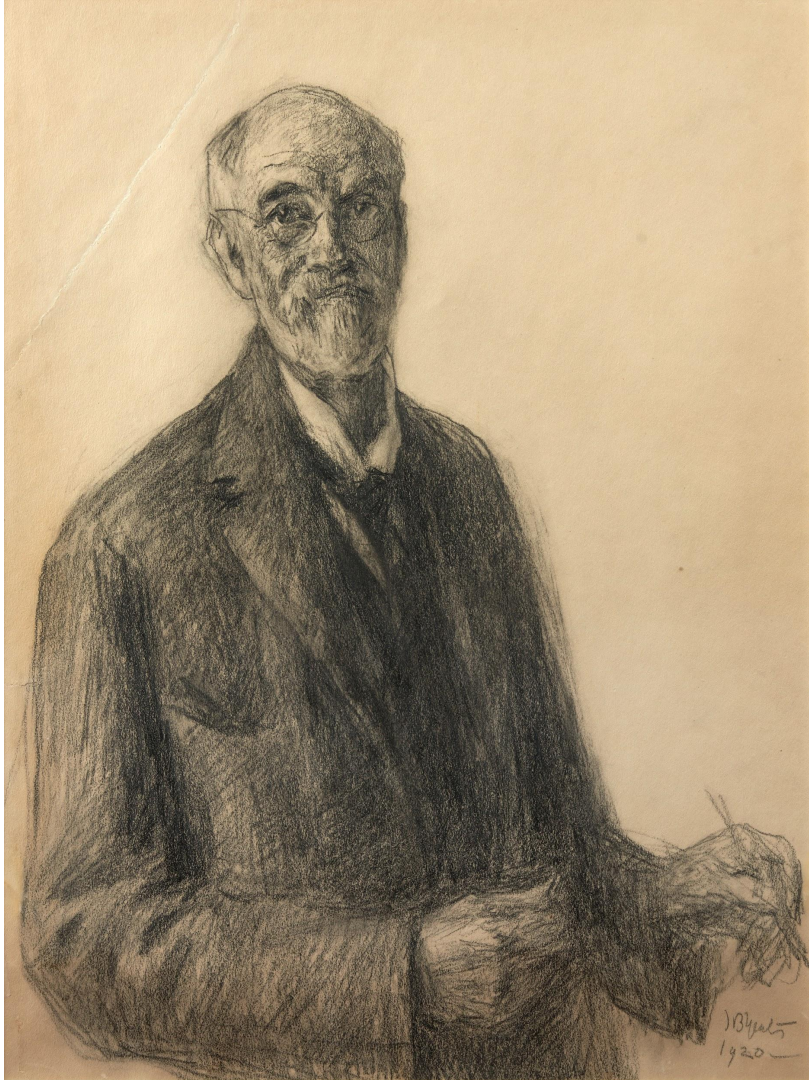
Cottie's portrait of Jack places him outside, in a faintly sketched landscape with a mountain that bears a resemblance to Ben Bulben in Sligo. The terrain signals the importance of travel to that region and other locales in Jack's artistic process and in her own work as well.



John Butler Yeats (1839–1922)
Self-Portrait, 1920
Graphite on paper
Carolyn A. and Peter S. Lynch Collection

John enjoyed the company of artists and intellectuals wherever he went, including New York City, where he lived from late 1907 until his death in 1922. He was charming, sociable, and considered brilliant by many who knew him. This self-portrait captures his kindly openness to new ideas, people, and places in his old age. At various points in his life, John made incomplete or unsuccessful attempts to branch into writing.

Success in publishing finally came during the last few years of his life. Hoping to help John earn some money, William and his friend the poet Ezra Pound put together *Passages from the Letters of John Butler Yeats*, which Cuala Press published in 1917. The collection was an immediate success and received glowing reviews. Soon after, John also published a book of his essays that was similarly successful, and Cuala issued *Further Letters of John Butler Yeats* in 1920. Ironically, John achieved a measure of fame through his writing that eluded his painting.



Portraits of a Family: Places

John Yeats met Susan Pollexfen in 1862 in Rosses Point, County Sligo, on the west coast of Ireland. He was impressed by the natural beauty of the surrounding area, which encompassed the seashore and windswept mountains Knocknarea and Ben Bulben. He was also struck by Susan's charms; they became engaged before he left Sligo just a few weeks later.

Susan never lost her love of Sligo, and their children would form lasting attachments to the region. Sligo offered a sense of rootedness and connection, but John moved his family frequently to various houses in Ireland and England, seldom staying in one place for more than a few years.

Between 1867, when William was two years old, and 1888, John moved the family from one home to another eight times. After his daughter Anne was born in 1919, William wrote in a letter, "We want Anne, before she begins to remember, to be settled in a house where she can live till maturity if not always. We both feel we have lost so much by changes of place in our childhood."

The experience of those moves, coupled with continuing affection for Sligo, shaped Susan and her children in profound ways, Jack most of all. Late in his life, he told a friend, "Sligo…is in every way my jumping off place, and is my spiritual home always, the foundation of everything I paint is Sligo."

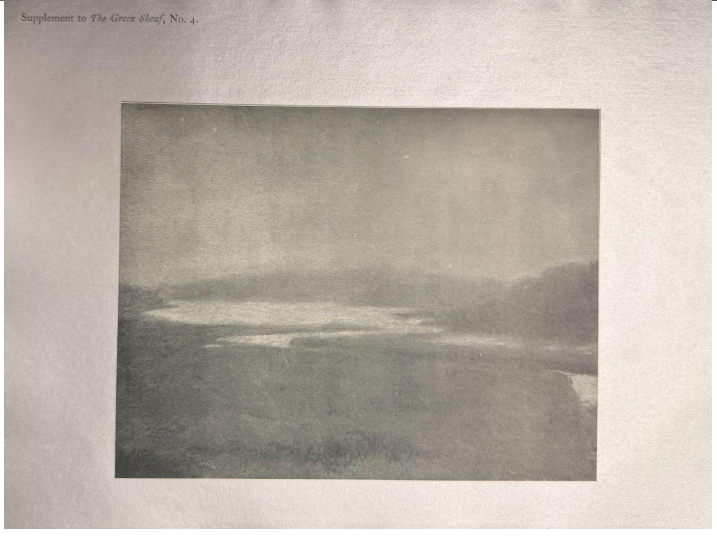
Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
The Little Town (Returning from the Fair), 1906
Graphite and watercolor on paper
Carolyn A. and Peter S. Lynch Collection

Jack's sense of place in the West of Ireland was inextricably bound with its residents. The years he spent living with his grandparents in Sligo provided ample opportunities to observe the local population at fairs, markets, races, and popular performances.

When Jack began painting, he favored working in watercolor, and early examples like this one were also influenced by his work as an illustrator. He often represented locals in action; here the small coastal town is a scene of lively activity. A group of horsemen gallops toward the viewer on one side of a stone wall while a lone, riderless pony on the other side canters forward in mid-air. Diagonals created by the stone walls lead the viewer's eye back to a townscape and harbor, which form a tranquil backdrop for the movement and drama in the foreground.

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939)
The Lake at Coole, 1899
Pastel on paper
Collection of Alan M. Klein

The Lake at Coole as published in Pamela Colman Smith, *The Green Sheaf*, 1903
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, PR1098 .G73 IRISH no.4 (1903)



William attended art school like his siblings, and he maintained a keen interest in the visual arts for his whole life, but surviving examples of his visual art are rare. This pastel depicts the lake at Coole Park, the County Galway home of Lady Augusta Gregory.

Gregory became a central figure in the Irish Revival, a movement that sought to create a distinctively Irish culture, independent of Great Britain. She and William were instrumental in founding the National Theatre. Her estate was an important meeting place for many revivalist intellectuals. She met William in the 1890s and was his collaborator, supporter, and patron until her death. Gregory was also an early supporter of Jack's work and a friend to the entire Yeats family. Jack's sometime collaborator Pamela Colman Smith reproduced William's painting (displayed in case behind) in *The Green Sheaf*, a short-lived literary magazine she edited.

Postcards received by Jack B. Yeats and Mary Cottenham Yeats
National Gallery of Ireland

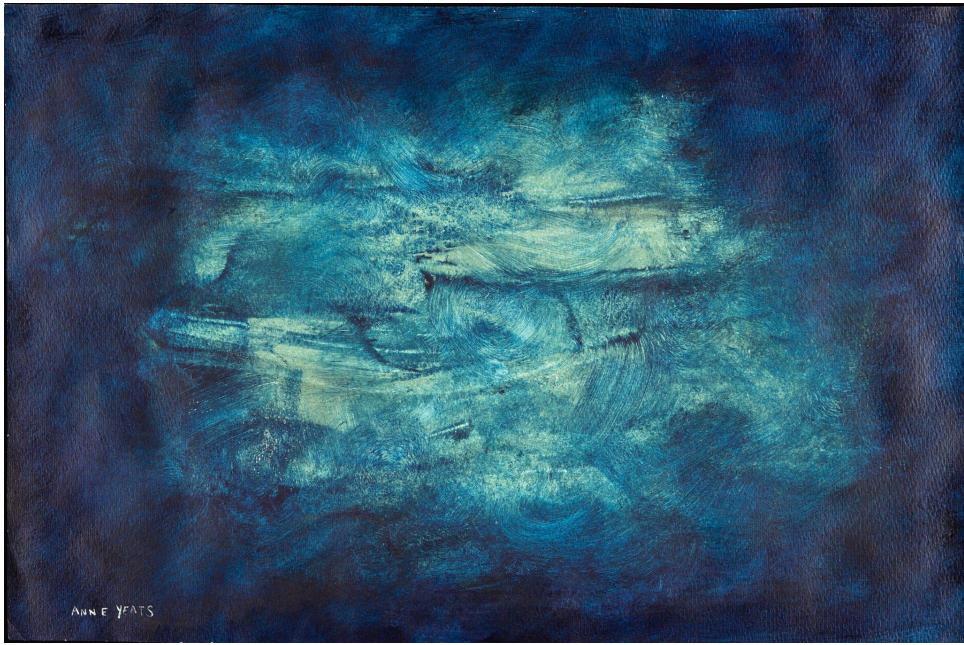
In addition to changing residences regularly, family members traveled for various personal and professional reasons. Sligo held a particular attraction, but other trips took them to a range of places in Ireland and Great Britain, as well as further afield to destinations in Continental Europe and the United States. It was Jack whose art depended most directly on travel, as he developed the habit of carrying a sketchbook with him wherever he went so he could record his impressions of the places and people he encountered. Many of these would later be incorporated into paintings.

Postcards like these are usually ephemeral; their survival in the National Gallery of Ireland's collection offers valuable insights into how family members experienced particular places and how family relationships, artistic endeavors, and geographical movement were intertwined for the Yeatses.

Unquiet Dreams
6′50″
Cyrus Rosen, Joe Nugent

Their somewhat chaotic upbringing—alternating between the Pollexfens' prosperous merchant household and their father's artistic penury—shaped the creative sensibilities of all four Yeats children. But summers spent exploring the ancient, elemental landscape of County Sligo provided reassurance and lifelong inspiration. Beneath the monumental presence of Ben Bulben mountain, William, Lily, Elizabeth, and Jack discovered woods, streams, waterfalls, mysterious raths, and magical places that exhilarated them, while to the west, the roar of the Atlantic Ocean beckoned and threatened. These long-remembered patterns, shapes, and sounds were woven into the fabric of the Yeatses' artistic lives. This short film presents a window into those resonant land- and seascapes.

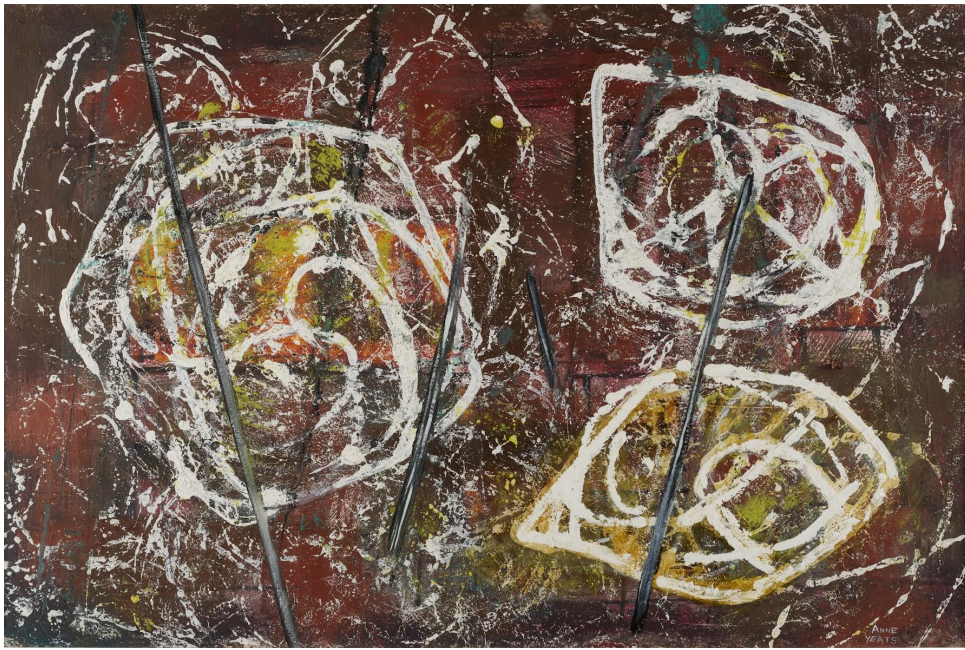
Anne Yeats (1919–2001)
Blue Waters, 1993
Oil on paper
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Collection of Yeats Family Papers, MS-1986-054



As she did with portraits, Anne demonstrated her appreciation for a Yeats family tradition—in this case representing land- and seascapes—while also putting her own stamp on it. The rich blues and violets here merge into one another to capture the mesmerizing quality of water. Starting in the 1960s, Anne began to saturate various fabrics, string, and other materials in paint and manipulate them across the canvas to evoke the movement of water and the texture of other natural forms. Combined with her later preference for striking deep blues, such “string and cloth paintings” would become her distinctive vision for representing the natural world.

Anne Yeats (1919–2001)
More Stones (No. 41), n.d.
Oil on board
University of Galway

Although stones recur as a motif throughout Anne's oeuvre, the style and composition of this painting suggest that it comes from her early period. Like her uncle and aunts, she was drawn to nature. However, while Jack's natural settings are usually inextricable from narratives of human action, and Lily and Elizabeth favored scenes recognizable as landscapes, Anne's work often focuses on the natural world on a much smaller scale. She lavishes sustained and careful attention on inanimate elements like stones or water, endowing nature with nuance and depth of character normally reserved for human subjects.



Elizabeth C. Yeats (1868–1940)

Landscape with Cottage in the West, 1927

Watercolor on paper

Collection of Catherine Gilligan and John Donohoe

In contrast to Lily's use of vibrant colors in her "needle picture," Elizabeth employs more somber tones, accented with vivid greens, in this watercolor of a rugged but homey landscape. A thatched cottage is the focal point with a stone wall and flanking tree in the foreground, and the mountains of Sligo, probably near Loch Gill, behind.

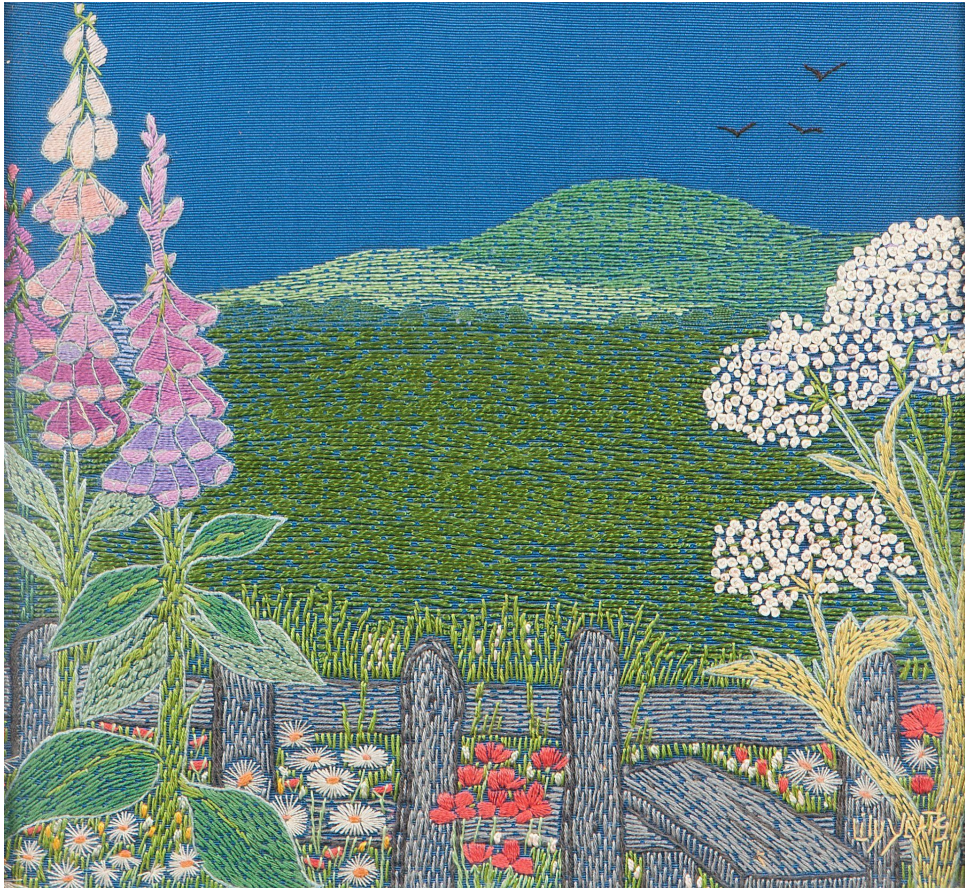
This spontaneous scene was executed with quick brushstrokes. Under a moody sky, the land is rocky and somewhat bare, but the house nestles into the hillside, and its colors harmonize with those of its surroundings. The painting illustrates the complex nature of the Yeats family's attachment to the West of Ireland; sometimes they idealized it as picturesque and authentically Irish, but they also found ways to convey the harshness of many local people's lives.

Lily Yeats (1866–1949)
Foxgloves by the Stile, n.d.
Silk embroidery on blue poplin ground
Private collection

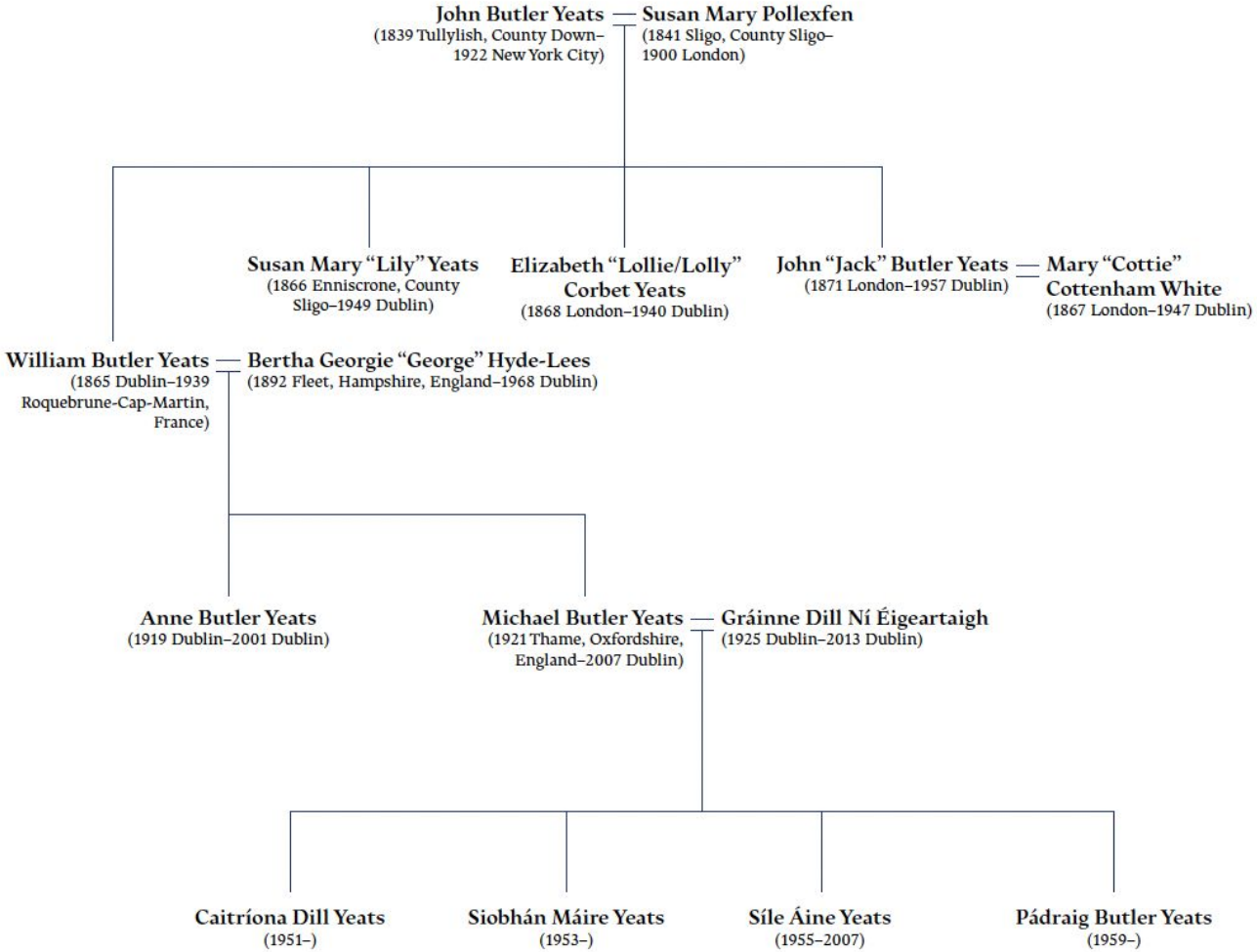
Lily's term for works like this one was "needle picture," which signaled her artistic ambitions. This embroidery displays both simplicity and sophistication. She stitched it on a vibrant blue poplin that forms the sky and used various stitches to render a three-dimensional effect.

For the poppies and daisies crowding the foreground she employed a combination of satin and stem stitches, while the stile's fence and diagonal step lead the eye into the picture and incorporate a series of darning and stem stitches. Areas of blue poplin show through to create a further textured effect in the stile and the mountains. Protruding French knots comprise the meadowsweet blossoms, which, with the foxgloves on the other side, provide a foil to the view beyond.

The scene may have been inspired by the Wicklow Mountains, which Lily could see from her home south of Dublin.



Yeats Family Tree



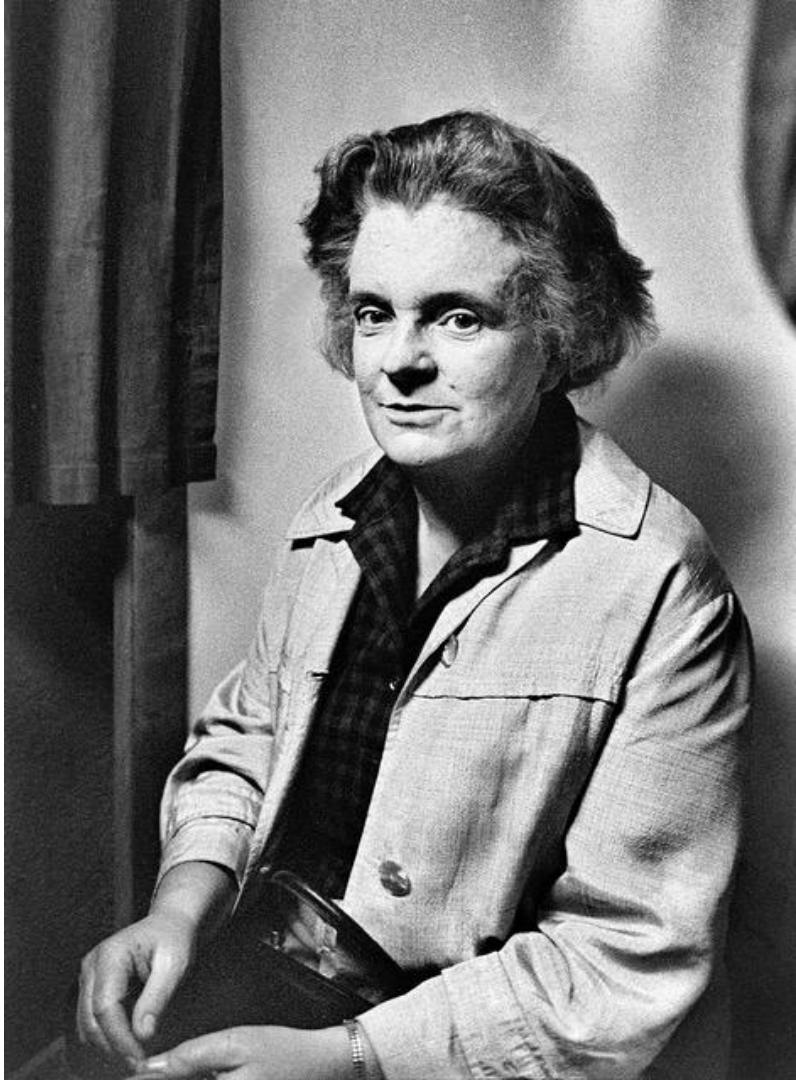
Alen MacWeeney (1939–)

Anne Yeats, Busaras Bus Station, Dublin, 1963

Gelatin silver print

John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Alen MacWeeney Ireland Photographs, MS-2020-004

Captured while sitting in the photo booth of a Dublin bus station, this portrait of Anne by the photographer Alen MacWeeney (brother of Anne's friend and fellow artist Leslie MacWeeney) embodies a self-conscious and witty engagement with her family's legacy and traditional portraiture. Her pose is dignified, and her gaze engages the viewer directly and seriously, but at a slight angle. A subtle smile hovers around her mouth, as if she were savoring the humor of approximating a traditional portrait in the spontaneous and unserious space of the photo booth. The image shows Anne's tendency to revise her family's artistic traditions even as she worked to preserve them and act as their custodian.



Youth: Points of Departure, Places of Return

When Jack Yeats called Sligo his “jumping off place,” he was invoking both a geographical location and his childhood, especially the years he spent there with his maternal grandparents. He would return to Sligo and his youth throughout his career. As a child, Jack was fascinated by the busy Sligo seaport and frequented markets, fairs, horse races, and popular performances. As an adult, he resolved that he should only paint what he had actually seen, rather than what he merely imagined. This conviction, along with his habit of carrying sketchbooks wherever he went to record his observations, made his travels and youthful experiences inexhaustible sources of material to draw upon for his work.

Jack began his career as an illustrator, work that emphasized direct expression, firm lines, and figures captured in action; these elements were later reflected in his style when, in his mid-twenties, he began to paint seriously. He was also influenced by the Irish Revival, which celebrated Ireland’s distinct language, folklore, music, and literature. Jack’s siblings all contributed to the Revival; like many revivalists, they considered the West of Ireland the most authentically Irish region of the country. Jack shared with the Revival a wish to counter negative British stereotypes of the Irish and to represent them as people with dignity, purpose, and a rich indigenous culture.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
Market Day, 1906
Watercolor on paper
The Niland Collection

During his early forays into painting, watercolor was Jack's favored medium. He was often drawn to the busy and crowded scenes of market days; this watercolor captures a vibrant abundance of activities and commodities.

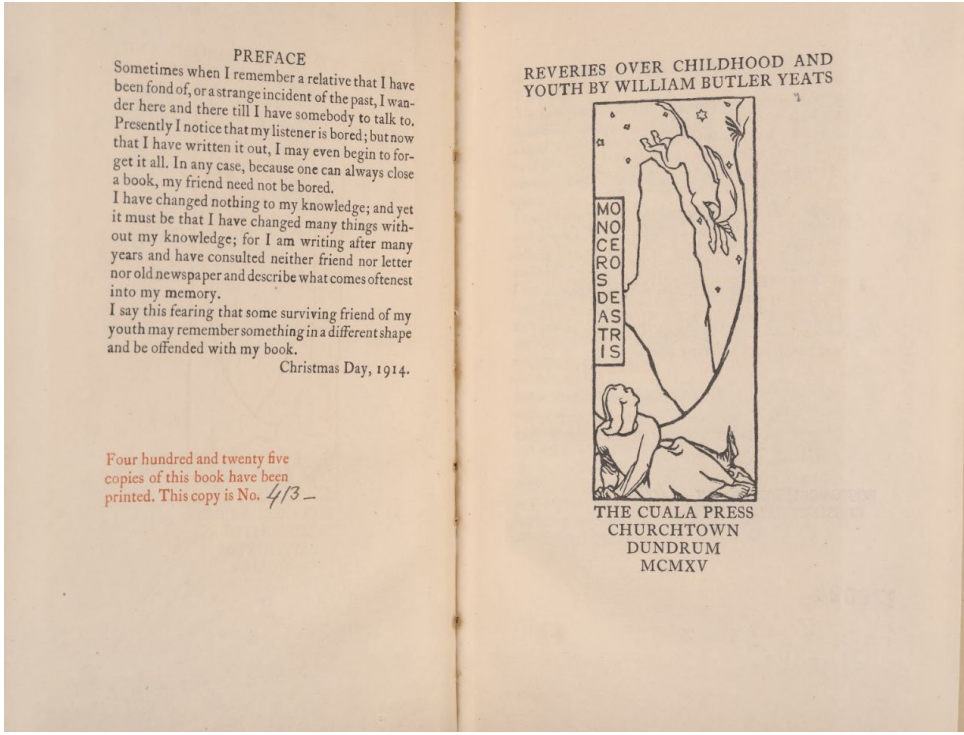
The image uses light and shadow to differentiate between the horsemen galloping up the street and a lone woman standing at a stall. Her face is doubly shaded by her hat and the awning above her, and her expression is contemplative and enigmatic. Her prominent placement in the scene conveys the depth and complexity of Jack's appreciation for rural dwellers, which encompassed both their boisterous leisure pursuits and a more meditative register.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
View of Gorumna and interior scene, *Connemara 1905*
Graphite, ink, and watercolor on paper in bound sketchbook
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Anthony Mourek Collection of Irish Culture and History, BC-2024-066

Jack's interest in memory and his determination to paint only what he had actually seen converged in his habit of sketching. Beginning as a young man, he carried small sketchbooks with him, keeping a pictorial diary of his daily activities and recording his impressions of the people, places, and sights he encountered.

Sketching was an important part of Jack's method; by the end of his life he had accumulated over two hundred sketchbooks. The first decade of the twentieth century was a particularly productive period for his sketchbooks; he filled over one hundred during those years. He annotated them, carefully recorded the year and location, and mined them repeatedly for his paintings.

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939)
Reveries over Childhood and Youth (Cuala Press, 1915)
Bound paper
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, PR5906 .A557 1915 IRISH



PREFACE

Sometimes when I remember a relative that I have been fond of, or a strange incident of the past, I wander here and there till I have somebody to talk to. Presently I notice that my listener is bored; but now that I have written it out, I may even begin to forget it all. In any case, because one can always close a book, my friend need not be bored.

I have changed nothing to my knowledge; and yet it must be that I have changed many things without my knowledge; for I am writing after many years and have consulted neither friend nor letter nor old newspaper and describe what comes oftenest into my memory.

I say this fearing that some surviving friend of my youth may remember something in a different shape and be offended with my book.

Christmas Day, 1914.

Four hundred and twenty five copies of this book have been printed. This copy is No. 413

REVERIES OVER CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH BY WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

MONOCEROS DE ASTRIS

THE CUALA PRESS
CHURCHTOWN
DUNDRUM
MCMXV

William relied on other family members when he was beginning to write his autobiography. He consulted Lily for her memories, as she had become the family historian. In 1915 Elizabeth's Cuala Press published the first volume of the autobiography, *Reveries over Childhood and Youth*. Initially, William intended to call the book *Memory Harbour*, after one of Jack's paintings, but abandoned that title as another author had recently used it.

Much of the book records William's formative experiences in Sligo. In it he remarks of Jack that "in half the pictures he paints to-day I recognize faces that I have met at Rosses or the Sligo quays."

Family drama arose out of the book's production: William shared the finished draft with Lily and Jack before printing, but not with Elizabeth, although she was the printer, and John was hurt by some of the volume's accounts of his relationship with William.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
Memory Harbour, 1900, in *Plates to Accompany "Reveries over Childhood and Youth" by W. B. Yeats* (Cuala Press, 1915)
Print after original watercolor
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, PR5906 .A557 1915 plates LEEMING, c. 1

This painting's evocative title aptly embodies the merging of landscape and memory that Jack would embrace increasingly after 1910. The compressed image assembles elements of Jack's experiences in the Sligo area: a well-known cast iron statue in the waters near Rosses Point called the Metal Man, several ships, a horse and rider, and a man in the foreground, who William might have recognized as Michael Gillen, a local pilot who appears in several of Jack's works. The composition suggests both geographical movement and the mind's travels back into the past.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
An Island Man, 1906
Pen, ink, and watercolor on paper
The Niland Collection

In the summer of 1905, Jack and the Irish writer J. M. Synge traveled together through several impoverished areas in the West of Ireland, known as Congested Districts. They produced a series of illustrated newspaper articles documenting conditions there.

Synge had also just completed text for his book *The Aran Islands* (1907) for which Jack produced illustrations. This image became the book's frontispiece. Jack based his figure on a photograph Synge had taken—an unusual method for him. The island man appears heroic, even romanticized, but his clothing is authentic. The bare rocks and empty sky suggest the harshness of life on Ireland's western seaboard.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)

A Summer Day, 1914

Oil on canvas

The O'Brien Collection

Jack was fascinated by the leisure activities of local people in the West of Ireland and elsewhere. He frequently attended races, circuses, popular theater, and other entertainments. Posters advertising such events appear here in the shop windows in the background. Reclining over a row of barrels, the central figure suggests an unconventional form of leisure that also gestures towards drunkenness and disability. In contrast to the two men standing in the background, he wears ragged clothes and has crutches rather than a more gentlemanly cane. This painting reflects Jack's penchant for depicting men who are disreputable, odd, or marginalized.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
Dancing for a Cake (The Dancer), 1903
Watercolor on paper
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Collection of Yeats Family Papers, MS-1986-054

The regatta at Rosses Point, County Sligo, drew people from the surrounding area for various lively, traditional festivities. One was a public house staging a dance contest and offering prizes—a cake and a bottle of whiskey—for the best female and male dancers. In this watercolor, a man dances on a platform, traditionally a door, that has been brought outside. Assorted characters make up an audience; the regatta boats and Donegal Bay form a backdrop.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
The Unruly Horse, 1890
Watercolor and ink on paper
Carolyn A. and Peter S. Lynch Collection

Jack had an enduring interest in representing horses and donkeys, and his depictions of such animals in motion are among his most accomplished works. By the end of the 1880s, Jack had successfully launched his career as an illustrator. Based in London, he received commissions from an increasing range of publications, especially those covering sports, popular entertainment, and street life. He captured what he saw quickly and deftly; many of his illustrations approached their subjects through humor and caricature, which were popular at the time.

In 1891 Jack began working for *Paddock Life*, a sporting magazine, which provided him the opportunity to broaden his long-standing fascination with horses and racing by attending various other sporting events. This drawing from 1890 epitomizes why Jack found illustrating for *Paddock Life* congenial. Here he displays his interest in lively street scenes, his skill in depicting horses in motion, and his facility with caricature and cartoon.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
The Racing Donkey, 1908
Watercolor on paper
Carolyn A. and Peter S. Lynch Collection

In contrast to the nearby *The Young Donkey*, here Jack depicts a racing donkey firmly subordinated to human handlers. The men exchange conspiratorial glances, suggesting the lively, sometimes rowdy world of informal racing Jack witnessed in Sligo. The background—sea, a distant landmass, and a ship to the right—however, is strikingly similar in both works.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
The Young Donkey, 1914
Oil on panel
Carolyn A. and Peter S. Lynch Collection

Donkeys have been in Ireland for centuries, but were generally looked upon as beasts of burden and thought to be inferior to horses; they came to prominence as farm workers in times when horses were in short supply. In this early oil, however, Jack elevates a donkey to near-mythic status.

Other works by Jack in this period depict local people in the West of Ireland as stoic and dignified, bravely enduring their fate; here, the young donkey embodies exuberance, power, and play.

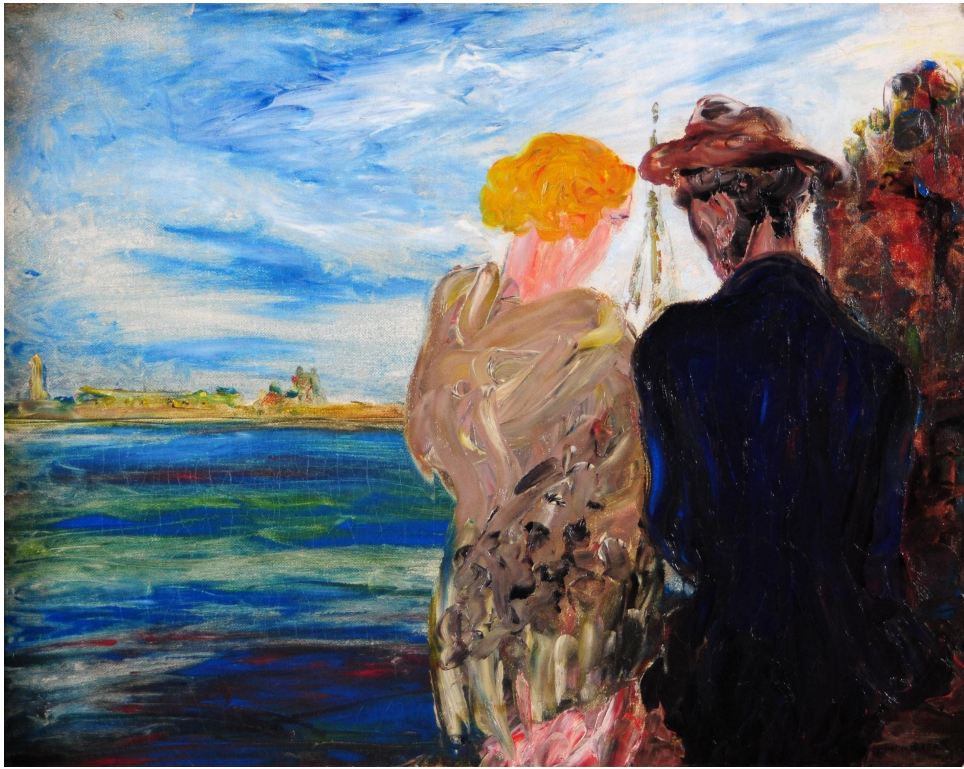
Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
An Island Funeral, 1923
Oil on canvas
The Niland Collection

This somber oil in muted tones approaches life in the West of Ireland in a register that is neither heroic nor humorous. Instead, the image suggests two departures: death and emigration. While revivalist intellectuals sometimes romanticized the West as a source of pure Irish culture, untainted by England, many also recognized the realities of poverty and widespread emigration that shaped the lives of people there.

In *The Aran Islands*, for which Jack produced illustrations, J. M. Synge's account of life on the islands emphasizes the constant proximity of death. While this painting hints at the existential and symbolic preoccupations of Jack's later works, it also maintains his early commitment, evident in the faces of the mourners, to capturing character. In 1919 he told a journalist, "I never make up my pictures. All my people are people I have actually seen."

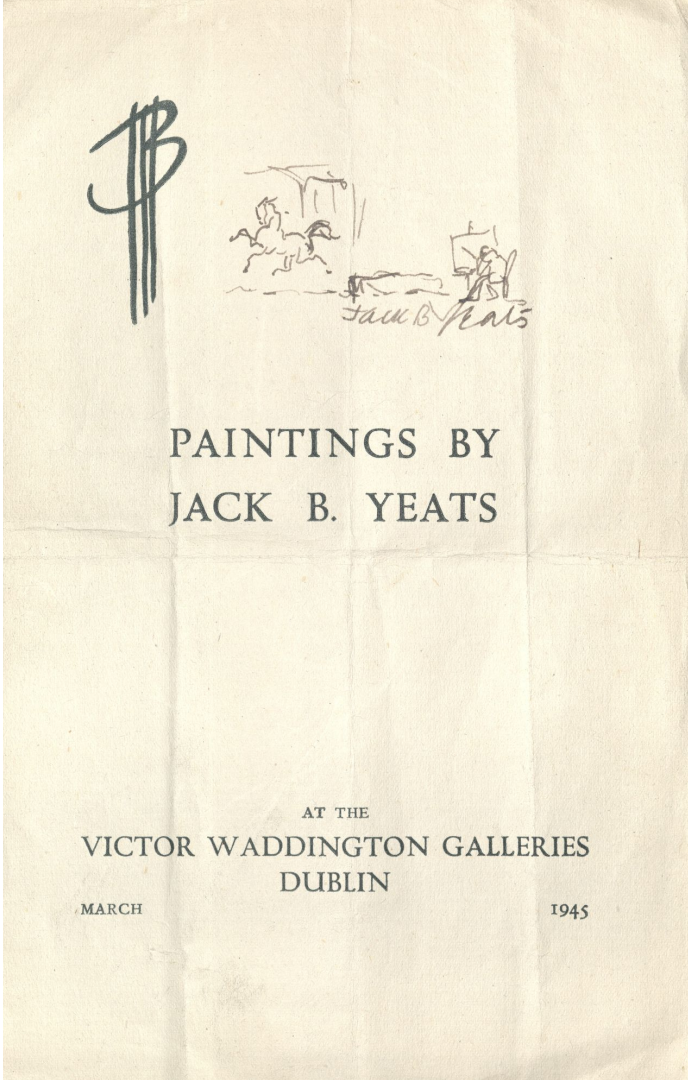
Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
On the Quay, Dungarvan, 1925
Oil on canvas
Private collection, formerly Ernie O'Malley Collection

This painting shares with *An Island Funeral* (nearby) an elegiac meditation on emigration, in this case, from Dungarvan, a town and harbor on the southeast coast of Ireland. A couple, backs to the viewer, contemplates the mast of a departing ship at sunset. The male figure is dimly visible, dressed in black, and a dark mass looms over him on the right. The painting includes a potential counterpoint to such mourning, however, in its rich and varied colors. The warm, bright tones of the female figure at the center draw her towards the ship and sky. The deep blues of the sea will become increasingly important to Jack's later work.

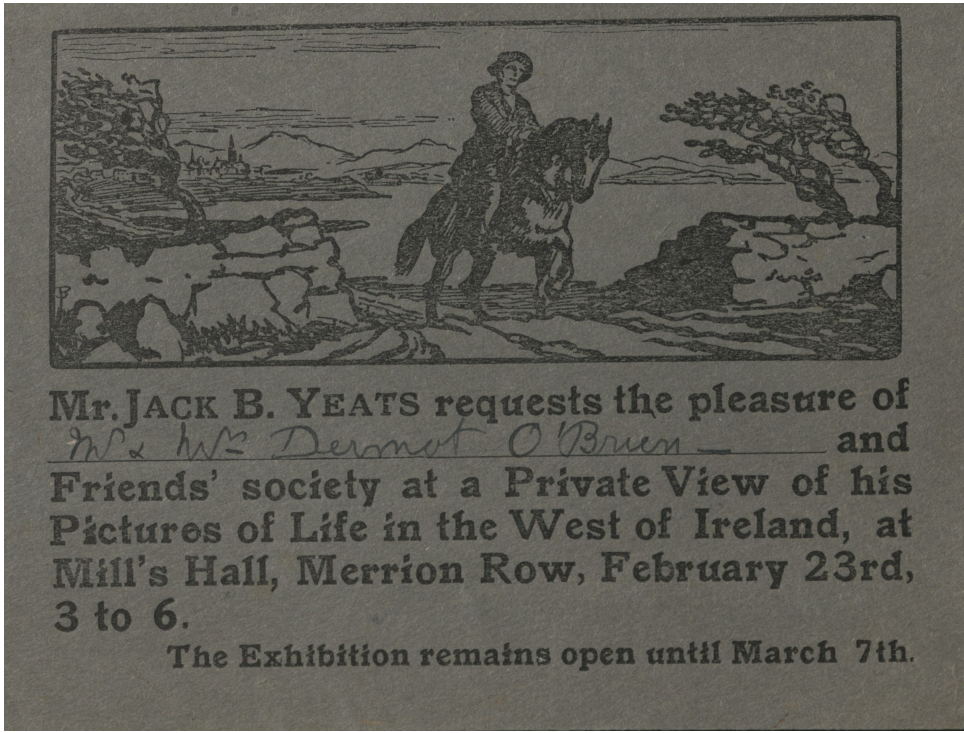


Paintings by Jack B. Yeats at the Victor Waddington Galleries (Three Candles Press, 1945)
Printed paper with ink sketch
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Anthony Mourek Collection of Irish Culture and History, ND497.Y4 W33 1945 IRISH

Born in London, Victor Waddington established a gallery and framing business in Dublin in 1928. In 1942 he became Jack's manager and exclusive dealer. In the summer of 1945, Waddington organized a large retrospective *National Loan Exhibition* of Jack's works, the catalogue for which included an influential essay by his friend and collector Ernie O'Malley, the daring republican revolutionary. Earlier that year, Waddington held a smaller show of Jack's paintings in his galleries. This inscribed copy of the checklist features a sketch by Jack showing him painting one of his favorite subjects, a horse.



Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
Pictures of Life in the West of Ireland exhibition invitation, February 23, 1924
Printed paper
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Anthony Mourek Collection of Irish Culture and History, BC-2024-066



Between 1899 and 1924, Jack's drawings and paintings were featured in about two dozen solo shows with titles referencing the West of Ireland. Some of his early success arose from a group of admirers interested in the Irish Revival. They saw Jack as a genuinely Irish painter depicting distinctively Irish ways of life.

Examples of his postcard invitations to private viewings are common on the art market and survive in numerous public and private collections. This 1924 invitation to an upscale art venue in central Dublin is addressed to Dermot O'Brien, who was president of the Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts (RHA) from 1910 to 1945.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)

View of Gorumna and interior scene, *Connemara 1905*

Graphite, ink, and watercolor on paper in bound sketchbook

John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Anthony Mourek Collection of Irish Culture and History, BC-2024-066

Jack's interest in memory and his determination to paint only what he had actually seen converged in his habit of sketching. Beginning as a young man, he carried small sketchbooks with him, keeping a pictorial diary of his daily activities and recording his impressions of the people, places, and sights he encountered.

Sketching was an important part of Jack's method; by the end of his life he had accumulated over two hundred sketchbooks. The first decade of the twentieth century was a particularly productive period for his sketchbooks; he filled over one hundred during those years. He annotated them, carefully recorded the year and location, and mined them repeatedly for his paintings.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
Earliest known letter (written to his mother, Susan Mary [Pollexfen] Yeats), c. 1880–83
Ink on paper
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Anthony Mourek Collection of Irish Culture and History, BC-2024-066

Many of Jack's interests and practices as an artist had their origins in his childhood. His father John recalled that, as a child, Jack liked to draw "groups engaged in some kind of drama" rather than solitary objects or figures. This preference was also reflected in Jack's childhood preoccupation with dolls. He made a house for them, known in the family as "The Farm," and insisted on bringing it with him when the family traveled. In this letter, Jack tells his mother about new objects he has added to his farm. He includes small sketches in the letter, a habit that he would continue throughout his life.

Youth: Entertainment & Education

Many Yeats family members were keenly interested in education but distrusted conventional schooling. They often embraced forms of education that were innovative and privileged cultural development. John chafed against the rules and orthodoxies he encountered at boarding school and college. Late in life he claimed that Jack's true education lay in the fact that he "diligently observed and diligently drew what he observed." Both Jack and Elizabeth advocated exposing children to art education early and favored teaching methods that emphasized creativity, self-direction, and play. Elizabeth was trained and certified as a teacher in a Froebel Kindergarten, a school run according to similar principles.

Jack's childhood preoccupation with dolls grew into an interest in toy theaters as sources of both entertainment and education. He designed and constructed a toy theater, wrote plays for it, and put on performances for local children. Anne made her own toy theater and taught art at her studio and local schools.

The embroidery and print shops at Dun Emer and Cuala Industries, headed by Lily and Elizabeth, had to teach the young women who worked there the skills of their trades. But the sisters were also committed to expanding their workers' educations more broadly by affording them access to Irish language classes, art lessons, theater performances, and opportunities for self-expression.

Elizabeth C. Yeats (1868–1940)
Brush-Work Studies of Flowers, Fruit and Animals for Teachers and Advanced Students (London: George Philip & Son, 1898)
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, ND1400 .Y398 1898 IRISH
"Plate II.—Tulips," in *Elementary Brushwork Studies* (London: George Philip & Son, 1900)
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, ND2420 .Y4 1900 IRISH

Following her studies at art schools in Dublin and London, Elizabeth trained as a kindergarten teacher at the Bedford Training College, where she embraced Friedrich Fröbel's philosophy of learning through play with freedom and guidance. Between 1896 and 1900 she published a series of copybooks and instruction manuals for teaching children elementary techniques for painting flowers, plants, and animals through direct use of the brush without preliminary outlines or sketches, a method inspired by traditional Japanese painting practices.

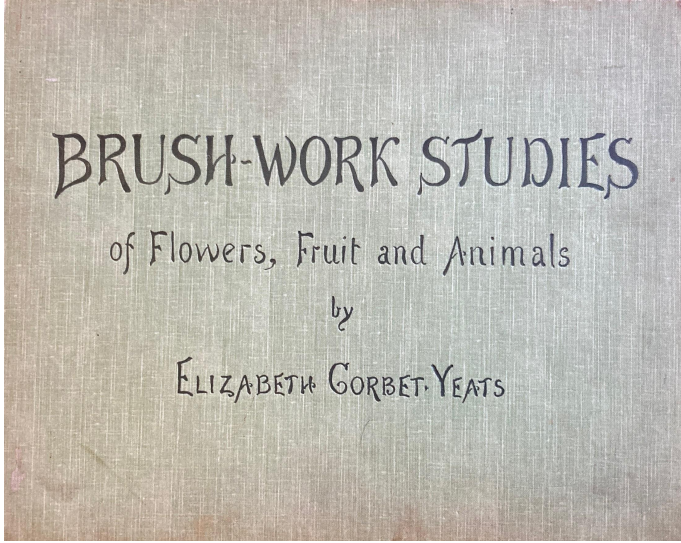



PLATE II.—TULIPS.

Colours—Flowers: crimson lake and a little gamboge; gamboge alone for the yellow flowers. Leaves: cobalt and gamboge.

The flowers are made by three, or sometimes four, dabs overlapping at the base; the point of the brush towards the top of the page.

The buds are made by a single dab.

The stalks must be drawn with the point of the brush; and to avoid the red colour running into the green, it is a good plan not to allow the stalk to quite touch the flower.

The leaves are each made by a single stroke of the brush, starting with the point, and pressing it upon the paper to widen the touch, and then drawing it up again to form the narrow appearance of the leaf as it overlaps the stalk.

PLATE II.

John Butler Yeats (1839–1922)
Portrait of Lily and Elizabeth Yeats, c. late 1870s
Graphite on paper
Collection of Catherine Gilligan and John Donohoe

John's affection for his daughters is evident in this intimate sketch. In many ways, the sisters were very different people. Lily, who had been born prematurely, suffered periodically from respiratory problems for much of her life. As a child she was placid and even-tempered; she and William were close. By the time Elizabeth was born, her mother, Susan, was depressed, overwhelmed, and not anxious for a third child.

When Lily was twelve, John decided to send her to a progressive girls' school in London, but he did not send Elizabeth, who was eleven. Left at home with her withdrawn and unhappy mother, Elizabeth was bored and resentful. This unequal treatment contributed to a long-lasting pattern in which Elizabeth was moody and prone to outbursts, and the rest of the family regarded her as troublesome.

Elizabeth C. Yeats (1868–1940)
Embroidery stencil for sampler with botanical designs, 1902
Embroidery stencil with cornflower designs, 1902
Graphite on tracing paper
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Loretta Clarke Murray Collection of Women in Revolutionary Ireland, MS-2016-016

One of these stencils by Elizabeth shows a full range of motifs for a sampler like the completed example at right. It provides a variety of flowers, fruits, and leaves to fill a rectangular space in an artistic configuration.

Her other stencil features cornflower sprigs that could be used to decorate garments like the bonnets, collar, and bag shown in the Transforming Private Spaces section of the exhibition.

Dun Emer Industries
Sample embroidery of a butterfly and flowers, c. 1903
Silk thread on linen
National Gallery of Ireland; Centre for the Study of Irish Art, Yeats Archive, Y18/2

The word “sampler” derives from the Latin “exemplum,” or the old French “essamplaire,” meaning “an example.” Before the introduction of printed designs, embroiderers and lacemakers needed a way to record different designs, stitches, and effects to reuse in new pieces. This sampler, possibly embroidered by Lily Yeats, uses different colored threads and stitches to create a varied group of motifs that could be incorporated into larger designs and used as models for teaching embroidery skills to the young women Dun Emer employed.

John Butler Yeats (1839–1922)
Portrait of Jack B. Yeats, c. 1890s
Graphite on paper
Collection of Catherine Gilligan and John Donohoe

In this sketch John shows Jack gazing downward and inward rather than engaging with the viewer, thereby suggesting self-reliance and self-containment. There was good reason for this. The age gap between Jack and Elizabeth and Jack's extended stays in Sligo set him apart from his siblings. Lily observed later, "We really did not grow up with him." As with Lily and Elizabeth, early family dynamics created lasting patterns.

At age twenty, Jack surprised the family by announcing his engagement to Mary Cottenham White (Cottie). He spent the next three years before their marriage working and saving money, even though Cottie had resources of her own. By marrying and establishing himself as a successful earner, Jack characteristically attained a measure of independence from the rest of the family.

Miniature theater, 2025
Matboard, blueboard, and fabric
Constructed by Diana Larsen, after Anne Yeats's theater in the collection of the National Gallery of Ireland

This replica of a toy theater in the collection of the National Gallery of Ireland is similar to one made by Anne Yeats, who shared with her uncle Jack and father William a love for all aspects of the theater. Different hand-painted backdrops, like this harbor setting, could be inserted and removed, as could the side wings.

Here, the side wings depicting trees and a house provide depth to the scene. Cut-out characters could also be changed and moved according to the narrative. Jack enjoyed every aspect of his miniature theater. He recounted planning the shape and size of his theater carefully, collecting scraps of paper and other materials throughout the year, beginning to write the script in the fall, and playing the role of showmaster himself during the actual performances, which included circuses and pantomime as well as plays.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
The Toy Theatre, 1906
Watercolor on paper
The Niland Collection

In this scene, Jack shows Sligo Harbour outside the window as a miniature theater captivates an elegantly dressed young boy, possibly the artist himself. The painting may constitute an introspective self-portrait as a child in his grandparents' parlor; this autobiographical element is evident also in his painting *Memory Harbour*, a print of which is displayed nearby.

In 1900, Jack built a miniature theater with hand-colored and cut-out scenery and characters, and wrote plays for it that he performed for local children at Christmas. Here, the boy holds a cut-out character from the play, and the harbor scene suggests nautical themes common in Jack's plays, many of which featured pirates or other sea-faring adventurers.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
The Town Crier of the Old Sea Port Town (miniature theater character for *Esmeralda Grande*), 1900

Watercolor and ink on card, pasted into notebook
National Gallery of Ireland, Centre for the Study of Irish Art, Yeats Archive, Y1/JY/2/1/2

The contents of this notebook include an essay and scripts, set designs, and character sketches for one of Jack's toy theater productions, which are explored in the Youth: Entertainment & Education section of the exhibition. In the play, titled *Timothy Coombewest, or Esmeralda Grande*, Timothy sets out to make his fortune at sea and joins an expedition searching for a huge emerald. After eight years, Timothy's kindness towards a fellow sailor prompts the man, who has acquired the emerald, to give it to Timothy. The ship is wrecked, but Timothy retrieves the emerald from Davy Jones's Cavern and returns home triumphant to claim the hand of his sweetheart.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)

Letter written to Lady Augusta Gregory, February 19, 1907

Ink on paper

John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Anthony Mourek Collection of Irish Culture and History, BC-2024-066

From a young age, Jack was fascinated by the busy port of Sligo, and even as an adult he enjoyed designing, constructing, and sailing toy boats. He shared an interest in all things nautical with his close friend John Masefield, who went to sea at just thirteen. The two men constructed toy boats from various materials. Rather than collecting the models, they enjoyed sailing them on a local body of water and destroying them in various ways.

This letter from Jack to the dramatist and theater manager Augusta Gregory refers to such toys, and the sketch on the envelope depicts a ship sailing towards its doom at the end of the earth, at the mercy of a threatening giant, while an indifferent observer, perhaps Jack himself, turns away. The sketch can be compared to Jack's play, *The Treasure of the Garden* (displayed nearby), which engaged with surprisingly adult themes involving the potential meaninglessness of life, the inevitability of death, and the limited power of individual will.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
The Treasure of the Garden (Elkin Mathews, 1902)
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, PR6047.E3 T73 1902 IRISH, c. 1 (uncolored), PR6047.E3 T73 1902 IRISH, c. 5 (hand colored)

The published version of this brief play for Jack's miniature theater included scenery and characters for buyers to cut out and use in performances. It also provided directions for mounting them on cardboard, creating lighting and other stage effects, moving the figures on stage, and speaking dialogue.

The play's plot is more disturbing than a simple children's story, and suggests Jack's interest in existential questions about life, death, and meaning-making. It is also based on a family story about the high moral standards of Jack's Sligo grandfather William Pollexfen. The action revolves around a retired pirate, Willie McGowan, who is determined to lead a better life. A corrupt ship owner asks him to captain an unseaworthy vessel full of Irish emigrants to the United States in the hope that it will sink and allow the ship owner to collect the insurance money. McGowan's refusal is rewarded when he unearths a crock of gold in a garden, but his wealth is rendered meaningless when his sweetheart, the ship owner's daughter, dies when the ship goes down.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
At the Dewey (View of a woman on stage at the Dewey Theatre, New York), 1904
Watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper in bound sketchbook
National Gallery of Ireland, Centre for the Study of Irish Art, Yeats Archive, Y1/JY/1/1/72/18

The wealthy American lawyer and patron of the arts John Quinn traveled to Ireland and acquired works by Jack and John Yeats; when William was in New York on a lecture tour he was pleased to see them hanging in Quinn's rooms. Quinn went on to become a major supporter of the family, especially John: John called him "the nearest approach to an angel."

Quinn suggested that Jack should mount an exhibition in New York and that he and Cottie should travel there for it, which they did in 1904. Although only twelve of the sixty-three works on offer sold, with Quinn buying ten of them, the trip was a success. Jack explored New York, sketchbook in hand, recording memories that he would draw upon in his work for years. He visited several theaters, including the Dewey, where he made this finely observed, small-scale sketch of a woman on stage.

Transforming Private Spaces

As young women, Lily and Elizabeth began careers that helped reshape prevailing ideas about private homes. In 1902 Evelyn Gleeson invited them to found Dun Emer Industries with her in Dublin. A series of conflicts between the Yeats sisters and Gleeson, along with an unworkable business model, eventually led to a split and the founding of Cuala Industries in 1908. Both enterprises embraced the Arts and Crafts ethos articulated in England by William Morris, who advocated making beautiful, hand-crafted household items rather than mass-produced ones.

In Ireland, the Arts and Crafts movement developed in tandem with the Irish Revival and often embraced Irish nationalism. A 1904 advertisement for Dun Emer encouraged housewives to "decorate your house with Dun Emer" rugs, sofa backs, tapestries, and books, concluding, "this is the duty of an Irish woman." Such objects broke down distinctions between art and craftwork. They were meant to make aesthetic pleasure, as well as the assertion of national identity, part of everyday life in the home.

The Irish Arts and Crafts movement also aimed to improve the well-being of the workers who produced such objects. The Yeats sisters deliberately staffed their businesses with young women, and broadened their employees' educations by offering them Irish language classes, art lessons, and theater tickets. Such laudable aims, however, were sometimes at odds with the need to turn a profit. Running Dun Emer and Cuala gave Lily and Elizabeth needed wages and engaging artistic careers, but they paid a price. Growing up, both expected to marry one day. Instead, they found themselves burdened by their double roles as businesswomen and domestic housekeepers for their father John.

Lily Yeats (1866–1949)

Account of a Vision Seen by Me, Lily Yeats, in July 1914

Typescript

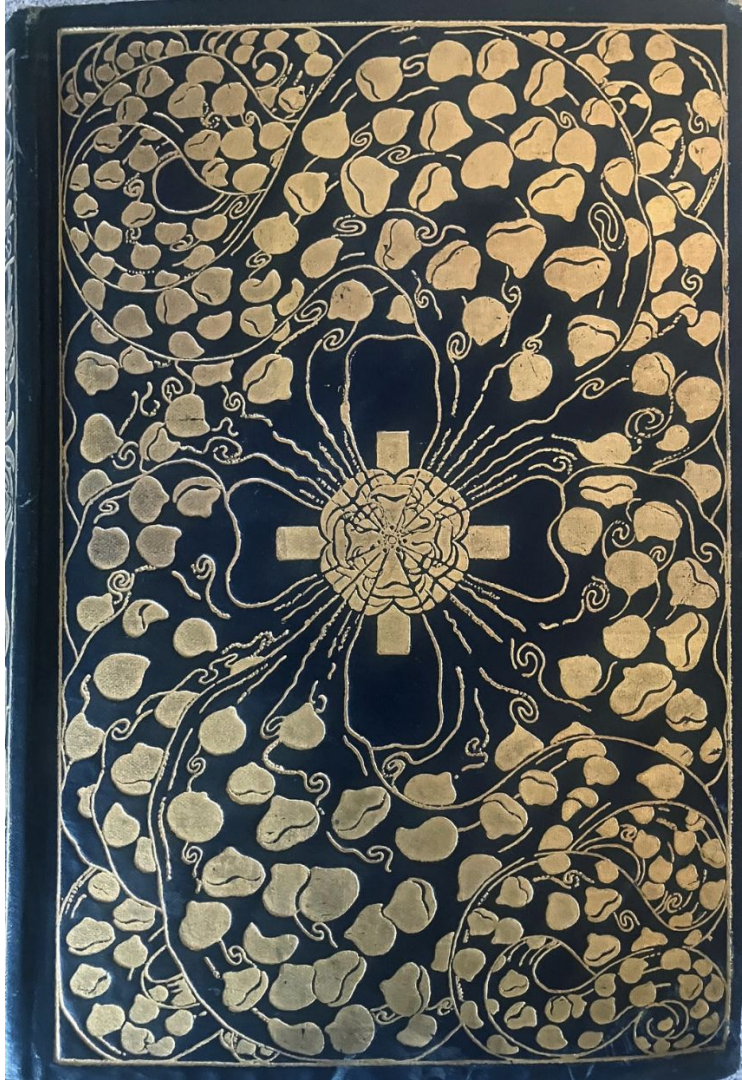
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Collection of Yeats Family Papers, MS-1986-054

Lily shared William's interest in psychical experiences. For much of her life, she and others in the family considered the visions she received in her dreams as a "second sight" that predicted future events.

In 1916, Lily's friend Oliver Eaton, an English literary scholar, transcribed a vision that she had experienced two years earlier. After visiting the ancestral home of Irish statesman Daniel O'Connell, Lily dreamed about a woman who had lost the love of her youth in France. Subsequent inquiries revealed striking parallels to a daughter of O'Connell's about whom Lily could not have known. Oddly, John, who disapproved of William's occult pursuits, accepted the idea of Lily's psychical abilities.

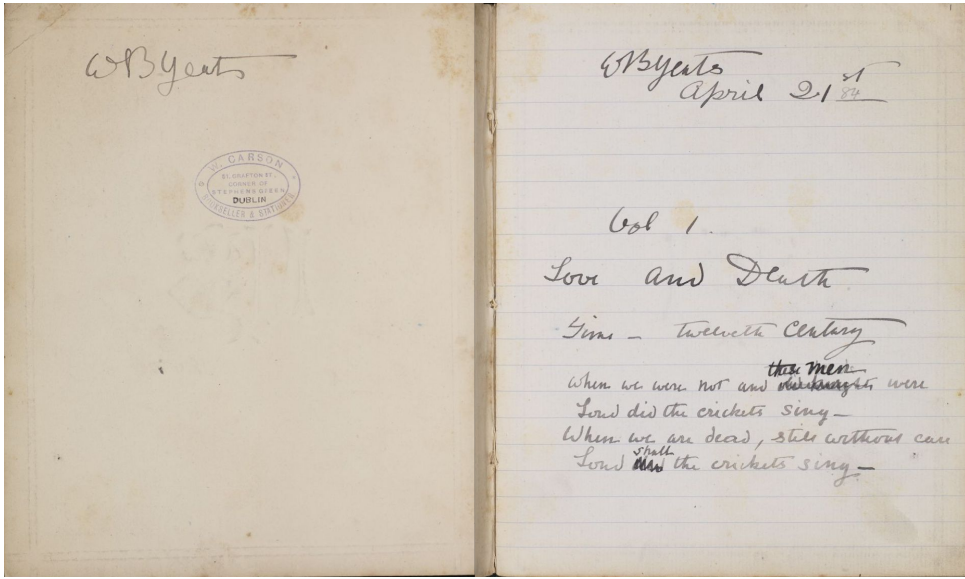
William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), *Poems* (T. Fisher Unwin, 1904)
Collection of Jeffery Howe

One of the esoteric religious traditions that intrigued William was Rosicrucianism, which combined Christian mysticism with occult traditions. The name means “Rose Cross,” and it was symbolized by a rose mounted on a cross, a version of which appears on the cover of this 1904 publication by William. The book includes an early volume called *The Rose*, which contains “To Ireland in the Coming Times,” the poem referenced in Elizabeth’s nearby embroidery stencil titled *The Red Rose Bordered Hem*. The rose was an important and multi-layered literary, religious, and political symbol for William.



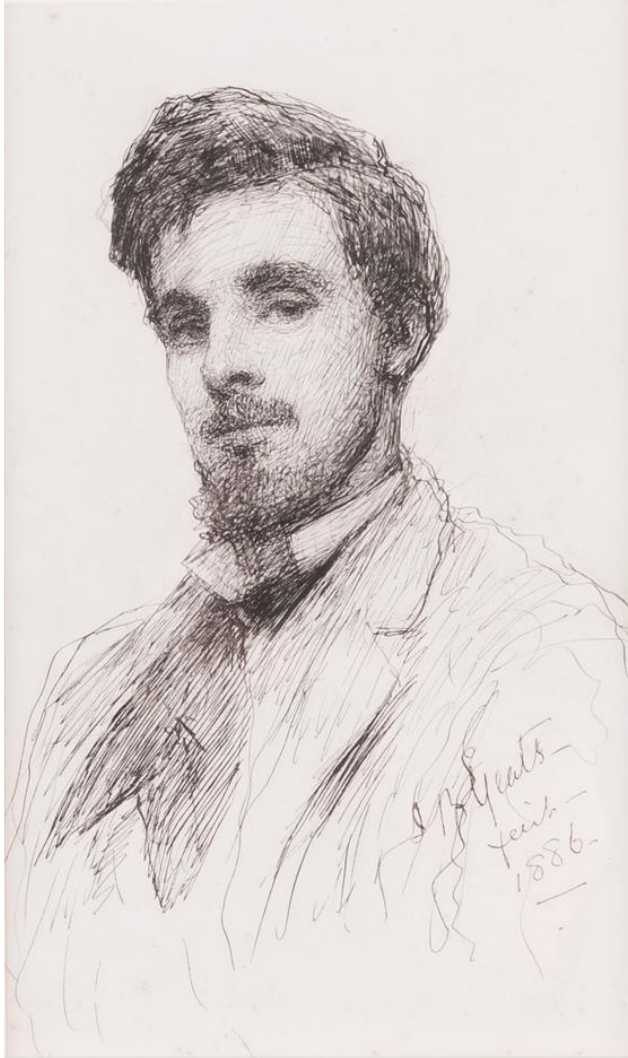
William Butler Yeats (1865–1939)
Love and Death notebook, c. 1884
Ink on paper, bound
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Collection of Yeats Family Papers, MS-1986-054

William later recalled that, as a young man, he focused on writing drama in verse because his father John "exalted dramatic poetry above all other kinds," and he characterized those early forays into playwriting as "fantastic and incoherent." Like *Mosada* (to the left), *Love and Death* mingles romance and the supernatural. It was never published, and in his autobiography William described the plot this way: "A king's daughter loves a god...and to be worthy of him and put away mortality, becomes without pity and commits crimes, and at last, having made her way to the throne by murder, awaits his coming....At last he is at her throne's foot and she...dies babbling like a child."



John Butler Yeats (1839–1922)
Portrait of William Butler Yeats (*Mosada* portrait), 1886
Pen and ink on paper
Collection of Alan M. Klein

William's play *Mosada* was first published in the *Dublin University Review* in 1886, when he was only twenty-one. In a gesture of fatherly pride that might make any son cringe, John asked friends to help pay for a separate printing of the play and insisted on having his portrait sketch of William included as a frontispiece. The original sketch, shown here, is exhibited for the first time since it was sold from the Yeats family collection in 2017.



William Butler Yeats (1865–1939)
Mosada: A Dramatic Poem (Dublin: Sealy, Bryers, and Walker, 1886)
Collection of Alan M. Klein
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, PR5904 .M7 1886a (unsigned copy)

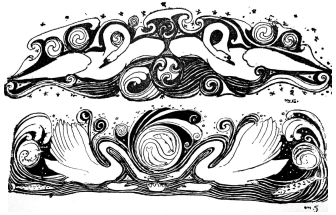
In *Mosada*, a “moorish lady” practices magic in an effort to connect with her lost lover. William’s personal life frequently involved women who shared some of his occult interests and activities: romance and magic went together for him. In the play, the woman is arrested by agents of the Catholic Inquisition and condemned to burn at the stake, but she takes poison in prison instead. The monk responsible for condemning her visits her cell too late to save her; the play reveals that he is the lover she was pining for.

Exceedingly rare, *Mosada* remains highly sought after among collectors of William’s works. This copy was sold in 2023; the original owner, Mrs. Zena Vowell, may have been one of the subscribers who gave John help. The second copy, here shown closed, is not inscribed. It was purchased by Burns Library from the 1990 Sotheby’s auction of the library of noted collector H. Bradley Martin.

Maud Gonne MacBride (1866–1953), designer
Embroidered panel with sunburst and swans, c. 1912
Cotton and metallic threads with beads and glass ornaments embroidered on Irish poplin ground
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Loretta Clarke Murray Collection of Women in Revolutionary Ireland, MS-2016-016; Custom display case donated by friends of the Burns Library

In 1889 William met the Irish republican revolutionary and actress Maud Gonne and fell in love; his unsuccessful courtship of her spanned decades. From the beginning, his obsession with Gonne was closely intertwined with his occult studies and magical experiments, many of which involved elaborate systems of symbolism. Gonne shared his supernatural interests and worked them into her design for this vibrantly embroidered panel. The swans, rose, sword, sunburst, and other elements were drawn from Irish mythological traditions; William, Gonne, and other friends incorporated such symbols into their various mystical pursuits.

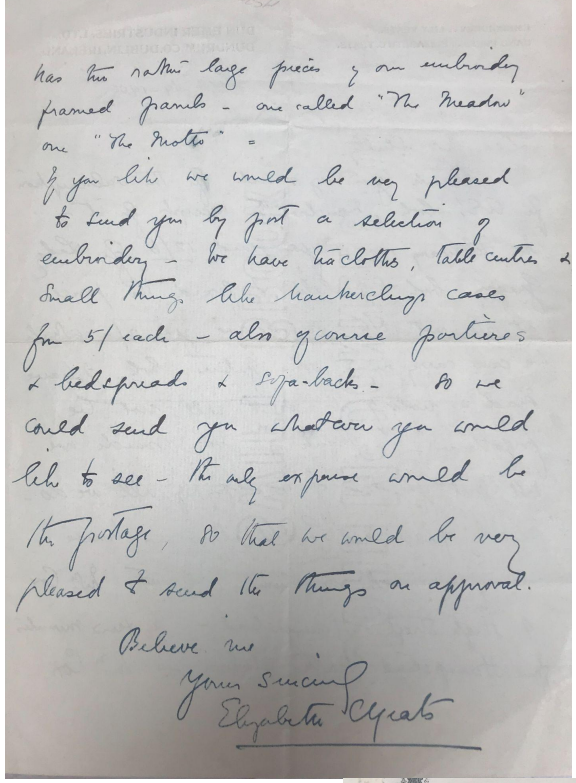
Gonne is most famous for her beauty and her fiery Irish nationalism; her artistic skills are less well known. She supplied illustrations for her friend Ella Young's book, *Celtic Wonder Tales*, which contained "retellings" of fourteen ancient Irish myths; she then drew upon those illustrations for the embroidery. Whether it was to be displayed as a banner, used as a table covering for mystical rites, or had some other purpose is unclear. Unfortunately the embroidery was worn and damaged by years of neglect.



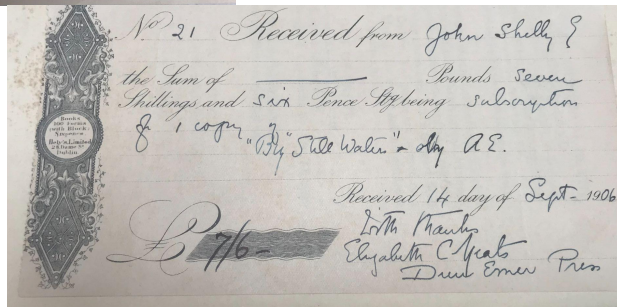
John Butler Yeats (1839–1922), *Maud Gonne MacBride, Actress and Revolutionary*, 1907. Graphite and watercolor on paper, National Gallery of Ireland, NGI.7712.

The head and tailpiece ornaments that Gonne created to accompany "The Children of Lir" legend in Young's *Celtic Wonder Tales*.

Elizabeth C. Yeats (1868–1940)
Letter to John Shelly offering embroideries, September 14, 1906
Receipt for John Shelly's purchase of George Russell's *By Still Waters*, September 14, 1906
Ink on paper
Collection of Catherine Gilligan and John Donohoe



has the rather large pieces of our embroidery framed panels - one called "The Meadow" one "The Trotter" =
If you like we would be very pleased to send you by post a selection of embroidery - We have tea cloths, table centres & small things like handkerchiefs cases from 5/ each - also guipure portieres & bedspreads & sofa-backs - So we could send you whatever you would like to see - The only expense would be the postage, so that we would be very pleased to send the things on approval.
Believe me
Yours sincerely
Elizabeth C Yeats

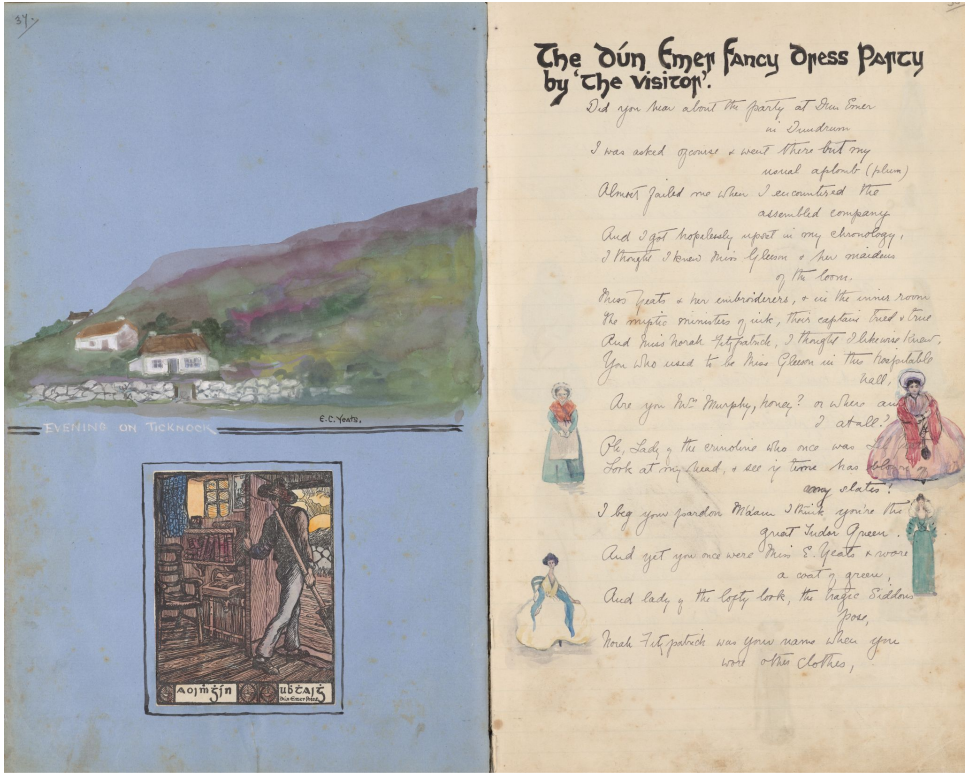


No 21 Received from John Shelly £
the Sum of ____ Pounds Seven
Shillings and Six Pence Stg being Subscription
& 1 copy "By Still Waters" a play A.E.
Received 14 day of Sept- 1906
£ 7/6-
With thanks
Elizabeth C Yeats
Dun Emer Press

In this letter, accompanied by a receipt, Elizabeth thanks one of her regular customers in London for purchasing Dun Emer Press books. She also offers to send him on approval, for the price of postage, a variety of embroidered household items, such as tablecloths and handkerchief cases, as well as bedspreads and sofa back covers. She further mentions that a dealer in Hampstead has examples of Lily's larger framed art embroideries, including one of her popular meadow scenes.

This correspondence indicates that the sisters did not simply wait for buyers to come to them; they expended considerable time and energy cultivating customers.

Elizabeth C. Yeats (1868–1940), editor
Evening on Ticknock watercolor; Jack B. Yeats bookplate for Caoiṁġín Ó Dubḋaiġ; “The Dún Emer Fancy Dress Party” story; *Leabhar Dún Éimire*, vol. 3, 1905
Watercolors, photographs, ink on paper, ephemera pasted into bound volume
The Library of Trinity College Dublin, Cuala Press Business Archives, IE TCD MS 11535/7/3

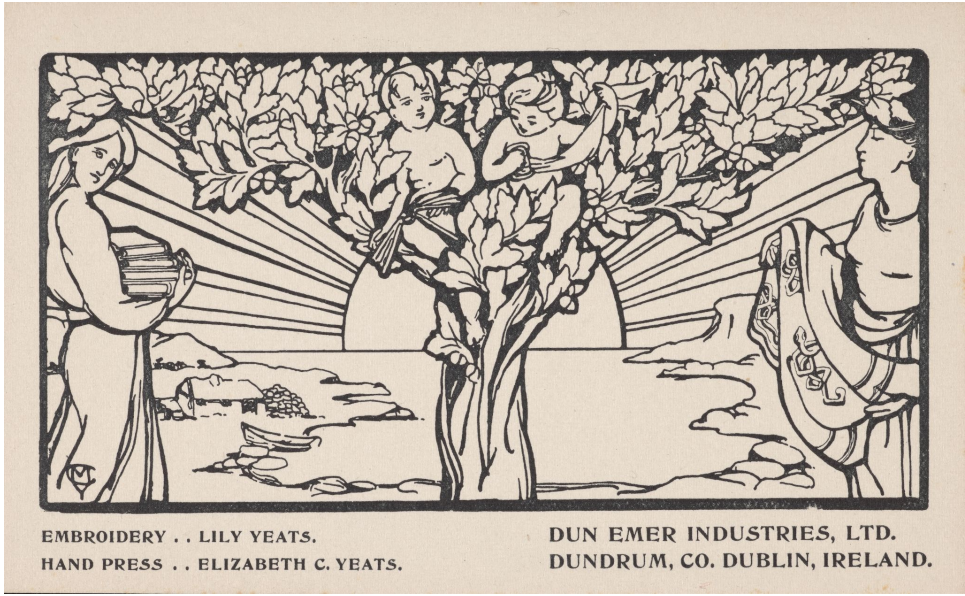


The three scrapbooks compiled by Elizabeth during the early years of Dun Emer form a fascinating and deliberate record of the enterprise, its ambitious goals for educating young women, and the lively and supportive atmosphere of the workplace. Their contents include photographs, sketches, and creative writing by employees.

The pages seen here contain a bookplate designed by Jack, a landscape painted by Elizabeth, and a description of a social event, a “fancy dress party.” While the Yeats sisters did not see themselves as social or political revolutionaries, documents such as these scrapbooks suggest that they viewed their endeavors as significant and worth recording. Lily reflected later that their father John “lived to see Willy famous, Jack a fine painter whose work will live [and] Lolly [Elizabeth] & I are not nonentities.” The adjacent monitor displays other pages from the three scrapbooks.

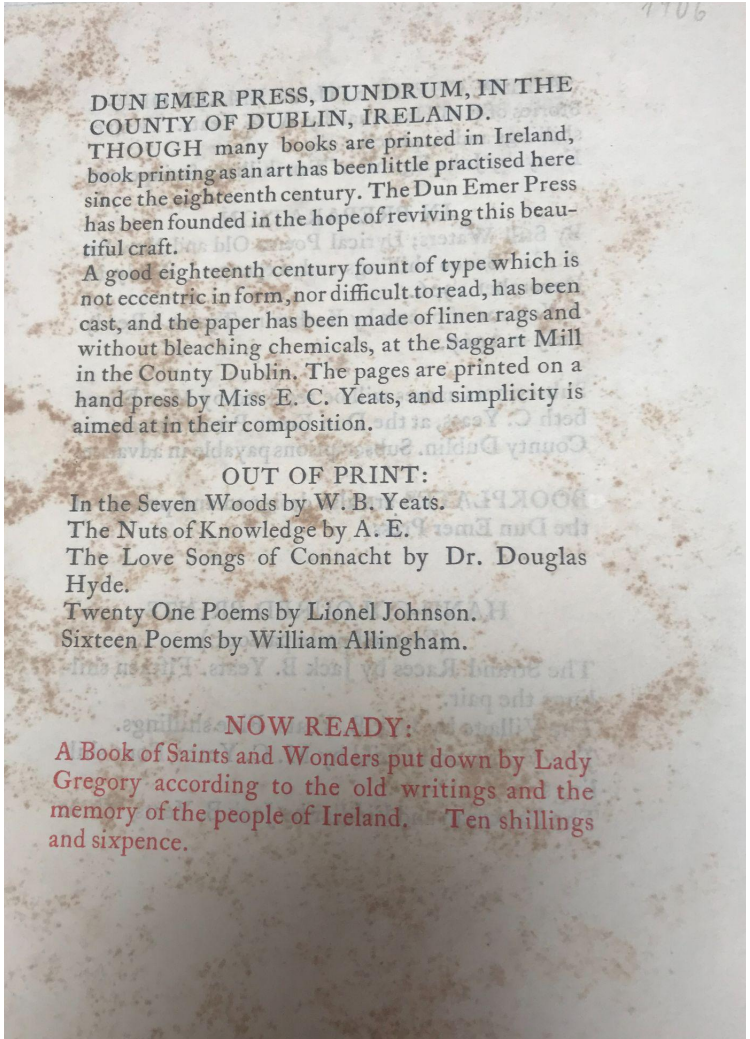
Mary Cottenham Yeats (1867–1947)
Rising sun postcard, Dun Emer Industries, 1905
Printed paper
The Library of Trinity College Dublin, Cuala Press Business Archives, IE TCD MS 11535/1/5/1

In 1904 Dun Emer Industries was divided into two components. Evelyn Gleeson continued to direct the tapestry and carpet weaving operations as well as bookbinding under a new name, Dun Emer Guild, reflecting its organization as a cooperative crafts venture, while Elizabeth and Lily managed their printing and embroidery departments under the original name. This advertising card for Dun Emer Industries was designed for the sisters by Cottie Yeats, and the rising sun can be compared to the central sunburst in Maud Gonne's nearby embroidery.



Elizabeth C. Yeats (1868–1940)
Dun Emer Press brochure, August 1906
Printed paper
Collection of Catherine Gilligan and John Donohoe

Elizabeth printed this prospectus to announce the publication of Dun Emer Press's sixth book: a collection of Irish folklore and tales of saints compiled by Augusta Gregory. The leaflet also describes the purpose and principles of her enterprise, namely to revive the craft of handpress printing as an art form in Ireland through the use of the historic Caslon typeface and locally made paper.



DUN EMER PRESS, DUNDRUM, IN THE COUNTY OF DUBLIN, IRELAND.

THOUGH many books are printed in Ireland, book printing as an art has been little practised here since the eighteenth century. The Dun Emer Press has been founded in the hope of reviving this beautiful craft.

A good eighteenth century fount of type which is not eccentric in form, nor difficult to read, has been cast, and the paper has been made of linen rags and without bleaching chemicals, at the Saggart Mill in the County Dublin. The pages are printed on a hand press by Miss E. C. Yeats, and simplicity is aimed at in their composition.

OUT OF PRINT:

In the Seven Woods by W. B. Yeats.
The Nuts of Knowledge by A. E.
The Love Songs of Connacht by Dr. Douglas Hyde.
Twenty One Poems by Lionel Johnson.
Sixteen Poems by William Allingham.

NOW READY:

A Book of Saints and Wonders put down by Lady Gregory according to the old writings and the memory of the people of Ireland. Ten shillings and sixpence.

Katherine (Kitty) MacCormack (1892–1975)
Girls at Dun Emer, before 1908
Watercolor on paper
Private collection

This watercolor painted by Evelyn Gleeson's niece, Kitty, shows the Dun Emer embroidery workshop. The young women who worked there were encouraged to try creative activities like sketching, painting, writing, or acting. A banner produced by Dun Emer, probably part of the 1903 commission for the new Loughrea cathedral, examples of which are displayed in the final section of this exhibition, hangs on the wall. The choice of subject matter suggests that at least some of the women who observed or participated in the enterprise thought that what they were doing was worth documenting, a sentiment that also motivated Elizabeth to curate the nearby Dun Emer scrapbook.

John Butler Yeats (1839–1922)
Portrait of Susan Mary (Lily) Yeats, 1908
Graphite on paper
The Niland Collection

Compared to Elizabeth, Lily had a more tranquil temperament and more tolerance for her male relatives' faults. She was happiest in a quiet home and found sharing a house with Elizabeth's restless energy difficult. In 1888, when William Morris's daughter May offered Lily a job in London as an embroiderer, she was thrilled to be earning money and found the work itself soothing and enjoyable. The next year, money was still tight, so Elizabeth tried producing piecework for May, but she found embroidery unbearably tedious and sedentary.

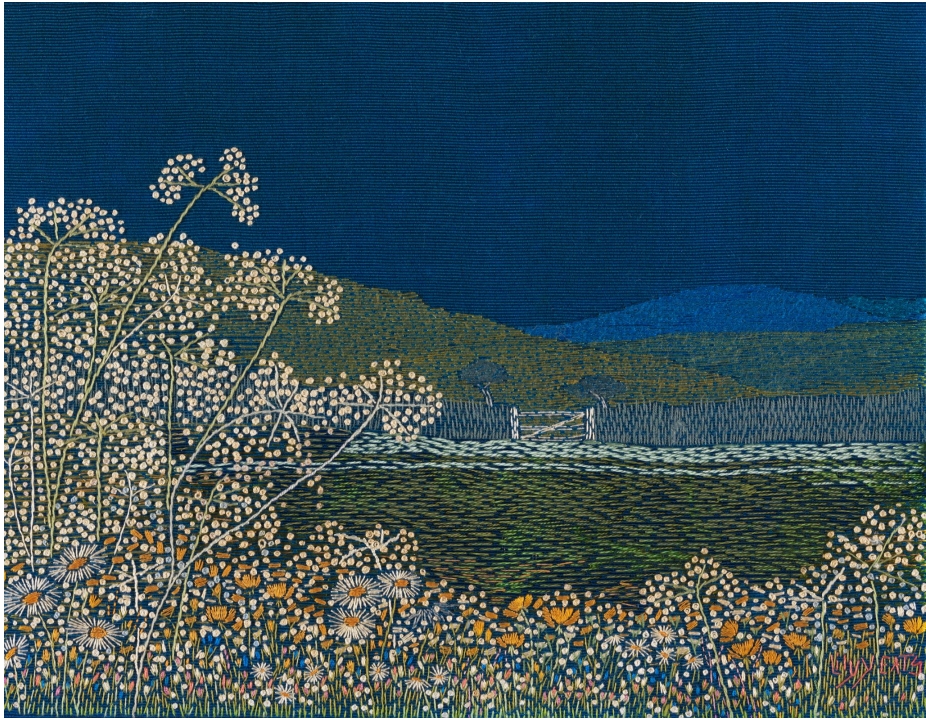
John's 1908 pencil sketch of Lily at age forty-one records her serene and steady temperament, but her expression also hints at her disappointment with her life. As she wrote in a letter two years later, "I have not had a woman's life but an uncomfortable, unsatisfying mixture of a man's and a woman's....Next incarnation I hope I will be all woman and have a woman's life."

Lily Yeats (1866–1949)

The Meadow, c. 1906

Silk and wool on blue poplin

National Gallery of Ireland; Presented, Friends of the National Collections of Ireland, 2002, NGI.12263



Lily produced “needle-pictures” like this one on commission for private clients and friends. Unlike many objects produced by Dun Emer and Cuala, which had practical household uses, such as the nearby firescreen and cushion covers, this work was designed to be hung like a painting. The scene combines wildflowers in the foreground, a field and fence in the middle distance, and mountains beyond in a harmonious composition set against characteristic blue poplin that suggests a clear blue sky.

Lily used French knots, satin, and straight stitches for the flowers, creating a contrast between the foreground and the distant landscape, for which she used straight and darning stitches. The lighter silk threads in the flowers also contrast with the darker green and blue areas to create a balanced design.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
Early scrapbook with Morris and Company advertisement, c. 1904
Paper ephemera pasted into Greek dictionary
National Gallery of Ireland, Centre for the Study of Irish Art, Yeats Archive, Y1/JY/8/1

Jack was fascinated by the design, typography, and coloring of advertisements. In this Greek dictionary, which he turned into a scrapbook, he collected and pasted more than nine hundred examples of promotional ephemera, ranging from alcohol and tobacco labels to fruit wrappers, as well as samples of his own stenciled monograms, over a period of nearly thirty years.

The opening displayed here includes a notice issued by Morris and Company, the Arts and Crafts design and manufacturing firm founded by William Morris. It cautions buyers against imitators of Morris and asserts the company's exclusive rights over his designs, suggesting the success and popularity of Arts and Crafts products.

Thomas Sturge Moore (1870–1944)
Bookplate for W. B. Yeats, September 6, 1921
Engraving on paper
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Anthony Mourek Collection of Irish Culture and History, BC-2024-066

British writer and artist Thomas Sturge Moore met William in 1899 and the two became lifelong friends. Moore designed covers for several of William's books, including *Responsibilities* and his autobiographical *Reveries over Childhood and Youth*, printed by Cuala Press. In 1918 William asked Moore to create bookplates for him and his new wife, George. Both designs incorporated unicorns. William's includes the Latin and French mottos meaning, "To the good, all things are good" and "I find myself."

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
Elizabeth C. Yeats's Connraḋ na Gaeḋilge (Gaelic League) dance card, March 17, 1899
Printed paper
The Library of Trinity College Dublin, Cuala Press Business Archives, IE TCD MS 11535/9/13/5/1

The family's economic insecurity did not prevent the Yeats siblings from pursuing many of the pastimes that young people of their generation and class enjoyed. They socialized, attended the theater, took part in sports like badminton and ice skating, and went to dances. Elizabeth recorded their enthusiastic participation at one dance in her diary: "I enjoyed it awfully we danced from 8:30 till 4:30 we were dead tired yesterday."

Jack designed this card, which Elizabeth used to keep track of to whom she had promised dances; the St. Patrick's celebration was sponsored by the Gaelic League, an organization dedicated to promoting the Irish language. Unlike many Irish political and cultural organizations of the time, the Gaelic League welcomed women. This, along with the League's focus on the Irish language, rather than on Catholicism, as key to Irish identity, provoked the Catholic Church's disapproval.

Elizabeth C. Yeats (1868–1940)
Fan with landscape, floral designs, and text from William B. Yeats's "Anashuya and Vijaya" (1897), 1905
Watercolor on silk; engraved tortoiseshell
National Gallery of Ireland, Centre for the Study of Irish Art, Yeats Archive, Y19

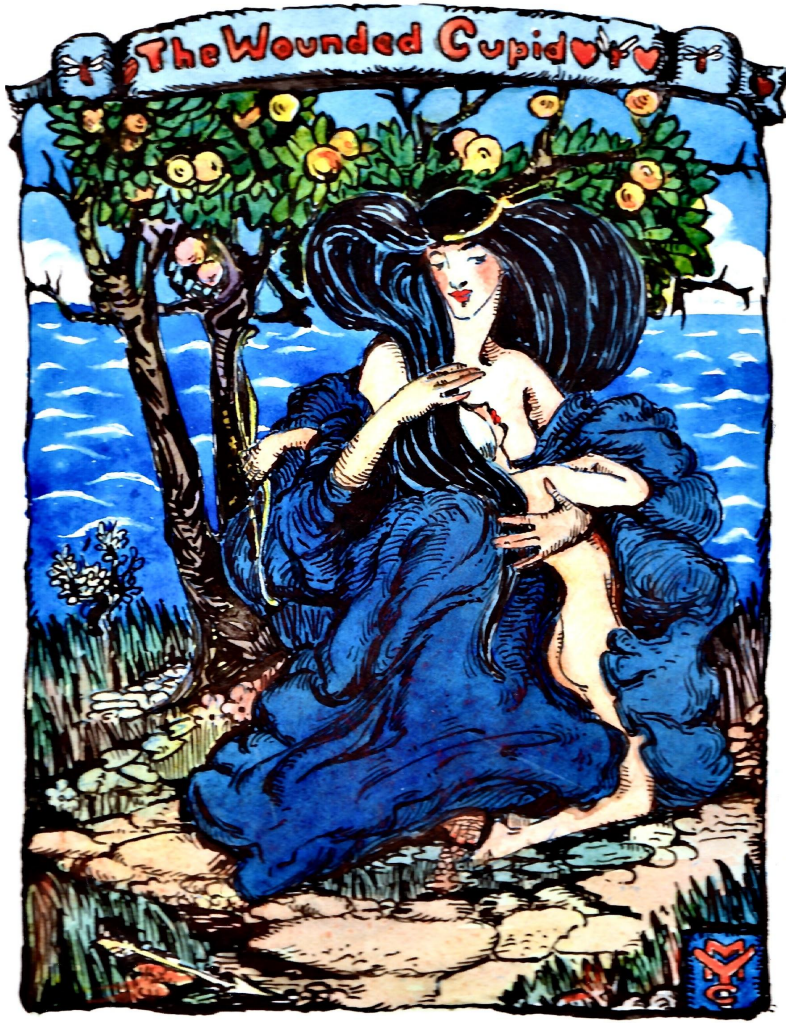
This hand-painted fan illustrates the skilled brushwork Elizabeth developed for her own practice and incorporated into her teaching. Her books outlining her method for teaching art to children focused largely on painting flowers and plants.

The fan depicts delicately rendered flowers and a quote from William's little-known early poem, "Anashuya and Vijaya." The poem's subject is exotic, even orientalist; it imagines a dialogue between the priestess of an Indian temple and her lover. It was written before William began focusing primarily on Irish settings and subject matter.

Mary Cottenham Yeats (1867–1947)
The Wounded Cupid, n.d.
Watercolor on paper
Private collection

Cottie Yeats's media of choice were pastel, watercolor, and gouache, an opacified water-based paint. This brightly colored painting depicts a scene drawn from the ancient Greek poet Anacreon. In it, Cupid seeks solace from his mother, complaining that "A winged Snake has bitten me, Which Country people call a Bee." She comforts him by comparing his suffering to that caused by the sting of his own dart. Flanking the title at the top are two bees, and the artist's distinctive monogram appears in the lower right corner.

Cottie created a sensual image of the mother with abundant flowing hair, cradling her child, his nakedness revealed, under a tree laden with fruit by the sea. The lush landscape and voluptuous figural composition are reminiscent of the English Pre-Raphaelite painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti.



Mary Cottenham Yeats (1867–1947), designer; Ruth Lane Poole (1885–1974), embroiderer
Tulips cushion cover, c. 1903
Silk thread on blue poplin
National Gallery of Ireland, Centre for the Study of Irish Art, Yeats Archive, Y17/1/1/2

Cottie Yeats designed this cushion cover with repeating tulips in a grid; a motif that featured prominently in both William and May Morris's designs. This flower's versatile form could be adapted to geometric patterns as well as more elaborate stylized designs. A single tulip appears on the sampler in the Youth: Entertainment & Education section.

The embroiderer, Lily's cousin Ruth (Pollexfen) Lane Poole, became Lily's ward at fourteen after her parents divorced in 1899. Ruth apprenticed in Lily's embroidery workshop. Her embroidery, like Lily's, incorporates stem stitches for the outlines; for the rest, she used mostly running stitches that allow the blue poplin to show through. Ruth married Charles Lane Poole in 1911 and moved with him to Australia. There she became a well-known interior designer for prominent politicians; her work incorporated furniture made from local wood and embroideries commissioned from Cuala Industries.

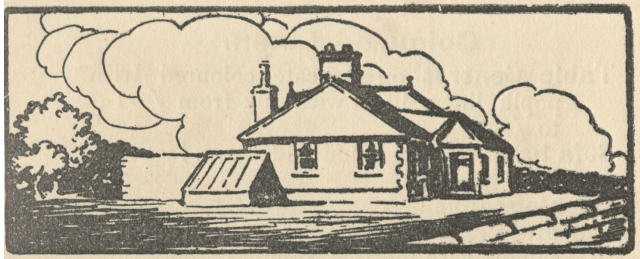
Cuala Industries advertising brochure, 1914

Printed paper

John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Anthony Mourek Collection of Irish Culture and History, BC-2024-066

Elizabeth and Lily established their new workplace in a cottage in Churchtown, south of Dublin. To promote sales of their books and embroidered goods, the sisters opened the Cuala workshops to visitors six days a week. This economic strategy resembled the contemporary practice, common in middle-class circles, of designating regular “at homes,” specific days and times when friends and acquaintances were encouraged to drop in. The sisters emphasized their proximity to rail and tram lines and the fact that all of their products were made “on the premises by young Irish girls,” appealing to revivalist and nationalist sensibilities.

The mix of typefaces and font sizes indicates that the printing of such advertising materials was probably outsourced, as Cuala Press owned only a small variety of type.



CUALA INDUSTRIES, LTD.,
CHURCHTOWN, DUNDRUM,
CO. DUBLIN.

EMBROIDERY . . LILY YEATS.
HAND PRESS . . ELIZABETH C. YEATS.

Workrooms open to Visitors any day from 10 to 5 o'clock.
Saturdays close at 12.
15 minutes' walk from Dundrum Station. 15 minutes from Dartry Tram.
All the work is done on the premises by young Irish girls.

Embroidery.

White Linen.

Tray Cloths embroidered in washing colours on hem-stitched Irish Linen, from 5/6, according to size and design.

Table Centres circular button-holed, various designs, washing colours, from 12/9.

Tea Cloths hem-stitched, corners heavily worked from £1-2-6.

D'Oyleys to match centres £1-2-6 a dozen.

Sideboard Cloths £1-1-0.

etc. etc.

Elizabeth C. Yeats (1868–1940)

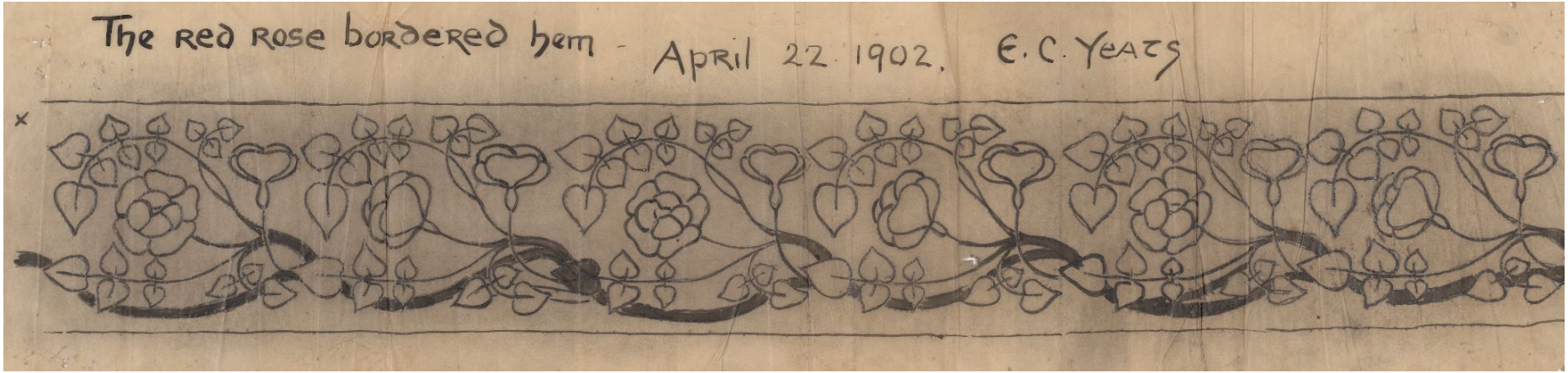
The Red Rose Bordered Hem embroidery stencil, April 22, 1902

Graphite on tracing paper

John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Loretta Clarke Murray Collection of Women in Revolutionary Ireland, MS-2016-016

This fine stencil was used for transferring a design onto a linen backing before embroidering. The small holes along the lines of the design illustrate the “prick and pounce” method employed. A darning needle coated in sealing wax was used to make the holes, and then a powder from charcoal or pipe clay was rubbed on the tracing paper, forcing powder through the holes. After the stencil was removed, the design would be outlined in dark dots, which could be joined with ink to make the pattern. The linen was then ready to embroider; the embroiderer determined what particular stitches to use to create the desired effect.

The “red-rose-bordered hem” is a quote from William’s poem, “To Ireland in the Coming Times,” which sought to make his interest in mysticism and the occult compatible with his desire to be recognized as a nationalist writer. The poem personifies William’s mystical pursuits as a female figure wearing a garment with a red rose-bordered hem.



Lily Yeats (1866–1949)
Envelope bag, early 20th century
Corded silk
National Museums Northern Ireland, BELUM.T2185

An envelope bag was an everyday accessory used to carry personal items such as calling cards, letters, coins, and handkerchiefs. Carrying a beautiful, hand-crafted example for a special occasion could enhance the owner's appearance and social status. This one was made by Lily for Bay Jellett, a celebrated violinist and conductor and the sister of the painter Mainie Jellett, for a family wedding. Bay and two other sisters carried similar bags as bridesmaids.

The bag is made of pale blue silk edged in cord and retains its vividly colored embroidery of red roses and green leaves with purple stems. Lily skillfully employed a combination of stem and satin stitches to achieve a dimensional effect. Satin stitches in a range of reds and pinks create lifelike roses, while the leaves, sewn with long and short stitches, have a different texture. The stencil nearby executed by Elizabeth features a similar motif of roses and vines.

Lily Yeats (1866–1949)
Bonnet, early 20th century
Corded silk
National Museums Northern Ireland, BELUM.T2247

Bonnets, worn by both girls and boys, evolved from the medieval tradition of head coverings for adults and babies known as coifs, which were worn for warmth, protection from the sun, and to ward off diseases and evil spirits. This white satin baby's bonnet is embroidered with a delicate floral sprig similar to one of the stencil designs on display in the Youth: Entertainment & Education section of this exhibition.

The sprig features a single pink rose amidst purple lavender and pale blue-and-yellow star flowers with stems and leaves in soft pastel colors ideally suited to the bonnet's tiny wearer. The bonnet bears a label reading "Cuala Dublin," indicating it was made after 1908 when Cuala Industries was formed.

Lily Yeats (1866–1949)
Coat collar with shamrock design, early 20th century
Silk
National Museums Northern Ireland, BELUM.T2248

The embroidered textiles in this display case are rare survivals of clothing and accessories made by the Dun Emer Guild or Cuala Industries in its early years. Dun Emer's stated aim was to use "Irish hands and Irish material in the making of beautiful things." The output of the enterprise was strikingly diverse and included garments for adults and babies, accessories such as purses, and decorative household objects such as hangings, quilts, cushion covers, sofa backs, and tea towels.

This cream silk coat collar was likely attached to a tweed coat of the same color. The interlaced shamrock pattern typifies the Irish Arts and Crafts movement's preoccupation with Celtic motifs and its affinities with the Irish Revival. The design is both bold and intricate, incorporating a variety of stitches in several shades of green and gray to articulate the intertwining stems and clusters of shamrocks.

Lily Yeats (1866–1949), embroiderer; James Hicks (1866–1936) & Sons, craftsmen

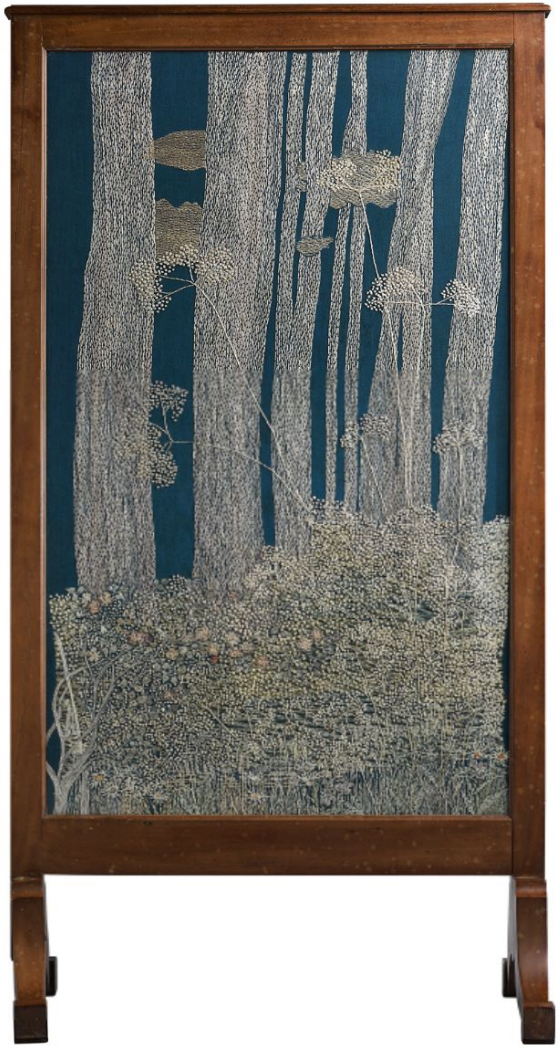
Trees at Night firescreen, 1928

Silk embroidery on poplin; wood

Collection of Catherine Gilligan and John Donohoe

When Lily worked for May Morris in London, May's embroidery workshop periodically produced embroidered firescreens, and Cuala Industries later included firescreens as part of their domestic output. This one, set in a freestanding carved wooden frame, depicts a haunting night scene with trees and bushes stitched in silver, gold, and copper silk threads on a deep blue poplin background.

A complex and delicate design of flowering bushes and plants in the foreground features an array of French knots, while the tall tree trunks are rendered in darning stitches, and the stems of the taller plants in front of them in stem stitch. This decorative natural scene fills the surface plane and is cut off at the top and sides, reminiscent of the Japanese aesthetic that was popular during this period.



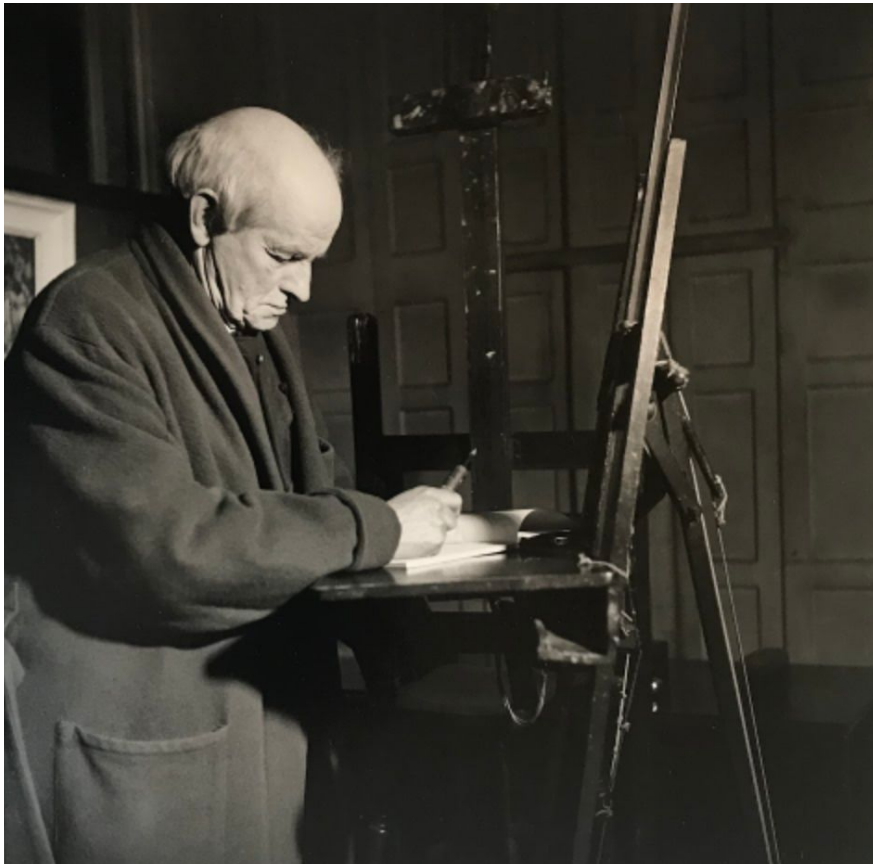
Cuala Industries banner, 1920s
Printed linen
University of Galway

Following their break from Evelyn Gleeson in 1908, Elizabeth and Lily dissolved Dun Emer Industries, leaving the Dun Emer name to Gleeson, and formed Cuala Industries, adopting the early Gaelic name for the neighborhood where they established the enterprise.

The sisters regularly promoted and sold their embroidered and printed goods at trade exhibitions and craft fairs, with a sign like this painted linen banner identifying their booth. Such promotional activities required effort; they also often afforded the sisters opportunities to travel.

William MacQuitty (1905–2004)
Jack Yeats in his Dublin studio, 1950
Gelatin silver print
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Anthony Mourek Collection of Irish Culture and History, BC-2024-066

In contrast to his father John, who was happiest when his workspace was full of artists and intellectuals to talk to, in his mature years Jack preferred to paint alone. He shut himself in his studio, kept regular work hours, and was so reluctant to be interrupted that he would tie a pipe cleaner around the door handle to indicate that Cottie should not intrude. During the 1920s and 30s Jack partially adopted William's symbolic rose for himself. He painted with a rose attached to his easel or on the table beside him and produced a series of rose paintings.



Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
Atlantic and New York 1904, *Galway 1900*,
Clifden 1907, *Harvey's and the Point 1908*
Watercolors on paper in bound sketchbooks
Private collection, formerly Ernie O'Malley Collection

As Jack grew older, he became increasingly preoccupied with memory, writing in a 1922 letter, "no one creates,...the artist assembles memories." His style evolved, becoming more expressionist and experimental. But his subject matter remained consistent with his earlier works, and he continued to draw upon sketchbooks like these. This group illustrates the wide range of places, scenes, and activities that caught his attention. The monitor at right displays more pages from the sketchbooks.

Anne Yeats (1919–2001)
Three Lamps, 1966 (ed. 12/80)
Lithograph
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Collection of Yeats Family Papers, MS-1986-054

Working with other Irish artists, Anne helped to establish Graphic Studio Dublin in 1960 to teach printmaking skills and provide printmaking facilities for artists. Early meetings were held in her flat, and the Studio fostered a collaborative environment enabling prominent and emerging artists to exchange ideas and learn from one another. During this time she took a keen interest in lithography; her meticulous method for making multicolor prints like *Three Lamps* involved using a separate lithographic stone for each color. This work transforms ordinary household things into aesthetically rich objects that invite the viewer to explore form, color, and texture.

Lily Yeats (1866–1949)

Fisa Playing His Harp (after a design by Boris Anrep, 1883–1969), 1922

Silk and wool thread on cotton

National Gallery of Ireland, Centre for the Study of Irish Art, Yeats Archive, Y84

Russian mosaicist and poet Boris Anrep created this design, inspired by a narrative poem he composed in 1910, “Fiza” or “Phyza,” which gave its name to Russia’s Society of Poets. The poem contains complex imagery, making identification of the figures depicted in the embroidery difficult. Fisa seems to embody the alter ego of the poet engaged in creative work and is described as having long golden braids, one of which unravels. At the poem’s end he descends into the earth, and his hair is pulled skyward by a great bird, becoming the strings of a harp. Lily used a distinctive palette of harmonious gold and brown with stem stitches outlining the figures, running stitches for all the infilled solids, and couching for the harp strings.

Anrep’s work can be found in major institutions such as Westminster Cathedral, the National Gallery of Art, and the Tate in London. He trained in Paris in 1908–10 and made friends with the Bloomsbury group of artists, including Virginia Woolf. These connections may have introduced him to the Yeats family.

Lily Yeats (1866–1949)
Bird and Lily Stem embroidery design, 1915–40
Graphite on tracing paper
National Gallery of Ireland, NGI/YA/Y1/DEC/3/4

Lily most likely used the “prick and pounce” method for transferring designs like this one to her linen fabric. The drawing was first executed in graphite on tracing paper. Then the pattern was pricked with a needle and pounced with charcoal or pipe clay, the stencil was removed, and the dots were joined by ink to form a finished design for the embroiderer to follow, a process more thoroughly described in the label for the nearby *Red Rose Bordered Hem* embroidery stencil. This bird and lily stem design makes an instructive comparison to Elizabeth’s earlier blackbird cushion cover.

Elizabeth C. Yeats (1868–1940), designer; Ruth Lane Poole (1885–1974), embroiderer

Blackbirds and Peony cushion cover, c. 1903

Silk and wool thread on blue poplin

National Gallery of Ireland, Centre for the Study of Irish Art, Yeats Archive, Y17/1/1/1

Elizabeth's design of a wreath surrounding a central peony and leaves with blackbirds showcases Ruth Lane Poole's impressive embroidery skill. May and William Morris featured birds in many of their designs, but Elizabeth's choice of blackbirds distinguishes her composition.

Poole used stem stitches for outlines and for the blackbirds' dark, solid bodies, and darning stitches and satin stitches for contrasting details like the birds' bright orange eyes, beaks, and legs. The birds form a striking counterpoint to the exquisitely textured peony, bud, and leaves.

Shaping Public Life: Performing

Yeats family members sought to make aesthetic enjoyment part of everyday experiences and private spaces. They also had ambitions to give the arts and cultural institutions a meaningful public presence during a time of enormous upheaval as Irish nationalists struggled for and achieved an independent state. William was deeply involved in the establishment of an Irish national theater. Other family members and friends supported his endeavors in various ways.

Jack was fascinated by all kinds of performance; he attended both popular and elite forms of theater throughout his life. He wrote plays for his toy theater and for the adult stage as well. Jack was also keenly aware that Irish political life was full of public performances, both planned and spontaneous. While in Sligo in 1898, he was moved when he attended a public commemoration of the 1798 Rebellion and witnessed an outpouring of popular nationalist sentiment. Over time he became sympathetic to Irish nationalist aspirations, though few of his paintings treat overtly political subjects.

As a family, the Yeatses took an interest in every aspect of theater: writing, directing, acting, staging, and costuming; this was particularly true of Anne. At age sixteen, she was hired as an assistant stage director at the Abbey Theatre, which her father William helped found; two years later, she became its head stage designer. When she began to focus more on painting, she retained a lively interest in theater. Anne was a public figure for much of her life, and she continued the family's tradition of shaping and supporting Irish cultural institutions.

Brigid O'Brien Ganly (1909–2002), designer; Lily Yeats (1866–1949), embroiderer

"The Players Ask for a Blessing on the Psalteries and Themselves," c. 1935

Embroidered silk on silk poplin

John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Collection of Yeats Family Papers, MS-1986-054

It is unclear what prompted the creation of this second depiction of William's "The Players Ask for a Blessing" poem, markedly different from the one produced several years earlier. Here the three musicians stand on a Tuscan hillside and the central figure plucks a psaltery clearly modeled on the one Arnold Dolmetsch designed for William's early muse, Florence Farr, although she holds it upside down.

The poem acknowledges the difficulties William and Farr experienced in trying to find appreciative audiences for their experiments in performing music and speech together; the musicians ask their audience to "bless the hands that play, / The mouths that speak, the notes and strings."

With an evident nod to "blackwork" embroidery, a Renaissance garment style in which black threads are stitched into white fabric, O'Brien designed this panel following a long sojourn in Italy, during which time she may have visited William's retreat in Rapallo.

John Butler Yeats (1839–1922)
Portrait of William Butler Yeats, n.d.
Graphite on paper
Collection of Joseph Nugent

When the Yeats children were young, Susan wanted them to attend the local Protestant church, but John, who was a religious skeptic, forbade it. Jack, probably influenced by his Sligo grandparents, grew up to be a lifelong churchgoer and sincere believer.

In a less orthodox vein, Elizabeth and Lily experienced dreams that they thought predicted future events, especially deaths. Lily also sometimes fell into visionary trances. This pleased William, who recalled, “my father’s unbelief had set me thinking…I did not think I could live without religion.” He passionately pursued his own eccentric version of religion, delving into the occult, mysticism, séances, and psychical research, much to John’s dismay. William’s literary endeavors and personal relationships were, for him, inseparable from his investigations of the supernatural, which permeated his everyday life.

Dorothy Blackham (1896–1975), designer; Lily Yeats (1866–1949), embroiderer

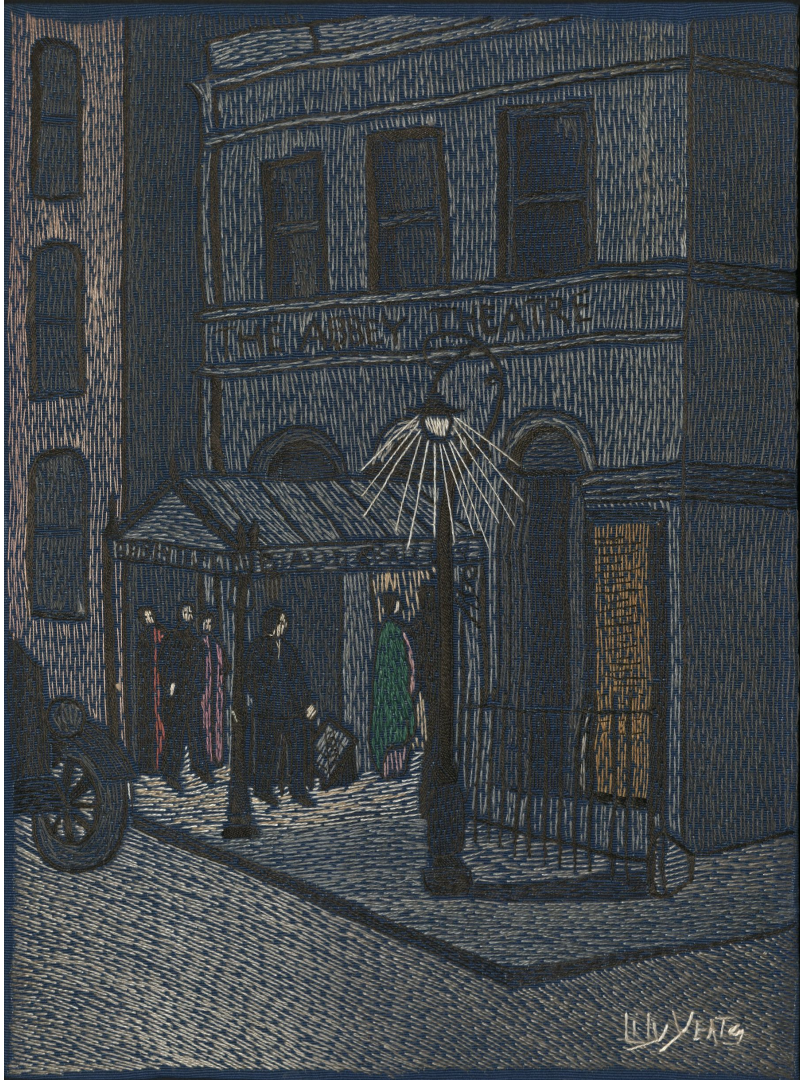
The Abbey Theatre, c. 1932

Embroidered silk on linen

John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Anthony Mourek Collection of Irish Culture and History, BC-2024-066

The establishment of a national theater was an important and long-lasting contribution to Irish public life; the Abbey Theatre remains a vital cultural institution today. One goal of the Irish Revival was to write distinctively Irish plays; a further, and equally crucial, ambition was the creation of cultural institutions offering physical spaces where they could be performed.

Lily's accomplished embroidery skills enabled her to suggest the fine-grained textures of the buildings and pavement and to reproduce the play of light and shadow created by street lights as theater patrons enter the Abbey for an evening performance.

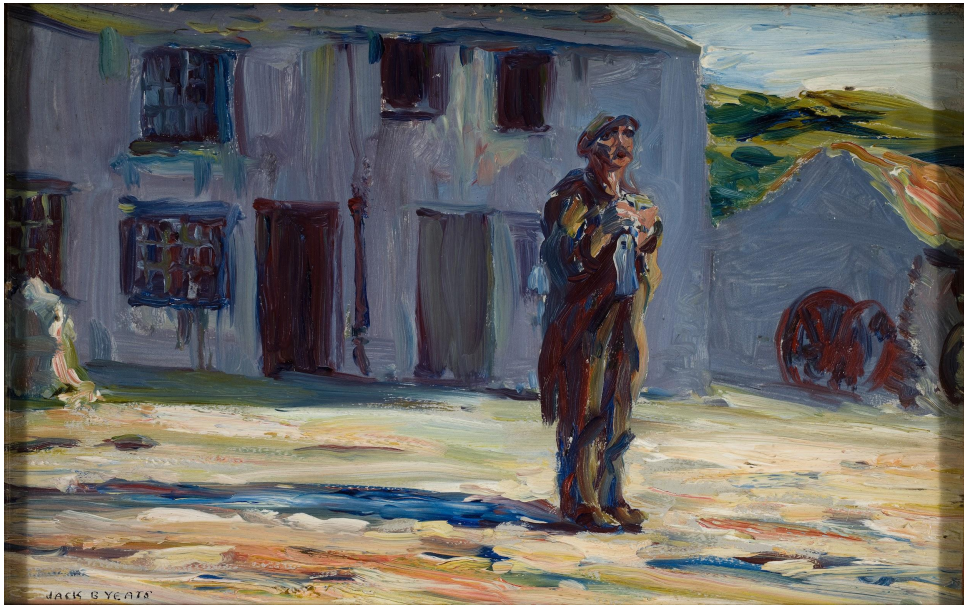


Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
Singing "(Oh) Had I the Wings of a Swallow," 1925
Oil on canvas
The O'Brien Collection

The ballad being sung by the woman in this painting was written in the United States; it expresses an emigrant's nostalgia for the Ireland he has left and wishes he could "travel far over the sea" to return. Like the traveling ballad-singer in *Singing "The Beautiful Picture,"* the singer here is also in transit; she appears to be standing in a train car. This image also shares with *Singing "The Minstrel Boy"* an interest in raising the possibility that the singer's audience may be reluctant or inattentive.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
Singing "The Beautiful Picture," 1925
Oil on panel
The Niland Collection

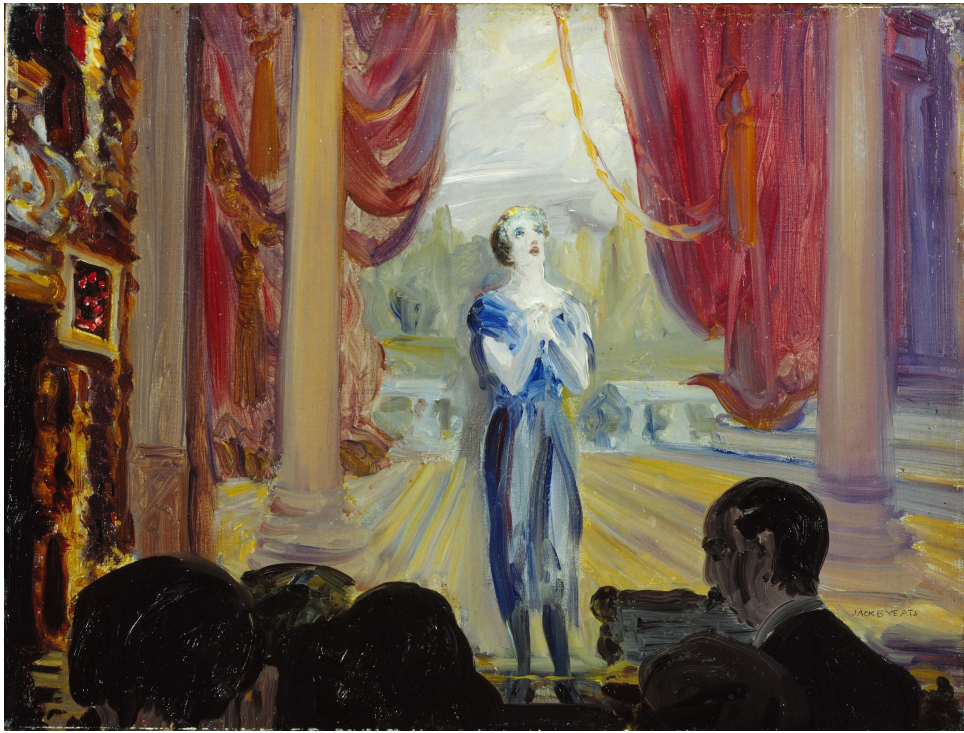
Jack loved ballads and collected them throughout his life. In this painting, a singer holds a ballad sheet. His ragged clothing and the relatively deserted setting suggest economic hardship. In contrast, the ballad he sings is a music hall song that tells the story of a rich man mourning as he looks at a painting of his dead wife.



Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
Singing "The Minstrel Boy," 1923
Oil on canvas
The Niland Collection

The lyrics for *The Minstrel Boy* were written by Thomas Moore, whose volumes of *Irish Melodies* published beginning in 1807 were immensely popular in Ireland. The song recounts the death and affirms the patriotism of a musician who fights and dies for Ireland, concluding, "Thy songs were pure and free, they shall never sound in slavery!"

In the painting, a woman in the audience has come onstage to sing during a break. Her rapt and earnest expression is somewhat at odds with the audience members' heads in the foreground, suggesting that they may not share her reverence for the song's sentimental nationalism.



Brigid O'Brien Ganly (1909–2002), designer; Lily Yeats (1866–1949), embroiderer

"The Players Ask for a Blessing on the Psalteries and Themselves," c. 1931–32

Embroidered silk on silk poplin

John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Collection of Yeats Family Papers, MS-1986-054

As Lily's health declined due to an aggravated thyroid condition, leading to the closure of Cuala Industries' embroidery section in late 1931, William commissioned artists to create designs for "needle pictures" that she could work at her own pace. One such artist was Brigid O'Brien, daughter of Royal Hibernian Academy president Dermod O'Brien.

O'Brien designed this panel illustrating William's 1903 poem "The Players Ask for a Blessing on the Psalteries and Themselves." The poem had appeared in the first book published by Dun Emer Press, William's *In the Seven Woods* (1903). The poem describes William's efforts to craft a new method for speaking verse accompanied by a musical instrument, a psaltery. Except for a later version of this embroidery displayed nearby, Lily avoided incorporating text in her needlework.

Anne Yeats (1919–2001)
Preparatory sketches for mural commission at the Unicorn restaurant, Dublin, 1946
Watercolors and ink on paper in sketchbooks
National Gallery of Ireland, Centre for the Study of Irish Art, Yeats Archive, Y40/1/16; YA/Y40/1/19

Like her uncle Jack, Anne carried a sketchbook with her wherever she traveled and she recorded the people, animals, and natural scenes she encountered. Her archive at the National Gallery of Ireland includes a collection of her sketchbooks, which she called “think books,” spanning sixty-five years of her life, from 1932 to 1997.

As a child, Anne frequently visited the Dublin Zoo with her mother and sketched the animals. In 1946 she was commissioned to create a mural for the Unicorn restaurant in Dublin and drew upon her experiences at the zoo to create these preparatory sketches.

Anne Yeats (1919–2001)
The Crow (Costume design for *As the Crow Flies* by Austin Clarke), November 1, 1948
Ink and watercolor on paper
National Gallery of Ireland, Centre for the Study of Irish Art, Yeats Archive, Y40/1/28/4

Anne recalled that, as a teenager, she was aware that she would have to work for a living, in contrast to Elizabeth and Lily. Although the Abbey Theatre terminated Anne's contract in 1940, she continued to do freelance theater and costume design, working for Dublin theaters such as the Peacock, Olympia, Gaiety, Lyric, and occasionally for the Abbey. During her career she produced theater designs for over sixty-five plays; many are now lost.

Austin Clarke's *As the Crow Flies* explores Irish myth and folklore, betrayal, and the dangers of seeking knowledge. It features the Crow of Achill, an ominous figure from Irish folkloric tradition. In the play, the Crow tricks a mother eagle into leaving her eaglets alone with her while the eagle searches for information about a raging storm. While the eagle is gone the Crow kills her children.

Anne Yeats (1919–2001)
Design for Book-Ends, January 1935
Ink, graphite, and watercolor on paper
National Gallery of Ireland, Centre for the Study of Irish Art, Yeats Archive, YA/Y40/5/4

This 1935 design for a pair of bookends suggests Anne's early awareness of the Arts and Crafts movement's commitment to beautiful, hand-crafted objects for the home. The bold composition and mirrored geometric elements in the bookends also indicate Anne's facility with art deco imagery. Just two years after she completed this design, Anne trained with famed French artist, illustrator, and scenographer Paul Colin at the School of Theatre Design in Paris.

Anne's long affiliation with the world of books and their associated crafts extended to their printing; beginning in 1969 she and her brother Michael expended considerable energy on reviving the Cuala Press, which finally closed in 1986.

Anne Yeats (1919–2001)
Woman Walking at Night, 1950
Oil on board
Private collection

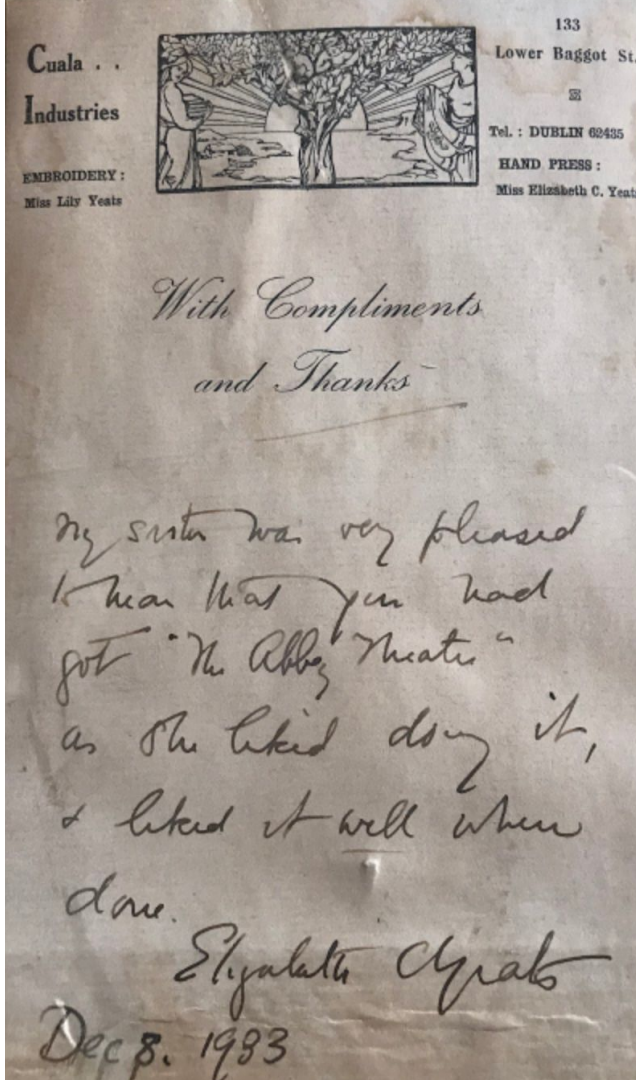
Women in Anne's paintings are often isolated, even when part of a group, and she would later remark that solitary figures like this one, on some level, "are probably me." At the time she produced this painting, Anne was living on Upper Mount Street in Dublin, an area popular with artists and intellectuals. It was also frequented by prostitutes and what she called "down and outs," and she observed such people with keen attention.

Reflecting the influence of her repeated trips to Paris, the vibrant reds and nighttime setting of this painting strike an assertive tone; the woman's gaze is intense and commanding. Ireland in 1950 was socially conservative; a woman walking alone at night could raise suspicions. The color palette and invocation of nocturnal enjoyments—amusements and the cinema—could be taken to suggest that she is a prostitute. The president of Ireland, Seán T. O'Kelly, seems to have thought so; he denounced the painting as "a disgrace to Irish womanhood." A more accurate reading would consider what kind of public statement Anne, and this woman, might be making, performing a woman's claim to authority, bodily autonomy, public spaces, and/or pleasure.

Elizabeth C. Yeats (1868–1940)
Letter referring to Lily's *The Abbey Theatre*, December 8, 1933
Pen on Cuala Industries letterhead
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Anthony Mourek Collection of Irish Culture and History, BC-2024-066

For the art exhibition held in conjunction with the 1932 Eucharistic Congress in Dublin, Lily displayed three of her *Stations of the Cross* along with "*The Players Ask for a Blessing*" panel also designed by Brigid O'Brien, plus two small-scale Dublin scenes designed by Dorothy Blackham: *The Abbey Theatre* and *The Custom House*. The following year Lily added a third, an embroidery of the General Post Office in Dublin, when examples from the series were exhibited again, this time at the Chicago World's Fair. *The Custom House* and the *GPO* are displayed in the final room on this floor.

In December 1933, Elizabeth Yeats wrote a complimentary note of thanks to F. S. Bourke, a medical doctor, bibliographer, and collector who purchased an example of *The Abbey Theatre.* She remarked that her sister "liked doing it, and liked it well when done."


Cuala . .
Industries
EMBROIDERY :
Miss Lily Yeats
133
Lower Baggot St.
Tel. : DUBLIN 62435
HAND PRESS :
Miss Elizabeth C. Yeats
With Compliments
and Thanks
My sister was very pleased
to hear that you had
got "The Abbey Theatre"
as she liked doing it,
& liked it well when
done.
Elizabeth Yeats
Dec 8. 1933

Roosebeck Fine Instruments
Psaltery, 2025
Wood with metal strings
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College

Throughout his career, William explored experimental forms of theater and performance. He rejected dramatic realism and worked with Florence Farr, an accomplished actress with a beautiful speaking voice, to develop a method of chanting poetic and dramatic speech accompanied by musical notes. He and Farr wanted to revive the oral performances, the “bardic arts” of medieval minstrels on stage. They chose a psaltery, an ancient stringed instrument similar to a harp, to provide the music.

Farr commissioned Arnold Dolmetsch (c. 1925 photo at right), a musical instrument maker with an interest in reviving ancient musical traditions, to make the unusually shaped psaltery she holds in a 1903 photo (at left). The original psaltery Dolmetsch made for her is held in the National Library of Ireland; the one displayed here has a more common form. It is a “bowed” psaltery (bow not shown), but can also be plucked. William and Florence’s efforts to publicize their innovative practice of pairing speech with musical notes included lectures, demonstrations, theatrical performances, and an essay by William entitled “Speaking to the Psaltery.”

Shaping Public Life: Printing & Publishing

In 1902 when Evelyn Gleeson invited Elizabeth and Lily to establish Dun Emer with her, Elizabeth knew almost nothing about printing, and it was largely a male field. Lily and other family members moved to Dublin; Elizabeth stayed in London and entered the Women's Printing Society to learn the trade. After joining Dun Emer, Elizabeth worked in uneasy partnership with William, who acted as the press's literary editor, and conflicts between them were common. Over the next decades, Elizabeth published hand-crafted, high-quality books by many of Ireland's most important writers, decisively influencing the country's literary and cultural landscape.

Such books were fairly expensive, and the demand for them was limited, so Elizabeth tried to find ways to tap into more popular and commercially viable markets, both in Ireland and internationally. Greeting cards and Christmas cards sold well; they often combined illustration with text by William or other contemporary writers. Cuala's bookplates were in demand among Irish Americans.

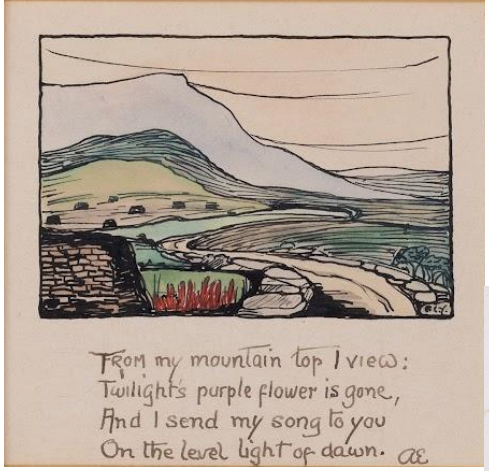
Broadsheets and broadsides, whose vigorous designs and bold colors set them apart from the restrained graphics of Cuala's books, were largely produced by Jack. They mixed the visual and the literary and were designed to recall an earlier form of popular printed product, the ballad. Traditionally, ballads were sold in single sheets by itinerant people at events like fairs and markets. Copies of hand-colored prints, including Jack's, were available to people who could not afford expensive paintings, though Jack would later become increasingly uncomfortable with the idea of reproducing his work.

John Butler Yeats (1839–1922)
Portrait of Elizabeth Corbet (Lolly) Yeats (1868–1940), Publisher, c. 1905
Graphite on paper
National Gallery of Ireland; Purchased, 2010, NGI.2010.2

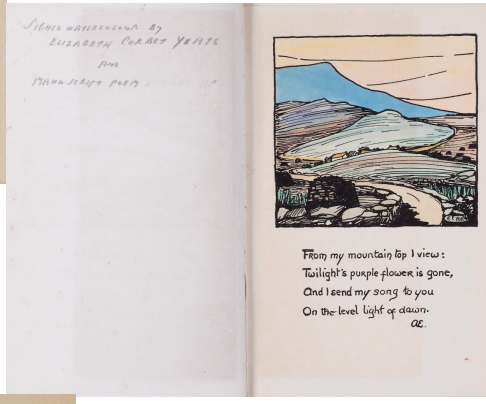
From the Women's Printing Society, Elizabeth learned many basics of printing, but, unlike them, she wanted to produce high-end fine books, rather than magazines. The Society's printing machinery had been run by men; Elizabeth was determined to employ only women.

John routinely criticized William for not respecting Elizabeth's judgment and her role as head of Dun Emer and Cuala Presses. In this pencil portrait John acknowledges Elizabeth's professional ambitions and successes by designating her a publisher. Her facial expression suggests the confidence and energy with which she pursued her career.

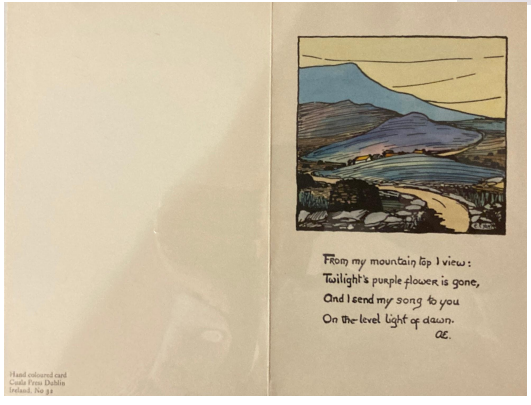
Elizabeth C. Yeats (1868–1940)
From My Mountain Top, c. 1904
Watercolor on paper
Collection of Catherine Gilligan and John Donohoe



Cuala Press print of *From My Mountain Top* in Æ, *The Divine Vision* (Macmillan, 1904)
Hand-colored card in printed book
Collection of Catherine Gilligan and John Donohoe



From My Mountain Top, Cuala Press, no. 32, n.d.
Hand-colored card
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Loretta Clarke Murray Collection of Women in Revolutionary Ireland, MS-2016-016



Cuala often printed multiple versions of illustrations for different purposes. Here an original watercolor produced by Elizabeth appears in a format suitable for display and, alternatively colored, in a book of poems by Æ (George Russell), a poet and mystic who was friendly with William. A third example, a greeting card, shows yet another variation of the scene. Cuala's talented colorists expressed their creativity through the hues and gradations they chose to enliven the black-and-white printed compositions.

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), editor
"The Cuala Press in Ireland: A Woman's Contribution to Fine Printing," in *Cuala Press: Letters to Miss Elizabeth C. Yeats*, c. 1925
Printed paper
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Anthony Mourek Collection of Irish Culture and History, BC-2024-066

Printed shortly after Elizabeth and Lily moved Cuala Industries to Lower Baggot Street in February 1925, this pamphlet features an article that originally appeared in *The Birmingham Post*, the principal newspaper of the industrial city in England's West Midlands. The article traces the Press's founding and development, praising the Yeatses' "family heritage of craftsmanship." The pamphlet also includes a list of hand-colored prints and books in preparation for sale.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
Printing block for *Sarsfield* (Cuala Press, no. 161), 1914
Zinc block
The Library of Trinity College Dublin, Cuala Press Business Archives

Although Cuala Press prints look like they were created from hand-carved wood blocks, they were actually made from zinc plates affixed to wood blocks. Many printers used zinc plates (also called “line blocks”) because they were cheaper and more durable.

A photographic process was employed to transpose an artist’s drawing onto a zinc plate coated with a light-sensitive asphaltum ground. The resulting image was reinforced by applying a resin, and the plate was submerged in acid to eat away the “negative” white spaces between the lines. The raised lines could then be inked with a roller and printed on a press, just like type characters.

Jack Yeats drew this image of Sarsfield’s Ride for a Cuala Press print suitable for framing and home decoration. Patrick Sarsfield was a heroic Irish military leader who fought for the deposed Catholic king James II. He was renowned for a daring raid on the forces of William of Orange, who had besieged Limerick following their victory in the Battle of the Boyne.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
A Broad Sheet, Midsummer 1901
Watercolor stencils on Japanese paper
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Collection of Yeats Family Papers, MS-1986-054

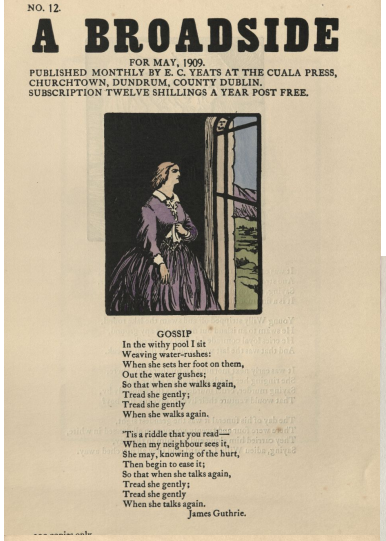
In a 1902 letter to his New York benefactor John Quinn, Jack wrote: “I had a weird thing called the Broad Sheet two years ago, just stencils that I used to print myself.” In contrast to the monthly series of hand-colored *Broad Sheet* broadsides published and sold by Elkin Mathews in 1902 and 1903, displayed nearby, the *Broad Sheet* shown here is one of a few surviving examples of experimental prints that Jack apparently produced for his own amusement. This *Broad Sheet* includes playful images of a trout and angler rendered in watercolor using rough-cut reverse stencils. His clever “JBY” monogram appears in the lower left.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957) and Pamela Colman Smith (1878–1951)
A Broad Sheet, July 1902
A Broad Sheet, February 1903
A Broad Sheet, November 1903
Hand-colored block prints, printed text on paper
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Anthony Mourek Collection of Irish Culture and History, 2026-84 SUPERSIZE; 2026-84 SUPERSIZE; BC-2024-066

During 1902 and 1903 Jack produced a series of hand-colored *Broad Sheets*, which were published monthly by Elkin Mathews. *Broad Sheet*s combined literature with visual art and featured contributions from various writers and artists. They often reflected Jack's interest in theater, nautical themes, and socially marginal figures. The three displayed here include a drawing of a ballad singer, a sketch of a pirate-themed play for a miniature theater, and Augusta Gregory's English translation of a poem written by Douglas Hyde, the founder of the Gaelic League, an organization dedicated to promoting the Irish language.

Cuala Press
A Broadside, no. 12, May 1909
A Broadside, no. 8, August 1937 (new series)
A Broadside, no. 1, June 1914
Hand-colored block prints, printed text on paper
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, PR1181 .B76 OVERSIZE, c. 4

These *Broadsides* exemplify the range and variety of illustrations the series contained: a middle-class interior with a well-dressed woman, a more expressionist and symbolic figure silhouetted against a fiery red background, and a rural scene featuring a barefoot boy and an itinerant scholar. Over the years, Jack produced roughly 250 illustrations for *Broadsides*. The series was revived briefly in 1935 and 1937 in the hopes of boosting Cuala's revenues in the first collaboration between William and Jack after a yearslong period of political estrangement. The 1937 issue of *A Broadside* features a quote from William's "The Curse of Cromwell," a poem that expresses his disillusionment with Ireland in the 1930s.


NO. 12.

A BROADSIDE

FOR MAY, 1909.

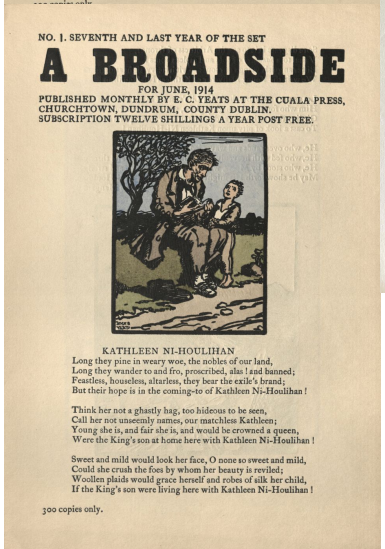
PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY E. C. YEATS AT THE CUALA PRESS, CHURCHTOWN, DUNDRUM, COUNTY DUBLIN. SUBSCRIPTION TWELVE SHILLINGS A YEAR POST FREE.

GOSSIP

In the withy pool I sit
Weaving water-rushes:
When she sets her foot on them,
Out the water gushes;
So that when she walks again,
Tread she gently;
Tread she gently
When she walks again.

'Tis a riddle that you read—
When my neighbour sees it,
She may, knowing of the hurt,
Then begin to ease it;
So that when she talks again,
Tread she gently;
Tread she gently
When she talks again.

James Guthrie.


NO. 1. SEVENTH AND LAST YEAR OF THE SET

A BROADSIDE

FOR JUNE, 1914

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY E. C. YEATS AT THE CUALA PRESS, CHURCHTOWN, DUNDRUM, COUNTY DUBLIN. SUBSCRIPTION TWELVE SHILLINGS A YEAR POST FREE.

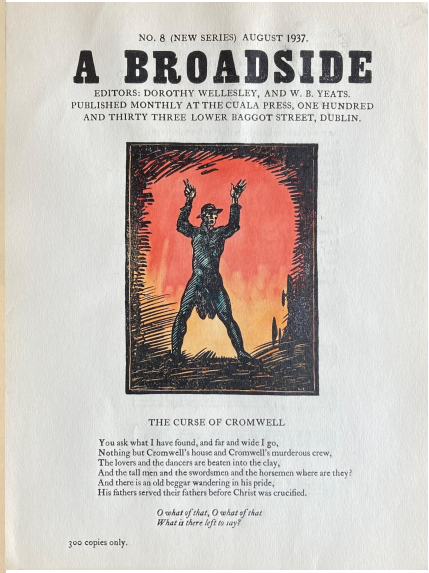
KATHLEEN NI-HOULIHAN

Long they pine in weary woe, the nobles of our land,
Long they wander to and fro, proscribed, alas! and banned;
Feastless, houseless, altarless, they bear the exile's brand;
But their hope is in the coming-to of Kathleen Ni-Houlihan!

Think her not a ghastly hag, too hideous to be seen,
Call her not unseemly names, our matchless Kathleen;
Young she is, and fair she is, and would be crowned a queen,
Were the King's son at home here with Kathleen Ni-Houlihan!

Sweet and mild would look her face, O none so sweet and mild,
Could she crush the foes by whom her beauty is reviled;
Woollen plaids would grace herself and robes of silk her child,
If the King's son were living here with Kathleen Ni-Houlihan!

300 copies only.


NO. 8 (NEW SERIES) AUGUST 1937.

A BROADSIDE

EDITORS: DOROTHY WELLESLEY, AND W. B. YEATS.
PUBLISHED MONTHLY AT THE CUALA PRESS, ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY THREE LOWER BAGGOT STREET, DUBLIN.

THE CURSE OF CROMWELL

You ask what I have found, and far and wide I go,
Nothing but Cromwell's house and Cromwell's murderous crew,
The lovers and the dancers are beaten into the clay,
And the tall men and the swordsmen and the horsemen where are they?
And there is an old beggar wandering in his pride,
His fathers served their fathers before Christ was crucified.

O what of that, O what of that
What is there left to say?

300 copies only.

Lily Yeats's portfolio of *A Broadside* prints, Cuala Press, 1908–15
Hand-colored block prints and accompanying text
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, PR1181 .B76 OVERSIZE, c. 3

Cuala Press published *A Broadside*, which featured written work and illustrations and was put together by Jack from 1908 to 1915. *A Broadside* appeared monthly; subscriptions to that series and to Cuala books were a more reliable source of income than sales at open house days. This set was owned by Lily and was kept in a specially designed case, which also displays her Cuala bookplate.

Cuala Press advertising pamphlet, November 1918

Printed card

John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Collection of Yeats Family Papers, MS-1986-054

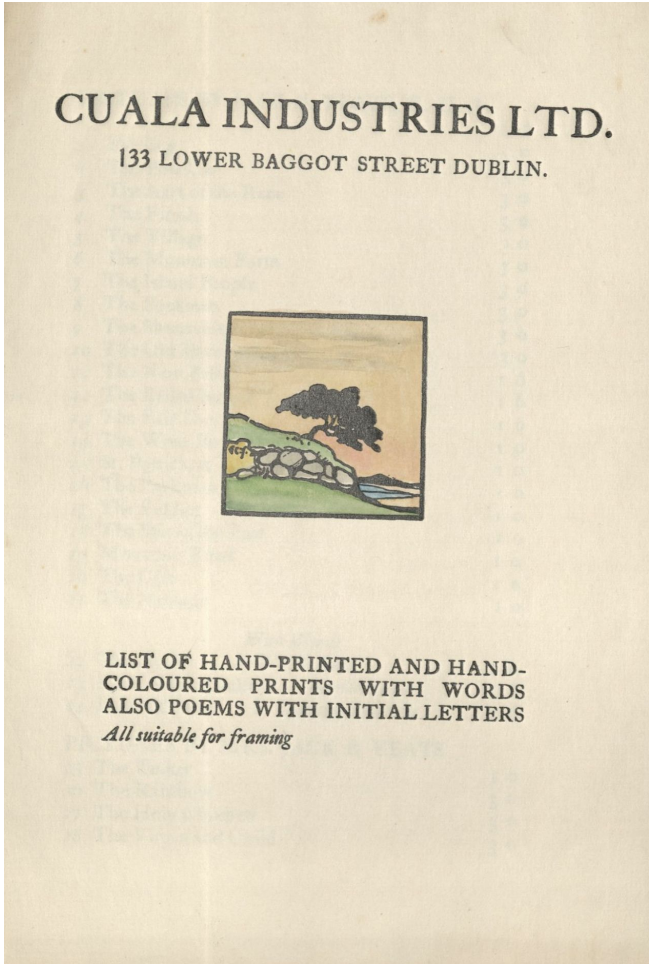
This advertisement illustrates the wide variety of books published by Cuala. It includes a posthumous collection of poems written by Edward Dowden, who had been a friend of John, a volume of William's poetry, the highly successful book of selections from John's letters, and *Certain Noble Plays of Japan*, which was edited by William's friend and fellow poet Ezra Pound. William wrote a series of plays influenced by Japanese drama; Elizabeth's publication of Dowden's book sparked a conflict between William's literary judgment and her need to find publishable material and make a profit.

Cuala Industries Ltd.

List of Hand-Printed and Hand-Coloured Prints, c. 1942

Hand-colored block print

John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Loretta Clarke Murray Collection of Women in Revolutionary Ireland, MS-2016-016



William Butler Yeats (1865–1939)
Responsibilities: Poems and a Play, 1914, ed. 3/228, signed by Graham Greene
Bound paper
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, PR5904 .R3 1914 GREENE'S LIBRARY

Cuala Press's publication of William's *Responsibilities: Poems and a Play* led to one of William and Elizabeth's periodic quarrels. Unlike some others, this conflict did not stay private but spilled out into the public sphere. William complained about typos and accused Elizabeth of carelessness; Elizabeth countered by blaming him for poor proofreading skills and for requesting changes to the text after it was too late. When he demanded she insert an errata listing mistakes, she added a note to it explaining that the errors were the author's fault rather than the printer's.

The page displayed contains Dun Emer and Cuala's original logo for the Press, which pairs a willowy and feminine figure of Emer, the pagan patron saint of Irish women's handicrafts, with a similarly willowy tree.

Lily Yeats (1866–1949)
Elizabeth Corbet Yeats: Born March 11th 1868; Died January 16th 1940
Print on paper
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Z232.Y4 Y4 1940 IRISH FOLDERS

Elizabeth eventually rejected the original logo for her printing enterprise (displayed nearby) and created a new one. She remarked of the original, “I don’t think the tree and lady have any meaning–except that our press was started as a woman’s press. She is a very limp figure is she not?”

The new press device features a lone tree on a rocky hillside, suggesting Elizabeth’s determination and perseverance despite the conflicts and obstacles involved in running the enterprise. Here it is featured on the cover of an account of Elizabeth’s life written by Lily.

Anticipating Yeatses
8′20″
Abel Black, Rachel Chamberlain, Catherine Phan, Cyrus Rosen, Joe Nugent

The phrase “mounting an exhibition” barely hints at the complexity of a project such as *Collaborating in Conflict*. From initial conception to final execution, the skills of seasoned museum staff and the hard work of enthusiastic faculty are tested daily. Long before a single precious item can be unpacked, loans must be negotiated, legal arrangements made, transport organized, and gallery layout imagined. For the accompanying catalogue, scholarly essays are solicited and edited. Then modeling, lighting, hanging….It is an intricate process held together by the dedication of all involved. *Anticipating Yeatses* offers a window into just some of the work that made this show.

Cuala Press cards, pamphlets, illustrated poems, and advertisements

Hand-colored prints

John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Loretta Clarke Murray Collection of Women in Revolutionary Ireland, MS-2016-016

The Cuala Press materials displayed in this case were hand colored and demonstrate various artistic styles. A range of artists and writers contributed to them. Many depict rural scenes, while a few feature Dublin city settings. Others illustrate poems by William and other writers. Some were written in Irish.

Running Elizabeth and Lily's enterprise was a nearly all-consuming project involving an array of marketing strategies exemplified by the ephemeral documents in this case. They also took their products to exhibitions in different locations, opening Cuala's workrooms to the public at specified hours, and produced printed advertisements and brochures.

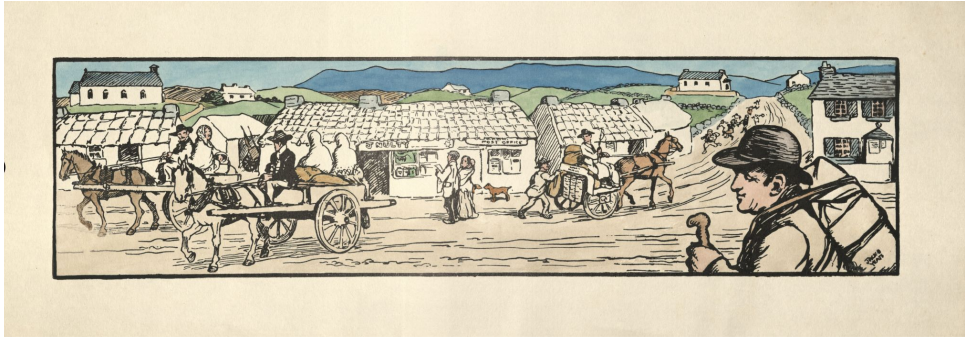
Their public lives as businesswomen were thoroughly intertwined with their social lives. Elizabeth in particular was a good saleswoman, and both sisters' letters show that when they traveled, they frequently sought opportunities to sell Cuala products through their social contacts.

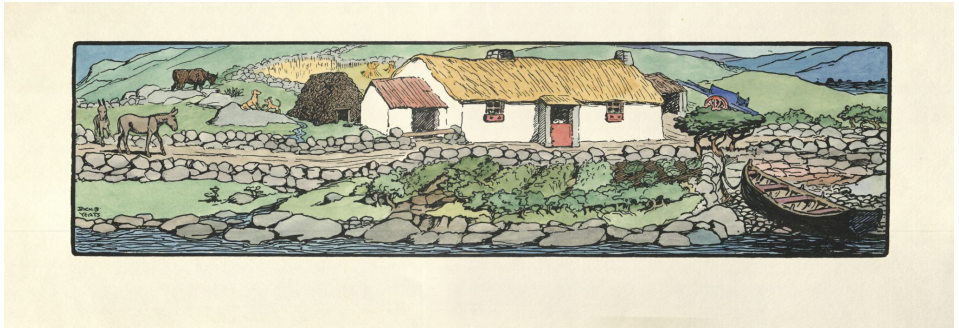
Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
The Start of the Race, Cuala Press, no. 3, n.d.
The Finish, Cuala Press, no. 4, n.d
Hand-colored prints
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Loretta Clarke Murray Collection of Women in Revolutionary Ireland, MS-2016-016

Jack's interest in sports and popular entertainments was lifelong, but horses and horse racing occupy a special place in his work. These prints display his skill in depicting horses in motion and his meticulous attention to the details of individual faces and figures.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
The Village, Cuala Press, no. 5, n.d.
The Mountain Farm, Cuala Press, no. 6, n.d.
Hand-colored prints
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Loretta Clarke Murray Collection of Women in Revolutionary Ireland, MS-2016-016

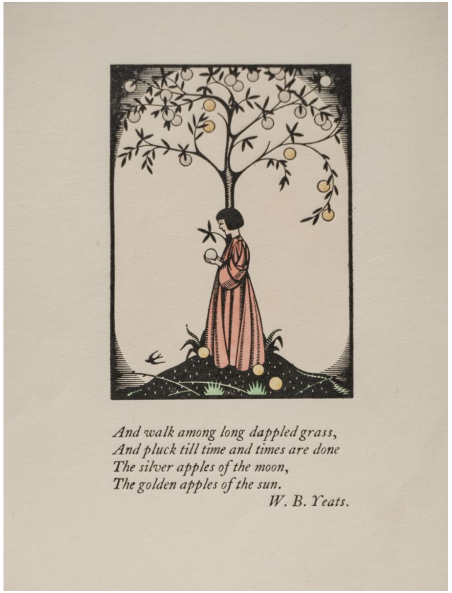
This pair of hand-colored scenes, suitable for framing and display, collects many of the elements Jack favored in his depictions of the West of Ireland, such as a thatched cottage on the coast, a bustling village, an itinerant man walking, and mountains rising in the background. For years, family loyalty prompted Jack to allow Cuala Press to market such prints, but in 1925 his discomfort with reproductions of his work came to a head. He wrote in a letter to William, “I know you are doing a great deal for Lilly and Lolly [*sic*] and it is very good of you. But I can do no more. The last two or three drawings for prints I have given them against my will. These reproductions are a drag, and a loss to me in my reputation.”





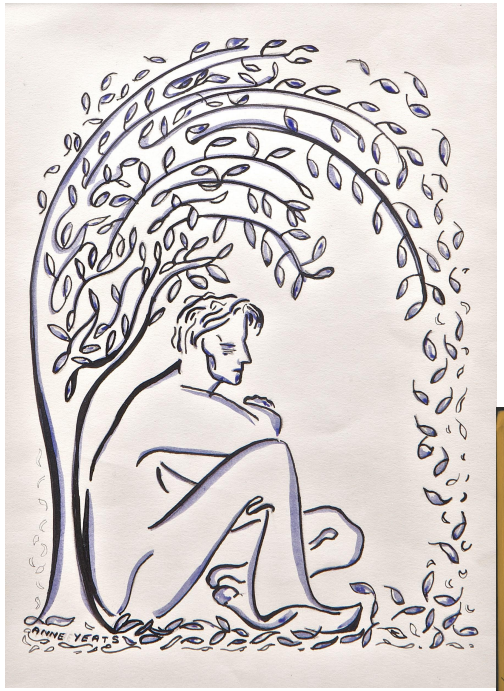
Prints illustrating W. B. Yeats's "The Song of Wandering Aengus" (1899), Cuala Press, no. 84, n.d.
Hand-colored prints
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Loretta Clarke Murray Collection of Women in Revolutionary Ireland, MS-2016-016

These prints illustrate the last four lines of William's poem "The Song of Wandering Aengus." The image is the same, but hand-coloring introduced variations in palette and shading. The poem is rooted in the Irish mythological tradition in which the women of the Sidhe, or fairies, could take the form of fish.



Anne Yeats (1919–2001)
Cover illustration for *Nuabhéarsaíocht*, *1939–1949*, c. 1950
Ink and wash on paper
Private collection
Seán Ó Tuama, *Nuabhéarsaíocht, 1939–1949* (Sáirséal agus Dill, 1950)
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, PB1351 .O95 1950

In the 1950s Anne began to illustrate books for the Dublin publisher Sáirséal agus Dill; she designed some forty book covers over the next twenty-five years. The books were all in Irish and were on the national school curriculum. The company was founded in the mid-1940s and quickly became the country's most important Irish-language publishing house. The title of this volume means *New Poetry*.



Anne Yeats (1919–2001)

Louis le Brocquy as a Young Man, c. 1947

Linoleum block

John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Anthony Mourek Collection of Irish Culture and History, BC-2024-066

A young Louis le Brocquy took painting lessons from Elizabeth Yeats; he was to become one of Ireland's most celebrated painters of the twentieth century. Later he visited Jack Yeats in his Dublin studio and occasionally collaborated with Anne on some of her freelance work. This linoleum block illustrates Anne's determination to experiment with new materials, production methods, and styles.

Imagining a New Nation: The Art of Revolution

The Yeats family lived and worked during a time of enormous political turbulence and change in Ireland. During the revolutionary period, traditional social hierarchies were disrupted, and women found new opportunities for participating in public and political life.

In the 1916 Easter Rising, Irish nationalists took over key buildings in Dublin, including the General Post Office, and proclaimed an Irish Republic. The British suppressed the Rising and executed its leaders, generating public outrage and paving the way for the Irish War of Independence. Disagreements over the treaty that ended the war led to the Irish Civil War, which ended in 1923. The new Irish state gave women the same voting rights as men, but, over time, the government pursued conservative social policies that limited women's rights and freedoms.

Like most people who participated in the Irish Revival, the Yeatses were sympathetic to nationalist aspirations. But they were dismayed by the Rising and the violence that followed and did not participate directly. Several young women who worked at Cuala did, earning Lily and Elizabeth's disapproval. William supported the treaty and entered politics for a time, accepting an appointment to the new Irish Senate. Jack opposed the treaty and was horrified by the state's harsh treatment of republicans. He wrote to a government leader, begging him not to execute the republican Erskine Childers "in the name of humanity and…sober judgment." Childers was executed anyway and the brothers' political differences created a lasting rift between them.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
A Political Meeting (in the West of Ireland), 1905
Watercolor and graphite on paper
The Niland Collection

This painting depicts an open-air meeting of the Irish National Foresters, a nationalist organization. Jack was in England when the meeting occurred; he probably saw a photograph of it. The sashes and banners suggest the ceremonial and performative dimensions of this public gathering; Jack may have been reminded of the 1898 centenary celebration he witnessed in Sligo. The massive crowd, the looming building on the right with the Lord Mayor of Dublin speaking from a second-story window, and the threatening sky all capture the turbulent nationalist energies gathering at the time.

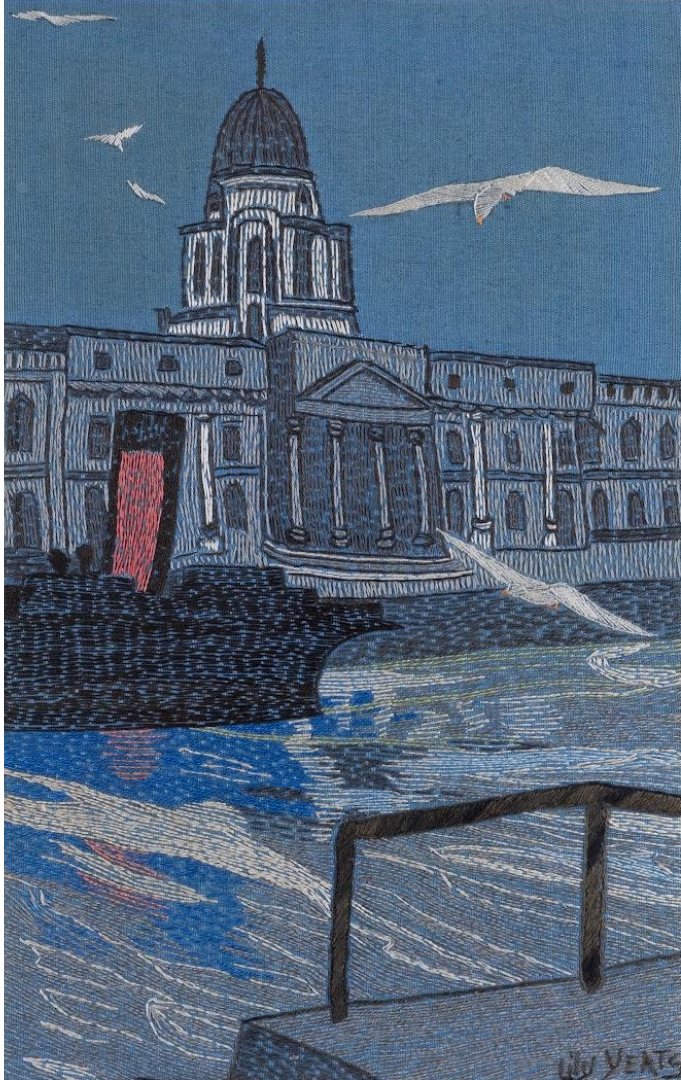
Dorothy Blackham (1896–1975), designer; Lily Yeats (1866–1949), embroiderer

The Custom House, c. 1932

Silk embroidery on blue poplin ground

Collection of the family of Kevin and Peggy McCourt

The Custom House is one of the grandest and most iconic buildings in Dublin. Designed in the eighteenth century by the English architect James Gandon, it was burned to the ground during the Irish War of Independence. Like the GPO, it was restored in 1929. Lily's embroidery depicts the neoclassical building in the center of Dublin, overlooking the busy docks of the River Liffey. It now houses government offices and a visitors' center.



Dorothy Blackham (1896–1975), designer; Lily Yeats (1866–1949), embroiderer

GPO, 1933

Silk embroidery on blue poplin ground

Private collection

During the Easter Rising, the General Post Office served as the Irish republican headquarters for six days, until they were forced to surrender in the face of the overwhelming power of British forces. Much of the building's interior was damaged by fire and British shelling. The Irish Free State restored the post office and reopened it in 1929. It is now a museum. Lily's embroidery conveys national pride and optimism, with its vibrant blue background, bustling street scene, and light emanating from inside the restored building.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
Paper Bags for Hats, 1925
Oil on canvas
Private collection, formerly Ernie O'Malley Collection

Like *Communicating with Prisoners* displayed to the right, this Dublin street scene depicts women inhabiting public space in an urban setting, even though their presence there might provoke disapproval. But the women in the painting are smartly dressed and apparently middle class. Wearing paper bags for hats could indicate poverty, unconventionality, and/or a resourceful, improvised way of keeping dry in the rain.

The women here reveal Jack's interest in figures who are slightly disreputable or socially marginal. In this respect, the painting can be compared to Anne Yeats's *Woman Walking at Night*, displayed in the Shaping Public Life: Performing section of the exhibition.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
The Days of Heroes, 1946
Oil on board
Carolyn A. and Peter S. Lynch Collection

Nationalist movements need heroes and create them; this painting reflects, in a more self-conscious and sustained way than *A Political Meeting (in the West of Ireland)*, on the intersections of politics and public performance. The title may refer to events in the real world or on a stage.

The central figure's military clothing, drawn sword, and raised fist suggest armed struggle, political conflict, and melodrama at once. Jack's interest in pirates, rogues, and misfits, as well as his keen attention to the ordinary and everyday, make it unlikely that he embraced notions of national or other heroism without irony. Here, the question is whether the work's ironies lie in the absence of past modes of heroism in the present, in the central figure's struggle to dominate the stage, or in the performative and stagey qualities of conventional ideas about heroism.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
Communicating with Prisoners, c. 1924
Oil on canvas
The Niland Collection

Women's increased participation in the political sphere brought them both opportunities and dangers. The Irish Free State imprisoned a number of republican women in Dublin's Kilmainham Gaol for their involvement in the Civil War. In this painting, a group of women stand outside the jail, while female prisoners inside shout through the windows. Kilmainham was first built in 1796; the image's juxtaposition of its stone tower with the brightly colored modern posters or advertisements on the left suggests there may be limits to how thoroughly the new government will be able to confine women to their traditional roles.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)

Quiet Men, 1946

Oil on canvas

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, Carolyn A. and Peter S. Lynch Collection, 2022.61

Like *The Days of Heroes* to the left, *Quiet Men* looks askance at the idea of nationalist heroes. The title may invoke Maurice Walsh's 1933 short story "The Quiet Man," later adapted by director John Ford into an iconic film of the same name depicting the strong, silent Irish countryman as capable of explosive violence.

The quiet men in this painting might be Irish revolutionaries, whose stillness belies their capacity for action. But they are also consigned to the margins of the scene, threatening to disappear into the similarly colored background or fall out of the frame altogether. The center of the painting is both filled with light, in contrast to the darkness of the men, and eerily empty.

Jack himself was something of a "quiet man" who disliked explaining his works and giving others advice.

Imagining a New Nation: A Rural Island

The end of the Civil War in 1923 led to a period of consolidation. Understandably, the new Irish state sought to ensure social stability and foster a unified Irish identity for a weary population. Historically, Irish nationalism and the Irish Revival tended to look to rural landscapes, especially those in the West, as embodiments of authentic Irishness and cultural richness.

Ireland after independence was largely a rural nation: nearly two-thirds of the population lived outside cities. The new government promoted the idea of the Irish as a rural people. It praised the virtues of rural living, cast small farmers as exemplary citizens, and passed legislation to help people purchase land. The realities of life in the countryside, however, were often harsh. The Irish Free State was fiscally conservative and slow to address poverty; the Congested Districts, the impoverished western areas to which Jack had traveled in 1905, remained poor in the 1920s.

Individual Yeats family members maintained their keen interest in rural dwellers and landscapes, even as their personal lives and artistic endeavors took new directions.

This continuity is most clearly reflected in the shape of Jack's career. In the decades following Irish independence, he returned repeatedly to the rural scenes of his youth, but his painting style began to alter markedly. Ironically, as the Irish Free State was trying to foster traditional Irish values by idealizing life on the land, Jack was turning to similar rural scenes to work towards what would become the most radical artistic experiments of his career.

Elizabeth C. Yeats (1868–1940)

Mount Errigal with Winding Road; *Inch, Co. Kerry, Evening*; *Inch, Co. Kerry*; *Wooded Landscape with Distant Mountains*, c. 1913

Watercolors on paper

John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Loretta Clarke Murray Collection of Women in Revolutionary Ireland, MS-2016-016

These landscapes illustrate Elizabeth's lasting interest in the natural beauty of remote areas on the west coast of Ireland. Mount Errigal is the tallest mountain in Donegal. Inch, which she painted in daylight and in the evening, is a well-known beach on the Dingle peninsula. Each of these paintings has a distinctive palette, showing Elizabeth's versatility with color. The warm earth tones and lush greens of *Mount Errigal* contrast with the blues and grays of the *Inch* paintings and the variegated greens and grays of *Wooded Landscape*.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
A Farewell to Mayo, 1929
Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, Carolyn A. and Peter S. Lynch Collection, 2021.23

The establishment of the Irish Free State did not significantly lessen the economic and social pressures that, for over a century, had been prompting Irish people in rural areas to emigrate to other countries. This extraordinary painting beautifully captures the emotional toll of the Irish "flight from the land." The social isolation involved in leaving friends and family behind in search of a better life is replicated in the image, in which the two human figures, though traveling in the same horse-drawn cart, have their backs to each other.

Vivien Leigh, the Oscar-winning actress who played Scarlett O'Hara in the 1939 film *Gone with the Wind*, saw the painting at an exhibition in the National Gallery in London. She had Irish roots, and the painting reminded her of a scene in the film in which, during the American Civil War, Scarlett escapes a burning Atlanta in a horse-drawn cart. She was so moved by the painting that her husband, the actor and director Sir Laurence Olivier, bought it for her. It remains one of Jack's most profound meditations on the human complexities of trying to make a home in rural Ireland—and having to leave there to make a home elsewhere.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
The Atlantic, 1943
Oil on board
Carolyn A. and Peter S. Lynch Collection

Jack painted this expressionist work during World War II, a conflict in which Ireland remained neutral. Ireland was already an island; neutrality, called the Emergency in Ireland, isolated the country further. Newspapers were censored, information was difficult to obtain, and Jack felt cut off from friends in other places.

The title of this turbulent coastal scene casts the Atlantic Ocean as a potential embodiment of the chaos, violence, and uncertainty of the time. The image also illustrates his use, in his later years, of impasto, a technique of applying paint thickly to the canvas so that brush or painting knife strokes are visible. Increasingly, Jack abandoned the brush, using a knife instead or even squeezing paint directly onto the canvas.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
In Tír na nÓg, 1936
Oil on canvas
The O'Brien Collection

Tír na nÓg means "Land of the Young"; in Irish mythology it represents a paradise or otherworld. William's early long poem, *The Wanderings of Oisín*, recounts a mythological hero's journey there.

In Jack's painting, the journey is a mental and imaginative one; it belongs to a boy reading a book. The image illustrates Jack's evolution away from the bold outlines that characterize his illustrations and early paintings. During the 1920s he described this process to John Rothenstein, director of the Tate Gallery, saying that "the painter always begins by expressing himself by line—that is, by the most obvious means; then he becomes aware that line, once so necessary, is in fact hemming him in, and as soon as he feels strong enough he breaks out of its confines."

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
The Glutton of Evening, 1948
Oil on board
Carolyn A. and Peter S. Lynch Collection

This enigmatic painting, showing a central seated figure with his back to the viewer, captures something of Jack's artistic life during the 1940s, a period when he was enjoying great success and recognition. And yet he remained reluctant to discuss his practice. In a 1947 radio interview, Jack was asked about his work, how he began his career, and what advice he might give to young artists. His reply was a masterpiece of withholding: "I'm not at all fond of talking about my own nor other painters' work,...I'm against the giving of personal details...there is no advice I could give."

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
Leaving the Far Point, 1946
Oil on board
The Niland Collection

This ethereal scene is a work of memory and mourning. It depicts Jack, Cottie, and his favorite uncle, George Pollexfen, walking at Rosses Point, near Sligo. George's death in 1910 severed an important Yeats family connection to Sligo.

Like *A Silence*, displayed in the first section of the exhibition, this painting depicts a family grouping that can only be imagined because it includes the living and the dead. Jack gave *Leaving the Far Point* to Cottie for her birthday. When he painted it, she was gravely ill and died two months later. The rapid expressionist brushstrokes Jack uses to define the three figures make them appear as though they are about to dissolve into the white background. Thus, the work suggests the artist's preoccupation with the porous boundaries between life and death.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
Rushing Waters, 1947
Oil on canvas
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, Carolyn A. and Peter S. Lynch Collection, 2021.24

In this scene, a central seated figure provides a point of stillness; around him swirl boldly colored, energetic impasto brushstrokes—the rushing waters of the title. The faceless man offers a striking contrast with Jack's earlier work, which often featured detailed faces to reveal individual character. The years between 1942 and 1957 represent a period of extraordinary productivity for Jack during which he painted half of his oils—more than five hundred.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
Until We Meet Again, 1949
Oil on canvas
The O'Brien Collection

Here, Jack returns to one of his favorite subjects: a horse. Like *A Farewell to Mayo*, displayed nearby, this moving painting mourns a moment of parting.

In a 1947 interview, Jack told his friend Thomas MacGreevy, "I have always held that affection was the greatest attribute any painter or writer can have." Here the obvious affection between the horse—innocent, trusting, and beautiful—and the human figure may also contain a hint of betrayal. The intimate connection between them is about to be severed, prompting the viewer to ask why.

Jack was probably aware of the popular poem by Caroline Norton entitled "The Arab's Farewell to His Steed," in which the speaker has sold his beloved horse and bitterly regrets it. The poem begins,"My beautiful! My beautiful!"; Jack used this phrase as the title for another painting of a horse and human figure in 1953.

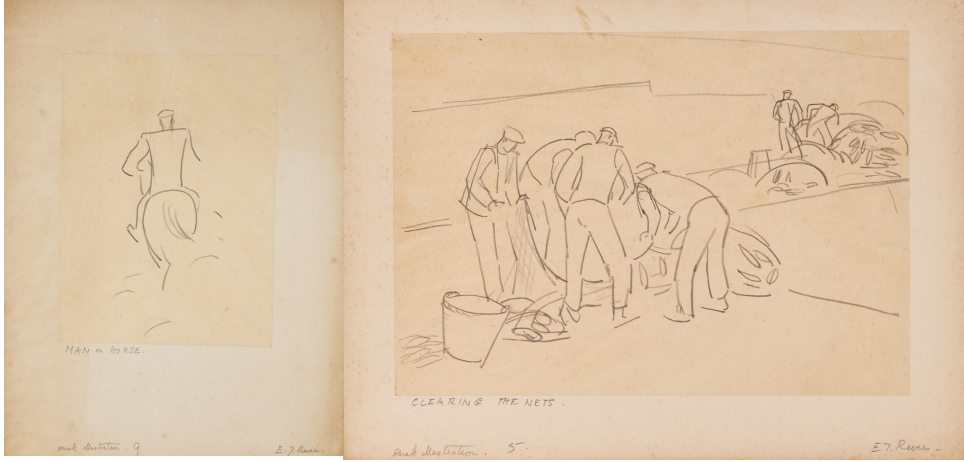
Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)
Horse Without a Rider, 1954
Oil on canvas
Carolyn A. and Peter S. Lynch Collection

The varying shades of deep blue that dominate this image, created in 1954, are characteristic of Jack's late works. Jack was in his eighties and was slowing down; his output for the year totaled only twenty canvases.

In contrast to *Until We Meet Again* (left), the horse and human figure here stand apart, suggesting tension, even antagonism, rather than affection. The horse is strikingly rendered with impasto strokes, while the man is only faintly suggested and threatens to fade into the background.

Elizabeth Rivers (1903–64)
“Man on Horse,” “Clearing the Nets”
“Birds on Rock,” “Curraghs Coming to the Quay with Fish,” illustrations for *Stranger in Aran*, c. 1946
Ink and graphite on paper
University of Galway

For her book *Stranger in Aran*, Rivers produced sketches of the landscape and people on the islands. As Jack did for the illustrations of J. M. Synge’s book, *The Aran Islands*, she recorded the islanders’ ordinary activities, many of which revolved around the sea. Her sketches are characterized by an elegant economy of line.



Elizabeth Rivers (1903–64)
Printing block for *Stranger in Aran* (Cuala Press, no. 137), c. 1946
Zinc block
The Library of Trinity College Dublin, Cuala Press Business Archives

In keeping with printing practices of the period used by Cuala and other presses, Rivers's drawings were transposed onto zinc plates using a photographic process. The plates were then attached to wood blocks so that they could be printed on a standard printing press, such as Cuala's old-style Albion hand press.

Elizabeth Rivers (1903–64)
Stranger in Aran (Cuala Press, 1946), no. 68/280
Bound paper
John J. Burns Library, Boston College, DA990 .A8 R5 1946 IRISH

Elizabeth Rivers was born in England but spent much of her life in Ireland. Rivers lived on the Aran Islands from 1936 to 1943; *Stranger in Aran* offers an illustrated account of her life there.

Stranger in Aran was the last book published by Elizabeth's Cuala Press before it closed. Rivers helped Anne Yeats found Graphic Studio Dublin in 1960. In 1969 Anne and her brother Michael revived the Cuala Press; it closed again in 1986.

Imagining a New Nation: A Catholic Island
Loughrea Sodality Banners

While the Yeats family and many others involved in the Irish Revival were Protestants, revivalism appealed to Catholics as well. In 1903 Dun Emer landed an important commission for the new St. Brendan's Cathedral at Loughrea in County Galway. Edward Martyn, a wealthy and devout Catholic who was friendly with William, was also an ardent Irish nationalist. He wanted to fill the cathedral with examples of Irish innovation and design by artists, including stone and wood carvings, mosaics, stained glass, metalwork, and textiles.

Dun Emer was asked to produce twenty-nine sodality banners as well as vestments and veils. Sodalities are voluntary associations of laypeople dedicated to promoting particular forms of Christian piety or charity. The twenty-five small banners were placed at the sides of each pew to designate seating areas for different sodalities; the four larger banners were carried in processions.

Each banner displayed here was designed by a different artist: Jack Yeats, his wife Cottie, Pamela Colman Smith, and George Russell. Lily embroidered the figures on gold poplin with strong black outlines, reminiscent of stained glass. The designs were nontraditional for church furnishings; William worried they might be "too fanciful and modern." But the banners were well received and generated significant publicity for Dun Emer. One review remarked that "they represent an entirely new departure in Irish ecclesiastical art."

Æ (George Russell, 1867–1935), designer; Dun Emer Guild, embroiderer

Saint Patrick sodality banner, 1902–04

Silk and linen on wool

St. Brendan's Cathedral, Clonfert Diocesan Museum

George Russell, or Æ, as he was known, was a leading figure with William Yeats in the Irish Revival and had various connections with the Yeats sisters, the Dun Emer Guild and later, with Cuala Industries.

This large banner depicts the most iconic patron saint of Ireland, Saint Patrick. Having returned to the country as a missionary bishop, he is shown holding a crozier and banishing snakes from the land into the sea, one of the famous legends associated with him. Likely used in processions, the banner has an elaborate border of alternating shamrocks and crosses in roundels. Patrick used the shamrock to illustrate the concept of the Trinity to the pagan Irish: one God in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Dun Emer Guild
Chasuble, 1902–04
Linen, silk, and wool
St. Brendan's Cathedral, Clonfert Diocesan Museum

In addition to the banners, Dun Emer also made tabernacle veils and several sets of vestments for Loughrea Cathedral. The colors of the veils and vestments—which can be red, green, or white—correspond to the liturgical season and celebration; each color has a specific spiritual significance. White, seen here, stands for purity and glory and is used in celebrations like Christmas and Easter.

The symbols of the four Evangelists appear in roundels: St. John (eagle) and St. Luke (bull) on the front, St. Matthew (man) and St. Mark (lion) on the back. The back also features the *Agnus Dei*, the lamb representing Christ, holding a flag and a cross to signify his resurrection and triumph over death. The saints' symbols with brightly colored open wings carry books. French knots convey the wooly fleece of the lamb, while satin and feather stitches create the color gradations inside the roundels. Celtic knots stitched in silver and gold thread and adorned with trumpets, spirals, and a triskele fill the interstices between the roundels.

Pamela Colman Smith (1878–1951), designer; Dun Emer Guild, embroiderer
Naoṁ Briġid (Saint Brigid) sodality banner, 1902–04
Silk and linen on wool
St. Brendan's Cathedral, Clonfert Diocesan Museum

Pamela Colman Smith was a young illustrator who met the Yeatses in London. She worked with Jack Yeats on *A Broad Sheet* in 1902.

Saint Brigid is one of three Irish patron saints and founded one of Ireland's first monasteries and schools in the fifth century. Also known as Brigid of Kildare, she embodies a blend of Christian and pagan traditions. As a Christian saint, she is associated with wisdom, healing, and protection. Brigid was also a Celtic goddess associated with fire, poetry, and spring whose festival on February 1 signals the start of the season.

This banner differs from the others in that the face and hands of the saint are painted on a silk ground and the halo incorporates silver thread. The other banners were worked entirely in standard colored threads.

Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957), designer; Dun Emer Guild, embroiderer
Naoṁ Caoiṁġín (Saint Kevin) sodality banner, 1902–04
Silk and linen on wool
St. Brendan's Cathedral, Clonfert Diocesan Museum

The bearded monk known as Saint Kevin of Glendalough, where he founded a monastery that became an important Irish pilgrimage site, was the patron saint of blackbirds. He is known for his love of nature and deep respect for the animal world.

On the banner, Jack depicts him standing in three-quarter view with two blackbirds above, and two smaller birds feeding from his hand and perched on his shoulder. A flock flies in a V-formation in the distance. Legend has it that a blackbird made a nest in the palm of Kevin's hand while he was praying during Lent; he stayed still until the eggs she laid hatched into chicks that fledged. Kevin is shown here as a hermit engaging with the creatures around him.

Mary Cottenham Yeats (1867–1947), designer; Dun Emer Guild, embroiderer
Naoṁ Íte (Saint Ita) sodality banner, 1902–04
Silk and linen on wool
St. Brendan's Cathedral, Clonfert Diocesan Museum

Saint Ita was known as the foster mother of the saints of Ireland. She founded a monastery at Killeedy, Limerick, where she cared for the sick and disadvantaged and mentored young boys, many of whom became prominent figures in the church. One of these youths was Brendan, Loughrea Cathedral's patron saint.

Cottie's banner is one of eight female saints (and four of the Virgin Mary) that she designed for Loughrea. Ita is depicted here as a young medieval queen; she is brown-eyed with full, plaited hair adorned with green ribbons and holds a blond boy wrapped in a red cloth with tassels. Echoing the drapery, Lily chose eye-catching red for her protruding foot. The lines forming the square flagstones upon which Ita stands recede to create perspective. Lily created a textured pattern for Ita's hair and the child's shoe that add visual interest to the scene.

Imagining a New Nation: A Catholic Island
The *Stations of the Cross*

Before and after independence, Catholicism was an important marker of national identity for many Irish people. The 1932 Eucharistic Congress held in Dublin would be by far the largest international gathering hosted by the Irish Free State. It was a chance for the new nation to celebrate its independence and its Catholic faith on the world stage, and preparations and anticipation were intense. William secured a commission for Lily to embroider the Stations of the Cross at the *Aonach Tailteann*, an Irish cultural and athletic festival that followed the Congress. The artist Brigid O'Brien designed the *Stations*, and Lily embroidered three (1, 8, and 12) for the *Aonach Tailteann* exhibition, where they won a prize.

The Stations of the Cross depict the story of the Passion of Christ, beginning with his condemnation and ending with his burial in the sepulcher. Catholics meditate on these as part of their devotional practice. The Stations can be created in many different materials, including stone and wood carving and mosaic and opus sectile, as at the Loughrea Cathedral; they are rarely embroidered.

Genevieve Brady, a wealthy American who attended the Congress, saw Lily's embroideries and was captivated by them. She commissioned the remaining eleven *Stations* for the Jesuit Novitiate of St. Isaac Jogues in Wernersville, Pennsylvania. After delivery in America, their distinctive Irish oak frames were made in art deco style. Two years ago the novitiate closed and Boston College's Dean Gregory Kalscheur, SJ, who had been a novice there, initiated the transfer of these extraordinary embroideries to the McMullen Museum. This exhibition offers viewers an unprecedented opportunity to view two major ecclesiastical commissions embroidered by Lily Yeats and her employees thirty years apart.

Brigid O'Brien Ganly (1909–2002), designer; Lily Yeats (1866–1949), embroiderer

Jesus Is Condemned to Death (Station of the Cross 1), c. 1931–33

Cotton, silk, and wool threads on Irish poplin ground; oak

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2023.3.1

This first *Station* depicts Pontius Pilate condemning Jesus to death. Lily outlines the bold design in black stem stitch much in the manner of the Loughrea banners in this gallery. A vertical Christ wearing a pale robe forms the center of the scene. A curtain is drawn back to reveal Pilate, seated, with a scribe at his right, and a boy holding a dish as Pilate washes his hands. A taunting group representing the diverse populace of Jerusalem and a Roman soldier in a crested helmet stand at the left.

Lily favored the darning stitch for most of the fabrics, faces, and other elements of the *Stations*. The soldier's helmet and Jesus's hair feature couching stitches to create dimensionality, and the patterned costume of one of the taunters incorporates satin stitches for the pink rosettes. The sophistication of the facial expressions articulated in black is remarkable, expressing both character and emotion.

Brigid O’Brien Ganly (1909–2002), designer; Lily Yeats (1866–1949), embroiderer

Jesus Receives the Cross (Station of the Cross 2), c. 1931–33

Cotton, silk, and wool threads on Irish poplin ground; oak

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2023.3.2

The same characters, identifiable by their garments, headdresses, and facial features, reappear throughout Lily’s *Stations*. Here again is the magnificently clad Roman soldier in red, this time with his back to the viewer. A guard is introduced, with a distinctive bald head, stubbly beard, chest hair, and green robe. Two other tormentors are represented, their cruel faces contrasting with Christ’s serene but sad expression.

Brigid O’Brien Ganly (1909–2002), designer; Lily Yeats (1866–1949), embroiderer

Jesus Falls the First Time (Station of the Cross 3), c. 1931–33

Cotton, silk, and wool threads on Irish poplin ground; oak

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2023.3.3

In this emotionally charged scene, the tipped cross and the positions of the guard and Christ suggest a tumbling movement, creating a cascading effect from the center and rendering Jesus’s first fall with the drama it deserves. Christ catches himself with his extended arm on the pebbly ground, embroidered in beige with purple shading. Two officials with distinctive patterned head covers observe the fall.

Brigid O’Brien Ganly (1909–2002), designer; Lily Yeats (1866–1949), embroiderer

Jesus Meets His Blessed Mother (Station of the Cross 4), c. 1931–33

Cotton, silk, and wool threads on Irish poplin ground; oak

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2023.3.4

Shown in profile, the Roman soldier, Christ bearing the cross, and the guard process toward Mary and another woman, whose back marks the boundary of the composition. Dressed in white, like her son, and in pale blue robes, Mary extends her arms to receive them with her eyes closed.

Lily’s signature appears in the lower right corner along with Brigid O’Brien’s initials “BB.” Lily signed all of her *Stations*, indicating her pride as their maker and claiming equal status with the designer. Brigid O’Brien’s initials appear in ten of the *Stations*, although she designed all fourteen.

Brigid O’Brien Ganly (1909–2002), designer; Lily Yeats (1866–1949), embroiderer

The Cross Is Laid Upon Simon of Cyrene (Station of the Cross 5), c. 1931–33

Cotton, silk, and wool threads on Irish poplin ground; oak

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2023.3.5

Here, Simon of Cyrene, who offered to help Jesus carry the cross, is introduced as a bearded figure dressed in a decorative rust-colored cloak with red heart-shaped motifs; he appears throughout the series.

The materials used to create the *Stations* were all produced in Ireland. The background fabric is poplin, a distinctly Irish product incorporating wool warp and silk weft to create a ribbed effect. Allowing the figures to stand out, the gold background recalls early medieval Italian painting, where the applied gold leaf signified divine light intended to transport the viewer into an otherworldly realm. The poplin ground in the *Stations* contrasts with the embroidered grounds of Lily’s Loughrea banners from thirty years earlier.

Brigid O’Brien Ganly (1909–2002), designer; Lily Yeats (1866–1949), embroiderer

The Face of Jesus Is Wiped by Veronica (Station of the Cross 6), c. 1931–33

Cotton, silk, and wool threads on Irish poplin ground; oak

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2023.3.6

Of all the *Stations*, this scene was Lily’s favorite. Veronica gazes directly at Jesus as she reaches up with the cloth, creating an unusually intimate encounter in the center of the composition. The Roman soldier’s demeanor is menacing in comparison with the gentle expressions of resignation of the others. Here Lily reveals her mastery in conveying emotion and pathos in faces.

Brigid O’Brien Ganly (1909–2002), designer; Lily Yeats (1866–1949), embroiderer

Jesus Falls the Second Time (Station of the Cross 7), c. 1931–33

Cotton, silk, and wool threads on Irish poplin ground; oak

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2023.3.7

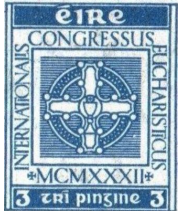
This *Station* captures the drama of Jesus’s second fall. Here he is collapsed and vulnerable. The guard at the right is caught in mid-action whipping him while Simon steadies the cross with strained arms. The Roman soldier has turned away and glances back at the scene.

Eucharistic Congress crest and plaque, c. 1932

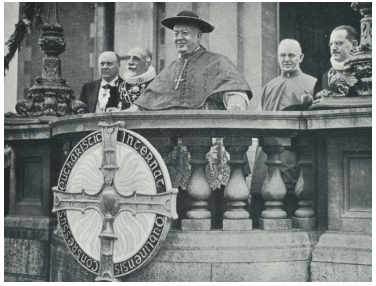
Wood, painted plaster; enamel, brass

St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral, Archdiocese of Dublin

The 1932 Eucharistic Congress in Dublin was by far the largest international gathering welcomed by the Irish Free State, attracting as many as a million pilgrims. It also marked the 1500th anniversary of Saint Patrick's return to Ireland as a missionary bishop; promotional materials were styled to reflect Celtic traditions and aesthetics. The Congress crest and commemorative stamp (see photo) based upon it feature a chalice set against the Cross of Cong, an early twelfth-century processional cross presented by Irish kings to the cathedral church, then in Galway.



Two large copies of the crest were created for ceremonial use. The one displayed here was used at official events, such as when the papal legate to the Congress, Cardinal Lorenzo Lauri, spoke at the residence of the Archbishop of Dublin (see image). The other hung in St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral, as indicated in the inscription on the commemorative enameled brass plaque. In November 2025, St. Mary's was designated as the official Roman Catholic cathedral in Dublin by Pope Leo XIV.



Brigid O'Brien Ganly (1909–2002), designer; Lily Yeats (1866–1949), embroiderer

Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem (Station of the Cross 8), c. 1931–33

Cotton, silk, and wool threads on Irish poplin ground; oak

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2023.3.8

A group of local women from Jerusalem weep for Jesus, acknowledging his sacrifice. The large cross forms a dramatic diagonal. The Roman soldier in red at the right anchors the composition. The ground is rocky with tufts of delicately rendered flowers in different colors and stitches.

In 1906 *The Irish Homestead* characterized faces in the Loughrea banners as "medieval in feeling" and yet also observed that "some of them might be met with in the streets of any Irish village." This can be equally applied to Lily's *Stations*, which include many different personalities.

Brigid O’Brien Ganly (1909–2002), designer; Lily Yeats (1866–1949), embroiderer

Jesus Falls the Third Time (Station of the Cross 9), c. 1931–33

Cotton, silk, and wool threads on Irish poplin ground; oak

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2023.3.9

Here, Lily artfully uses complementary colors to contrast the soldier’s red and the guard’s green garments as well as the strong blue of Simon’s inner robe and the rust color of his outer cloak. The cross separates figures in the foreground from those in the background. Clad in white with a light-colored halo, Christ stands out.

Brigid O’Brien Ganly (1909–2002), designer; Lily Yeats (1866–1949), embroiderer

Jesus Is Stripped of His Garments (Station of the Cross 10), c. 1931–33

Cotton, silk, and wool threads on Irish poplin ground; oak

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2023.3.10

Here Lily utilizes a sophisticated combination of stitchery to achieve this dense pyramidal composition. She incorporates both vertical and horizontal darning stitches to create the foreground fissure in the ground where colored flowers push through the earth around Christ’s feet. She renders tulips and other blooms in radiating stitches. Large swaths of adjacent colors for the garments create an overall surface pattern.

Brigid O’Brien Ganly (1909–2002), designer; Lily Yeats (1866–1949), embroiderer

Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross (Station of the Cross 11), c. 1931–33

Cotton, silk, and wool threads on Irish poplin ground; oak

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2023.3.11

This moving depiction of Jesus’s splayed body in a loincloth with his head thrust back and blood spewing from his hands conveys his surrender to the cruelty of his captors. A Roman soldier at left has rolled dice to determine who will receive the victim’s garments; a white cloth highlights the evil action. The familiar guard nails Christ’s body to the cross, while another soldier and tormentor observe complacently. The spear piercing the sky and the raised hammer accentuate the scene’s brutality.

Brigid O’Brien Ganly (1909–2002), designer; Lily Yeats (1866–1949), embroiderer

Jesus Dies on the Cross (Station of the Cross 12), c. 1931–33

Cotton, silk, and wool threads on Irish poplin ground; oak

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2023.3.12

The Crucifixion is shown with three mourning figures on the left, including Jesus’s mother Mary and St. John the Evangelist. Mary Magdalene kneels to the right of the cross, distinguished by her shimmering auburn hair created with two contrasting shades of rust, red shoes, and an unusual green dress with a subtle Celtic interlace pattern. The Roman soldier grounds the scene at right. Lily renders Jesus’s muscular body in black and gray threads. The hill of Golgotha with the distant town of Jerusalem forms the backdrop.

Brigid O’Brien Ganly (1909–2002), designer; Lily Yeats (1866–1949), embroiderer

Jesus Is Taken Down from the Cross (Station of the Cross 13), c. 1931–33

Cotton, silk, and wool threads on Irish poplin ground; oak

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2023.3.13

Here Joseph of Arimathea, cloaked in deep purple, and the elder Nicodemus in a patterned garment, are introduced. Their facial expressions are solemn as they remove Christ’s body from the cross. Mary and St. John the Evangelist (with arms around her), appear anguished. Tears fall from the blue eyes of Mary Magdalene, recognizable by her long auburn hair, green robe, and red shoes, as she kneels—a distinctive addition made by Lily here. The green hill of Golgotha supports the figures, with the buildings of Jerusalem beyond on each side.

Brigid O’Brien Ganly (1909–2002), designer; Lily Yeats (1866–1949), embroiderer

Jesus Is Placed in the Sepulchre (Station of the Cross 14), c. 1931–33

Cotton, silk, and wool threads on Irish poplin ground; oak

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2023.3.14

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus respectfully lower Christ’s body, shrouded in white, into the tomb. In contrast with earlier *Stations*, all but one figure are haloed; the evil characters have now left the scene. Mary, Mary Magdalene, and the other women express grief and pain.

Lily once again makes Christ the focus of the composition by wrapping his body in light colors contrasting with those of the other figures. The white of Mary’s dress emphasizes the bond with her son.